

SIGNIFICANT OTHERS: A VISUAL ANALYSIS OF THE REPRESENTATION OF GENDER IN THE AFRIKAANS CORPORATE CHURCH

by

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DECLARATION

Student number: 23073854

I declare that *Significant others: A visual analysis of the representation of gender in the Afrikaans corporate church* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Leandra Helena Koenig-Visagie

2 May 2012



“In the Lord, however, woman is not independent from man, nor is man independent from woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God”
(1 Corinthians 11:11 New International Version).

SUMMARY AND KEY TERMS

Title: Significant others: A visual analysis of the representation of gender in the Afrikaans corporate church

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Summary

This study explores how contemporary Afrikaans churches represent gender in their visual culture. For these purposes, a Barthean semiotic analysis is done on visual material produced between 2007 and 2008 by three Afrikaans corporate churches in the Pretoria-Centurion area, namely the Dutch Reformed congregations Moreletapark and *kerksondemure* (“church without walls”), and Doxa Deo’s Brooklyn and East campuses – Afrikaans Apostolic Faith Mission congregations. The analysis seeks to demystify and denaturalise the material’s potentially mythical, ideological and hegemonic underpinnings.

Operating from an interdisciplinary theoretical framework comprising aspects of Visual Culture Studies and Gender Studies, this study primarily provides a focused analysis of the representation of men and masculinity in the selected churches according to three themes, namely professional occupation and leadership; physical activity and adventurism; and fatherhood. This focus was adopted owing to the lack of available literature on men and masculinity in the church and Christianity, as opposed to the more ready availability of research on women and femininity. The representation of gender in Moreletapark, *kerksondemure* and Doxa Deo is conceptualised in broad terms through a comparison of the representation of masculinity with femininity as its foil. In this regard gender is analysed in the three churches according to notions of gendered ontology and matters of work, marriage and family. Exscripted, or non-represented, themes are also problematised.

It is argued that the churches under investigation represent gender in dualistic, essentialist and often stereotypical terms. This particular depiction of gender attests to the churches’ participation in the biological essentialising of gender, polarising men and women into strict binary dualisms, whilst also visually denying the existence of homosexuality and alternative sexualities. This tendency is problematic, not only because it fails to provide a realistic

portrayal of men and women in the three churches, but also because it visually participates in conservative and fundamentalist gender discourses.

Key terms: gender representation, men and masculinity, Afrikaans corporate church, Dutch Reformed Congregation Moreletapark, Dutch Reformed Congregation kerksondemure, Doxa Deo, Barthean semiotic analysis, church visual culture, essentialism, biological determinism, gendered binary oppositions, men's ministry, women's ministry, gendering of ministries, exscription.

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