Christian-Afrikaans women under construction: an analysis of gender ideology in *Finesse* and *Lééf*

Hettie Mans

Department for Education Innovation, University of Pretoria
hettie.mans@up.ac.za

Jenni Lauwrens

Lecturer in the Department of Visual Arts, University of Pretoria
jenni.lauwrens@up.ac.za

ABSTRACT

In this article we explore the nature of a particular kind of femininity, which we term 'Christian-Afrikaans femininity'. It is our contention that the rise of glossy magazines over the last two decades, and specifically since the fall of apartheid in 1994, aimed particularly at Christian-Afrikaans women in South Africa, is linked to a so-called crisis of cultural identity facing (white) Afrikaans speaking people at this time. The aim of the semiotic and iconographical analysis undertaken here is to explore the nature of contemporary Christian-Afrikaans femininity as it is constructed in two South African, glossy, women's magazines, namely, *Finesse* and *Lééf*. The construction of an ideal Christian-Afrikaans woman is considered here in terms of two closely related issues. On the one hand, we argue that the contemporary version of Christian-Afrikaans femininity is rooted in the social-political context of Afrikaner nationalism. On the other, we show that such myths are also rooted in the ideological construction of the 'ideal' woman in a Christian context, where patriarchal notions of gender continue to be perpetuated and maintained. It is, therefore, our aim to explore and expose the ways in which these two magazines naturalise a specifically white and normative construction of Christian-Afrikaans femininity thereby regulating and restricting the gender identities of modern Christian-Afrikaans women.

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Keywords: Gender ideologies, Christian-Afrikaans femininity, popular myths of femininity, Afrikaner/Afrikaanses, biblical femininity, construction of identity.

Introduction

Ideal femininity is a concept that is never static but remains highly variable in terms of time, place and cultural context. Western art, for instance, has provided many versions of idealised femininity. In his book, *Feminine beauty*, Kenneth Clark (1980) examines this concept in art works dating from the second century before Christ to photographs of Marilyn Monroe. Based on his overview, there is no doubt that what is considered to be ideal femininity is culturally determined and not a given.

In a post-industrial, media saturated context, contemporary representations of ideal femininity no longer only circulate within the confines of the art gallery, but are now also to be found in the cinema, on television screens and in magazines, to name only a few examples. These are the sites in which ideas regarding how women should behave, look and what they may do are created, shaped, circulated and naturalised. More specifically, women's magazines are a potent tool for the dissemination of gender ideologies by providing women (and men) with guidelines on the manner in which to perform (and understand) specifically sanctioned codes of gender (Bignell 1997; Ferguson 1983; McRobbie 1996, 2000; Shevelow 1989; Van Zoonen 1994; Viljoen & Viljoen 2005; Viljoen 2006; Viljoen 2008). For this reason, the study of women's magazines provides much insight into both historical and contemporary constructions or versions of femininity. The purpose of this article is to explore two South African, Christian, Afrikaans, women's magazines, namely *Finesse* and *Lééf*, in order to gain insight into the nature of a contemporary and specific version of femininity, as it is constructed in South African popular visual culture in the early twenty-first century.

Our argument therefore begins with a brief exploration of the ways in which women's glossy magazines function as cultural texts that establish and maintain models of behaviour and appearance for their readers. We then investigate the reasons for the rise of glossy magazines aimed particularly at Christian-Afrikaans women in South Africa, by suggesting that a broader crisis of cultural identity facing (white) Afrikaans speaking people after the fall of Apartheid in 1994, as identified by Carel Boshoff (1992), Mads Vestergaard (2001) and Hermann Giliomee (2003; 2004a; 2004b), may have played a significant role in this phenomenon. The two Christian-Afrikaans, glossy, women's magazines, *Finesse* and *Lééf*, are taken here as indicators of a particular kind of femininity which we term Christian-Afrikaans femininity.[1]

In our analysis of the two magazines, we show poignant similarities between the traditional, biblical, Afrikaner feminine ideal as a historical construction and the version of Christian-Afrikaner femininity displayed on the pages of *Finesse* and *Lééf*.[2] Characteristics such as piety, submissiveness, self-sacrifice and struggle – some of the mainstays of traditional representations of Afrikaner women in the discourse of Afrikaner nationalism (Gaitskell & Unterhalter 1989:60; Van der Watt 2009) – appear, for the most part, to be upheld in these magazines. In light of these historical roots, we investigate how contemporary Christian-Afrikaans women negotiate their identities within the complex visual

domain which restricts them, on the one hand, by offering them new versions of traditional femininity, and on the other, allows them to continuously reshape those ideals. It is our contention that, as with all mythical representations, Christian-Afrikaans femininity is constantly in a complex process of reconstruction and that critical scrutiny of this situation should never cease.

The approach used in this research is qualitative, speculative and exploratory. In other words, we neither attempt to reach objective, scientifically proven truths, nor do we suggest that constructions of femininity represented in *Finesse* and *Lééf* are the only or primary myths of Christian-Afrikaans femininity currently in circulation in the popular media. In addition, we acknowledge that there may be several overlaps between an Afrikaans feminine ideal and a Christian-Afrikaans feminine ideal as it is under investigation here.[3] As such, we reject a positivist view on the interpretation of images and align our research with hermeneutic and phenomenological streams of thought.

The visual analyses are based on a mixed method approach, including iconography and semiotics. According to Theo Van Leeuwen (2001:92), these two visual methodologies '… ask the same two fundamental questions: the question of representation (what do images represent and how?) and the question of the "hidden meanings" of images (what ideas and values do the people, places and things represented in the images stand for?)'. There are, however, at the same time subtle differences between iconography and semiology, which Van Leeuwen (2001:92) clarifies as follows:

> … where Barthian visual semiotics studies only the image itself, and treats cultural meanings as a given currency which is shared by everyone who is at all acculturated to contemporary popular culture, and which can then be activated by the style and content of the image, iconography also pays attention to the context in which the image is produced and circulated, and to how and why cultural meanings and their visual expressions come about historically.

Following Van Leeuwen's (2001:92) emphasis on the ways in which cultural contexts shape the making of meaning, it is imperative that the representations of a contemporary Christian-Afrikaans feminine ideal be analysed within broader p olitical, historical and cultural terms, as well as in relation to other (visual) texts. As a starting point, therefore, the ways in which magazine discourse has contributed to the construction of idealised femininity in general is briefly outlined.

Magazine discourse

The contribution of women's magazines to constructions of femininity is well documented.[4] Three decades ago, Marjorie Ferguson (1983:1) noted the role played by magazines in reflecting and determining views on femininity by stating that:

> ... alongside other social institutions such as the family, the school, the church and other media, [women's magazines] contribute to the wider cultural processes which define the position of women in a given society at a given point in time. … [T]hese journals help to shape both a woman's view of herself, and society's view of her.

Magazines are undoubtedly powerful ideological tools that form and define the world of a woman by depicting (and restricting) her role within it (McRobbie 2000:69). Furthermore, women's magazines reflect feminine ideals according to local cultures and prevalent ideologies. Ferguson (1983:2) argues that:

> [w]omen's magazines ... tell women what to think and what to do about themselves, their lovers, husbands, parents, children, colleagues, neighbours and bosses. ... [H]ere is a potent formula indeed for steering female attitudes, behaviour and buying along a particular path of femininity ….

In South Africa, the study of magazine discourse is an emerging field, with one of the most valuable contributions in this regard being Louise Viljoen and Stella Viljoen's (2005) analysis of 'the cultural conceptualisation of femininity' in two issues of the popular Afrikaans magazine, *Huisgenoot* (1953 and 2003). Stella Viljoen (2006:22) later noted a particular form of Afrikaner (nationalist) femininity as it was represented on the covers of *Huisgenoot* (from 1950-1959), identifying the Afrikaner woman as a homemaker and decorator and as a nurturing wife and mother. To our knowledge, as yet there is no analysis that specifically investigates representations of *Christian*-Afrikaans femininity in women's magazines.

As Viljoen and Koenig-Visage (2011:2) argue, very specific ideas regarding gender 'are communicated through the visual material promoting itself as "Christian" in the hegemonic sense'. For this reason, our analysis of the representation of women in two Christian-Afrikaans magazines from a feminist perspective seeks to uncover the nature and foundation of myths of femininity produced in these magazines and circulated to their readership.

As already stated, it would be impossible to argue convincingly that representations of Christian-Afrikaans femininity are altogether different from other constructions already established in the popular media. Rather, we acknowledge that the construction under investigation here taps into representations of women already circulating within global popular culture.[5] For instance, familiar signs used to connote femininity – such as codes of physical beauty and body shape – permeate the pages of both magazines. We also recognise that our interpretation of a limited selection of images and text on the covers of the magazines and only some articles on the inside pages, is but one of the various possible interpretations of gender constructions currently circulating in Christian visual culture. At the risk of some broad generalisations, we do, however, want to suggest that a subtle but specific variation on contemporary myths of femininity appears in the magazines. Our argument is, therefore, that in *Finesse* and *Lééf* contemporary myths of femininity are combined with traditional stereotypes of women as set out in biblical narratives on the one hand, and with the ideological construction of women specifically as *volksmoeders* in the discourse of Afrikaner nationalism on the other.

Finesse, was first published in May 1998, four years after the fall of apartheid. Published by Carpe Diem Media, *Finesse*'s target audience is Afrikaans-speaking South African women. The May 2008

issue that has been selected for our study not only marked *Finesse*'s tenth birthday, but also celebrates Christian-Afrikaans femininity throughout its pages by centering on a theme of 'ten most inspiring women' as voted for by readers. In other words, this issue quite clearly indicates what contemporary Christian-Afrikaans readers find inspiring in women.

Aimed at a similar target audience, *Lééf* was launched in October 2005 by Media24.[6] Apart from *Finesse* and *Lééf*, there are also currently a number of other Christian-Afrikaans magazines in South Africa, namely *Juig!*, *Lig* and *Intiem*. The reason for the sudden emergence of so many *Christian*-Afrikaans glossy magazines is perhaps rooted in the cultural identity crisis Afrikaanses are apparently experiencing (Boshoff 1992:5; Giliomee 2003; Vestergaard 2001).[7] The democratic elections in 1994 brought many socio-political changes for all races in South Africa. Since the ruling National Party defined Afrikaner identity in the last fifty years before the fall of Apartheid (Vestergaard 2001:21), it seems that Afrikaanses were faced with a cultural identity crisis after 1994 (Boshoff 1992:5). According to Vestergaard (2001), Afrikaners were radically influenced by factors that stripped them of power after the fall of Apartheid. Factors that contributed to the cultural identity crisis that Afrikaanses apparently began experiencing include the fact that the Afrikaans language is no longer the dominant language of the State (Giliomee 2004:54), and that Afrikaans – as a language – has to find a place between ten other official languages (Vestergaard 2001:26). In addition, according to Vestergaard (2001:22), freedom of religion poses a threat to the traditional Christian lifestyle of Afrikaners, and according to Viljoen (2008:319), affirmative action, which requires a re-evaluation of hegemonic relationships with regard not only to race, but also gender, has unsettled traditional Afrikaner patriarchal values.

Whilst other Afrikaans magazines, such as *Sarie* and *Huisgenoot* remain popular (Farquhar 2010) the existence of specifically Christian-Afrikaans magazines might also be a result of a backlash against the so-called 'immoral' lifestyle that many secular magazines portray. Angela McRobbie (1996:177) concurs that sex 'more than ever before ... fills the space of the magazines' pages ... in the 1990s'. A cursory glance through the magazine on the shelves of popular magazines outlets in South Africa reveals that, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, the description is still apt. The emergence of *Finesse* and *Lééf* as well as other Christian magazines may indicate that, in the search for a new cultural identity, Afrikaanses are yearning for the familiarity of Christian principles and values, as portrayed in these magazines. The following statement published in *Juig!* (2009) is evidence of this attitude:

> Contemporary society has been destroyed by perverted morals and weak family values. This is mainly due to the influence of the media, such as the Internet, TV, radio, books and magazines, on our daily lives. Of course, we also have a powerless Church (which chooses to adapt to culture rather than changing for the good); that is why we see a need for a high-principled Biblical magazine in the Afrikaans market.

Keeping up appearances

The magazine covers: *Finesse* and *Lééf*

The *Finesse* and *Lééf* covers already advertise the particular Christian-Afrikaans feminine ideal that is constructed in its pages with pink and white dominating the *Finesse*-cover (Figure 1). Lacey (1998:38) argues that '[a]s a code, colour takes its cue from social codes', suggesting that the reader interprets colour according to associations as set out by western conventions. According to Koller (2008:379), the traditional association of pink is 'connected with femininity and its stereotypical features, such as softness and delicacy, with childhood and innocence'. The shocking pink on the *Finesse*-cover seems to blatantly celebrate femininity, especially in light of the magazine's tenth birthday celebration, but may simultaneously be a celebration of ideal Christian-Afrikaans femininity. In explaining the association of white, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002:343) note that '[i]n China and other parts of East Asia white is the colour of mourning [while] in most of Europe it is the colour of purity, worn by the bride at her wedding'. According to western tradition, then, the reader may (subconsciously) associate the white on the *Finesse*-cover with innocence, and perhaps even a virginal, Christian-Afrikaans feminine ideal. As will be argued below, this contemporary feminine ideal seems to overlap with the ideal biblical woman who is pure (Geldenhuys 1954:169) and has integrity (Joubert & Smith 2010:18).

Figure 1: Front cover of *Finesse* (May 2008).

Similarly, the passive cover girls neatly correspond with what is perceived as attractive within the social codes already in operation in the twenty-first century. Admittedly, the presence of several cover girls instead of only one on the *Finesse* cover is unusual. Together they constitute the number ten, which on the one hand, obviously references *Finesse*'s tenth birthday, but on the other also implies 'top marks' or perfection. The women, as representatives of a Christian-Afrikaans feminine ideal, must surely then embody perfection. Furthermore, the pursuit of perfection also characterises ideal biblical femininity where a woman is described as 'a superwoman' (Landman 2003:772), the 'perfect woman' (Geldenhuys 1954:163; Joubert & Smith 2010:17), or the 'Proverbs 31-woman' (Joubert & Smith 2010:17) which we consider in more detail in the following section.

Biblically modelled

Socio-political, cultural and religious contexts that shaped the values and attitudes of Afrikaner identity must be taken into account in understanding the construction of contemporary myths of Christian-Afrikaans femininity (Heaven, Le Roux, Simbayi & Stones 2000:67). Historically speaking, the Afrikaner's cultural identity was embedded in nationalism (Boshoff 1992:10) which, in turn, stitched together the very fabric of Afrikaner language and religion (Heaven *et al* 2000:67). According to Vestergaard (2001:20-21), 'Afrikaner identity was based on values of God-fearing Calvinism, structures of patriarchal authority ... , adherence to the traditions invented by the Nationalist movement, [and] conservative values such as the fundamental importance of the nuclear family and heterosexuality ... '. In other words, Afrikaner identity, at least until the last decades of the twentieth century was predominantly based in a closely entangled connection between Afrikaner nationalism and Calvinist values.

Before 1994, (Christian) Afrikaner women were generally not influenced by international feminisms. This admittedly overly-simplistic generalisation is, however, supported by Christina Landman (1994:119) who argues that during apartheid '… an *Afrikaans* woman [had to] accept the religion of her father without question ...' And this religion not only dictated very specific roles for the Christian-*Afrikaner* woman, but continues to do so for the modern Christian-Afrikaans woman. In the last few decades numerous (Afrikaans) authors have referred to Proverbs 31:10-31 as a useful foundation according to which Christian-Afrikaans women should model themselves. The main categories that Geldenhuys (1954:163-170), for instance, pinpoints in his interpretation of Proverbs 31 include character, role, appearance and religion:

- The character of the biblical feminine ideal is beautiful and pure. She has high moral values; she is sound, virtuous and chaste. She has integrity and is loyal, honest, dependable, trustworthy, noble, sincere, modest, honourable and dignified. She is helpful and sympathetic. She encourages others, she brings them peace and joy, and she is friendly. She is active, diligent and hardworking. She is intelligent, tranquil, calm and loving. She is a tower of strength and inspiration (in particular, for her husband). She brings comfort and is a quiet, dependable force.

- Her gender role prescribes that she needs to 'help' in providing for the needs of her family. She acts with deliberation and sensibility. Her life is one of never-ending diligence (without complaint). Her love is spontaneous.

- Her physical appearance is neat and attractive (irrespective of how busy she is).

- She is deeply religious. She seeks God in prayer and Bible study. She prays to Him and trusts Him.

When describing the expectations regarding the contemporary Christian-Afrikaans woman, former South African president, FW De Klerk (2007), also referred to Proverbs 31 in his speech on National Women's Day. He stated that '[e]xcept for being virtuous and hardworking, the expectations for a

woman are compassion, nobleness, leadership, wisdom, love and guidance, to be without fear and to have courage for the future. … From biblical perspective, I find no difference between the "traditional" and the "modern" woman' (De Klerk 2007). De Klerk continued by encouraging Christian-Afrikaans women to stay true to the biblical feminine ideal, as it has been constructed throughout Afrikaner cultural history.

Landman (2003:772) maintains that this ideology remains prevalent in Christian-Afrikaans discourse, with Proverbs 31 '... frequently referred to as the picture of the ideal woman. The more you read about Ideal Woman, the more you get the idea that she is, in today's language, a super woman'. More than fifty years after Geldenhuys (1954) described the biblical feminine ideal as the best example of Christian-Afrikaner femininity, Joubert and Smith (2010) praise the same basic principles of the biblical feminine ideal. They too investigate Proverbs 31 in search of a definition of femininity, and identify her as the 'Proverbs 31 woman' (Joubert & Smith 2010:17). Joubert and Smith (2010:17-23) define the following categories in their in-depth interpretation of Proverbs 31: character, home-maker, mother and religion. They describe the Proverbs 31 woman as pure (of heart), honest, sincere, unselfish, supportive, subservient and selfless. In addition, she is apparently patient, meek, submissive and passive (Joubert & Smith 2010:17-18).

Cilliers' (2003:96, 101) interpretation of the Proverbs 31 woman suggests that she is an '... ideal or noble woman, the almost perfect woman, … who is worthy of emulation' adding that 'Proverbs 31 takes her back to the days of Superwoman when the fashion prescribed that a woman should be a home-maker, a mother for her children, bring money in and still be seductive to her husband'.

It would appear that the biblical feminine ideal as set out in Proverbs 31 has long been used as the yardstick for Christian-Afrikaans ideal femininity. On our reading of *Finesse* and *Lééf*, despite the fact that feminist discourses have exposed normative patriarchal myths of femininity, the ideal held up to modern Christian-Afrikaans women in these magazines perpetuates the patriarchal, traditional and restrictive myths of femininity as defined in Proverbs 31. This fact is not only evident in the photographs and colours used on the cover of *Finesse*, as already pointed out, but also in the choice of text which literally defines a Christian-Afrikaans women as 'married', 'stylish' and an 'angel' (*Finesse* 2008). In other words, the ideal Christian-Afrikaans mother is neither single nor sexually liberated.[8]

Similar gender ideologies are to be found on the cover of *Lééf*. Through her body language and pose, the cover 'girl' exudes maternal tenderness appearing to give visual expression to Geldenhuys' (1954:169) description of the biblical feminine ideal that '... despite her honesty and dignity, there is nothing hard and unsympathetic about her. … She has a wonderful talent to make people feel comfortable … with her wisdom, friendliness, and spontaneous love …'. In other words, the woman on the cover may be 'read' as being dignified, solemn, noble, neat and warm, all of which follow the rigid prescription of biblical femininity as outlined above.[9]

Figure 2: Front cover of *Lééf* (May 2008).

Similarly, the text on the *Lééf* cover (Figure 2) constructs a particular version of Christian-Afrikaans femininity by including the words 'boys', 'mother', 'stylish', 'pray' and 'heart-food' (*Lééf* 2008). These words immediately imply that, in a nutshell, an ideal Christian-Afrikaans woman is a deeply religious, stylish mother who shares her love by cooking. Once again, these characteristics overlap with the biblical feminine ideal as set out by Geldenhuys (1954) and Joubert and Smith (2010) and fix the gender identity of the ideal reader in the realm of the domestic sphere.

When investigating the covers of other women's magazines (Figure 3) published in May 2008, it is clear that ideal Christian-Afrikaans femininity as it is modelled in *Finesse* and *Lééf* is distinctively different from other myths of femininity. Whereas the pose of the woman on the cover of *Cosmopolitan*, for example, reflects the visual representation of the quintessential destructive, self-assured and seductive woman that arose in visual culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Kitch 1999), the myth of the prim and proper Christian-Afrikaans woman suggests prudishness, innocence, purity and dignity. In other words, the Christian-Afrikaans woman contrasts starkly with the sensual, sexually liberal, feminine ideal provided on the *Cosmopolitan* cover, and the playfulness of *Fair Lady*'s feminine ideal. In addition, the proliferation of hearts, flowers, and butterflies on the pages of both *Finesse* and *Lééf* connote a specific kind of femininity, which may include ideas of innocence, purity, tenderness and 'softness', thereby not only referencing romantic ideas in fairy tale myths,[10] but also framing women within the rigid parameters of the so-called 'Proverbs 31 woman'.

Figure 3: Front covers of *Lééf* (2008); *Cosmopolitan* (Oosthuizen 2011); *Finesse* (2008); and *Fair Lady* (Larney 2011).

The inside pages: *Finesse* and *Lééf*

Figure 4: '10 Most inspiring women' (*Finesse* 2008:16-17).

One of the main articles in *Finesse* is entitled '10 Most inspiring women' (Figure 4) and provides the reader with specific directives on how to ensure that she becomes a fitting Christian-Afrikaans woman. Once again, the compositions, colours and attire, carefully chosen for the photographs of each 'inspirational woman' connote friendliness and style. The choice of their make-up (which is toned-down so as to appear 'natural'), jewellery (not overbearing) and hairstyle (neat and fashionable) all contribute to such connotations.

The 'inspirational' theme of this issue of *Finesse* can be linked to the discourse of veneration and exaltation of the *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) in many visual representations of the stereotypical Christian-Afrikaner woman that appeared in South African visual culture in the early twentieth century. Notable examples include the sculpture, *Woman and Children* at the Voortrekker Monument (1938) (Figure 5) and the National Women's Monument (1913) (Figure 6) both of which portray the Afrikaner woman as a wife and mother with characteristics such as piety, submissiveness and self-sacrifice (Landman 1994; McClintock 1991:109).

Figure 5: Anton van Wouw, *Voortrekker woman with children*, 1949. Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria (Paulsen 2012).

Figure 6: Anton van Wouw, *National Women's Monument*, 1913. National Women's Monument, Bloemfontein (Labuschagne 2012).

More specifically, Liese van der Watt (2009:93) identifies a '*volksmoeder* discourse' evident in the Voortrekker Tapestry (created between 1952 and 1960) which depicts scenes from the Great Trek of 1838. On display at the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria, the depictions of the women in the fifteen tapestry panels form, according to Van der Watt (2009:93), part of a larger nationalist project aimed at 'venerating' and 'exalting' the mothers of the Afrikaner nation. Always portrayed within the domestic realm, women are depicted in well-defined and structured familial relationships which create and reinforce the 'overt harmony' (Van der Watt 2009:96) of the Voortrekker family. At the same time, the gendering of space in the tapestries 'offered an important way in which traditional patriarchal hierarchies within the Voortrekker, and by extension the Afrikaner family, could be reinforced' (Van der Watt 2009:97).[11]

Although such a line of arguing undoubtedly has it limits, it may not be too presumptuous to suggest that the ten 'inspirational women' which gloss the pages of *Finesse* subtly represent contemporary versions, if not of mothers of a nation, then surely of women after which Christian-Afrikaans women may (or should) model themselves. As Ferguson (1983:9) notes, '[r]eaders of women's magazines are presented with examples of superwomen, an endless procession of successful, beautiful and inspirational role models to envy or emulate'. Although in this case the reader of *Finesse* is not given an 'endless procession' of role models, s/he is given ten that reflect most definitively the rigid patriarchal Christian-Afrikaans ideal. Van der Watt (2009:103) notes that the Voortrekker women, whose hardships were immense, were depicted throughout the panels as '... fresh, clean and completely tidy'. In this way, these idealised portrayals of the Voortrekker women as *volksmoeders* 'idealised them as role models for Afrikaner women' (Van der Watt 2009:103). In similar fashion, *Finesse*'s '10 most inspiring women' prescribe a set of ideals toward which a modern Christian-Afrikaans woman ought to strive.

The way in which the models are posed in the photographs accompanying the article displays them with their heads slightly slanted. According to Goffman (1987:63) such a posture suggests submissiveness:

> [I]n head canting, height is reduced, contributing to a mere symbolization of submissiveness. The level of the head is lowered relative to that of others, including, indirectly, the viewer of the picture. The resulting configurations can be read as an acceptance of subordination, an expression of ingratiation, submissiveness, and appeasement.

Although submissiveness itself is not mentioned directly in Proverbs 31, this quality is no doubt a crucial ingredient of biblical femininity as viewed through the lens of patriarchy. For instance, although Joubert and Smith (2010:18 [emphasis added]) argue that '[n]o woman is any man's floorcloth …', they also state that 'a woman that is honoured, respected and served by her husband, is eager to be reliable/dependable and is pleased to support him in *his role as king, priest and prophet*. She is *unselfish* and her *subservient support* for her husband makes him look good. … She is willing to *sacrifice* to accommodate her husband's success'. Evidently, the myth of the subservient, submissive biblical feminine ideal is also a significant and unique characteristic of a modern Christian-Afrikaans feminine ideal.

Tough enough

The women featured in the article all describe a hardship which, with the help of their faith, had to be overcome, in order to become the 'inspirational' women they are today. In other words, what is emphasised in these articles is that these women are inspirational precisely because they have overcome some hardship in their lives. Thus, 'triumph over hardship', implicit in each story becomes a significant component of an imagined Christian-Afrikaans ideal woman. However, as McClintock (1991:109) points out, hardship and self-sacrifice have long been key ingredients of the Afrikaner woman. For example, 'suffering, stoical and self-sacrificial' (McClintock 1991:109) femininity are

enshrined in the *National Women's Monument* (1913) (Figure 6) in Bloemfontein which commemorates the achievements and remembers the suffering of the Afrikaner women and children in the South African War (1899-1902). In the same way, Gaitskell and Unterhalter (1989:60) note that 'after 1902, Afrikaner motherhood is exalted as saintly in suffering, admired for stoicism in victimisation, its strength an inspiration to the rest of the defeated nation. The emphasis is on nobility, passivity, virtuous nurturing and protection of children'. When viewed in this light, *Finesse*'s 'ten most inspiring women' are a potent reinvention of an earlier version of a specifically Afrikaner (and Christian) construction of women.

Nostalgia

Lééf adds another ingredient, namely nostalgia, to the myth of Christian-Afrikaans femininity. Throughout the publication, the codes that suggest a (better) bygone past include images suggesting the rural countryside, decor (such as a *trousseau*), handmade items and recipes that include traditional *boere*-food. Van Zyl (2008:132) argues that '[n]ostalgic recollection ... provides people with a sense of socio-historic continuity, allowing them time to come to terms with change and assimilate to their new conditions. Simultaneously, meaningful links to the past are made, allowing people to form their own sense of identity in a new era'. Considering the apparent cultural identity crisis that Afrikaanses are facing (Giliomee 2004b; Vestergaard 2001; Viljoen 2008), it is not surprising that nostalgia is a recurring trope in the construction of a Christian-Afrikaans feminine ideal in these magazines.

There are countless examples on the pages of both magazines that support the argument that the myth of contemporary Christian-Afrikaans femininity is a complex mix of patriarchal views of femininity and contemporary codes of normative femininity. On the one hand, a Christian-Afrikaans feminine ideal in the abovementioned analysis appears stylishly groomed according to contemporary secular standards. On the other, there are strong visual correlations between her current appearance and traditional definitions of Christian-Afrikaner femininity. Comparing the body posture of the constructed Christian-Afrikaans feminine ideal, typically with her head submissively canted in most instances in *Finesse* and *Lééf*, reveals that little has changed since the earlier versions of Christian-Afrikaans femininity were portrayed in the examples given above, except perhaps that she has (modestly) kept abreast with fashion.

Conclusion

In constructing a version of Christian-Afrikaans femininity on a mythical level, it cannot be denied that the representations offered in *Finesse* and *Lééf* are subtly shaped by codes of normative femininity already circulating in popular media. The construction of Christian-Afrikaans femininity in these magazines is, however, of a particular kind that cements it in two closely related issues.

On the one hand, we argued that the contemporary version of Christian-Afrikaans femininity is rooted in the social-political context of the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the particular way in which it envisioned, imagined and imaged Afrikaner women. On the other, we showed that contemporary myths of Christian-Afrikaans femininity are rooted in the ideological construction of the 'ideal' woman in a Christian context, where patriarchal notions of gender are perpetuated and maintained with women continuing to be portrayed as subordinate to men. We conclude that *Finesse* and *Lééf* idealise the women displayed both on their covers and in their articles as role models for Christian-Afrikaans women, thereby regulating and restricting the gender identities of Christian-Afrikaans women.

Owing to limited space we have admittedly analysed only a very small selection of the photographs and articles that appear in the magazines. For the same reason, we have also not paid attention to the lack of photographs and articles showing black or lesbian women. Therefore, our analysis may seem reductive and limiting, but this was necessary in sustaining the argument we set out above. We do not assume that all readers accept and live out the visual representations given to them in the magazines. For, as Van Zoonen (1994:40) argues, 'media audiences do not simply take in or reject media messages, but use them according to the logic of their own social, cultural and individual circumstances'. We do, however, suggest that the stereotypes presented in the magazines complicate the manner in which Christian-Afrikaans women negotiate their identities in the twenty-first century by restricting them to very specific normative gender roles.

As with its secular counterparts, the identities created in the pages of *Finesse* and *Lééf* magazines restricts Christian-Afrikaans women to a certain kind of normative ideal femininity. Although this kind of femininity can be pleasurable, it continues to encourage its readers to be submissive superwomen who differ only slightly from that propagated in Proverbs 31 as taken up by conservative (male) authorities in the Afrikaans community such as Geldenhuys (1954) and Joubert and Smith (2010). Evidently, the pious, submissive woman conjured up by this patriarchal framework has now simply been made more attractive to twenty-first century Christian-Afrikaans women by means of the artful techniques used by magazines such as layout, design, colour, fashion and make-up. The only difference in the construction of the supposedly 'new', liberated contemporary Christian-Afrikaans feminine ideal seems to be that it is merely a subtle, even disguised, portrayal of previous gender hierarchies. Thus, patriarchal assumptions about a women's role in the public and private spheres as well as her various roles as wife, mother, and object of beauty are neatly repackaged in the guise of the pseudo-empowered twenty-first century woman.

NOTES

1. In the publications examined in this article there is only one representation of a black woman in each magazine. The actress, Shaleen Surtie-Richards, appears in *Lééf* and famous TV personality and former Miss South Africa, Jo-Ann Strauss, appears in *Finesse*. Two possible conclusions might be drawn from this. On the one hand, the Christian-Afrikaans feminine ideal constructed here is predominantly a white ideal. On the other, the magazines assume their readership to be predominantly white.

2. The May 2008 issues of both these magazines were chosen specifically because they mark a celebration of a particular kind of ideal femininity in the context of Mother's Day. For instance, in *Finesse*, the main theme of 'ten most inspiring women' is an important component in the investigation of the current representation of an ideal Christian-Afrikaans woman, owing to the fact that the women on the cover were voted for by the readers of the magazine and then repackaged by the editorial board for consumption by the readers once again.

3. Owing to limited space, we are not able to explicitly draw such comparisons in this analysis and suggest that such an investigation would, no doubt, fall within the scope of another article. Suffice it to say that, throughout our argument, we endeavour to show our awareness of such overlaps.

4. Other similar studies that investigate representations of femininity in women's magazines include that of Marjorie Ferguson (1983), who studied *Woman, Woman's Own* and *Woman's Weekly* (1949-1980) and Kathryn Shevelow (1989) who studied femininity constructed in British magazines in the eighteenth century. Furthermore, Angela McRobbie (2000) identified a romanticised 'teen' feminine ideal in *Jackie* (1965-1976), while Anthony Fung (2002:326) studied the construction of (capitalist) femininity in Hong Kong in the magazine *Amoeba* (1997-1998).

5. Equally, we acknowledge that since images are polysemic, and contain multiple potential messages (Hall 1980:134; Lacey 1998:90-95; Van Zoonen 1994:40-42), myths of ideal Christian-Afrikaans femininity will be interpreted in different ways, depending on a reader's own frame of reference.

6. *Lééf*, which is spelt with emphasis on the 'ee's, implies that the ideal reader of the magazine lives life to the fullest. Already in this title, the magazine seems to encourage its reader to strive toward living a deeper and more spiritual life with 'heart and soul' (*Lééf* 2008).

7. In the post-apartheid era the debate concerning precisely who is included in and who is excluded from the term "Afrikaner" is ongoing. In attempting to define "Afrikaner", Giliomee (2003) merges culture and language, implying that an Afrikaner includes anyone who speaks Afrikaans. The issue is, however, more complex than this. Giliomee (2003:xix) explains that when it was first used in the eighteenth century, the term "Afrikaner" referred to whites and eventually '... had to vie with designations like burgher, Christian, Dutchmen and Boer'. Following Giliomee (2003), a distinction has been made in this article between the terms 'Afrikaners' and 'Afrikaanses' with the former referring to white Afrikaans speaking people in the pre-apartheid context – thus before 1994 – while the latter refers to all Afrikaans speaking people in the post-apartheid era irrespective of racial connotations.

8. Since heterosexual marriage with children is emphasised throughout these publications, a Christian-Afrikaans woman is apparently not homosexual. Clearly, although Christian-Afrikaans femininity is presented here as fashionable and trendy, it certainly holds on to notions of heterosexuality and patriarchy embedded in normative gender ideologies.

9. The cover girl on this issue is Penny Coelen-Rey who was crowned both Miss South Africa and Miss World in 1958.

10. Fairytale myths are often drawn upon in representations of Christian femininity. For example, in their visual analysis of the bookcover of *Captivating: unveiling the mystery of a woman's soul*, Viljoen and Koenig-Visage (2011:5) argue that '[m]ost of the formal elements, as well as the constructed codes, on this cover … function to connect fairytale myths with feminine identity construction'. Some of the characteristics that are linked to Christian (fairytale) femininity include the idea that she is 'identified with nature, beauty and the ephemeral' (Viljoen & Koenig-Visage 2011:5-7) as well as feminine physical beauty, passiveness, decorativeness and the so-called 'damsel-in-distress'. In addition, the fairytale myth connects a woman with the supernatural, the mysterious and the unknown.

11. The link between the construction of a specific gender identity for the Afrikaner woman and the repeated stress in these tapestries on Calvinist-Reformed doctrine as the crux of the family unit (made visible in the repeated images of the Bible) is an important one.

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