

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

“In naming gender, one is not simply naming a (sexual) division of labour; one is rather, naming a system of power, further denoted variously as patriarchy, sexism, male dominance, and so on” (Brod 1995:15).

This study described and critically analysed the representation of gender in three Afrikaans corporate churches. This comprised a Barthean semiotic analysis of visual material collected from selected Afrikaans churches in the Pretoria-Centurion area, namely Moreletapark, *kerksondemure* and *Doxa Deo*. The study was conducted and conceptualised within an interdisciplinary framework and comprised theories and methodologies appropriated from Visual Culture Studies and Gender Studies. This chapter provides a summary of the dissertation, as well as a review of the main findings and implications thereof. I also outline the limitations of this study and the contribution it makes. This is followed by suggestions for further research and some concluding remarks regarding the connection between the findings of this study and the rise of global Christian neo-conservatism and fundamentalism.

5.1 Summary of chapters

Apart from sketching the background and need for this study, Chapter One provided the methodological and theoretical framework for the research conducted. From the literature reviewed, I identified a gap in available research on gender in the visual culture in the contemporary church and in Christian culture. There also seems to be a particular lack of research into men and masculinity in the church and Christianity, especially in South Africa. This omission of masculinity in studies on gender in the church and Christianity led me to adopt the representation of men and masculinity in the church as this study's focus, as issues regarding women and femininity in the church and Christianity have received a fair amount of attention from South African scholars.

Chapter Two provided a discussion of the context of the three churches selected for this study. Moreletapark, *kerksondemure* and *Doxa Deo* were conceptualised as corporate churches, and the visual culture of these churches was described. I also considered the

phenomenon of the gendering of Christian men's and women's ministries prevalent in all three selected churches, as well as the tendency towards the gendered branding of these ministries. These descriptions were called for, as visual material from the churches' men's and women's ministries makes up a large portion of the data for this study

Chapter Three started with a theoretical exploration of the representation of masculinity and its associated myths. I also considered the relationship between gender and Christianity, as well as between masculinity and Christianity specifically and placed this relationship within the South African context. The connections between Christian gender beliefs, biological determinism and gender essentialism were highlighted. In this chapter, I discussed the representation of masculinity in the three churches, which was organised and discussed according to three recurring themes in the data, namely: professional occupation and leadership; physical activity and adventurism; and fatherhood. These themes are considered by various scholars to be central themes in the cultural construction of adult masculine identity. The centrality of the Christian notion of male headship and the breadwinner myth was focused on.

In Chapter Four, the representation of gender was considered in broader terms as it appears in the visual culture of the three churches. Here the representation of femininity was discussed as a foil to the representation of masculinity and in so doing the construction of dominant masculinity in the data from Moreletapark, *kerksondemure* and *Doxa Deo* was underlined. The highly essentialised nature of gender as it appears in these three churches was stressed. This chapter paid specific attention to the construction of gendered ontology in the churches and focused on the passive and decorative functions women and femininity assume in the three selected churches, in contrast with the active and leadership functions connected to men and masculinity. Matters of gender in family contexts were also considered, as well as the subordinated and domesticated roles connected to women and femininity in opposition to the dominant and public roles attributed to men and masculinity. Certain non-represented, or exscripted, gender aspects were also problematised.

5.2 Conclusions and implications

An analysis of the gender portrayals in the visual material produced by Moreletapark, *kerksondemure* and *Doxa Deo* reveals that gender representation occurs along unusually strict, separated lines. I believe this gender division to be out of the ordinary because when

these representations are compared to the mainstream media, which portrays an array of gender and sexual identities, the church images show a decisively neat division of the sexes as either essentially masculine or essentially feminine – as polar opposites, or ‘significant others’, in terms of gender identity. As is apparent when comparing the figures discussed in Chapter Four to those analysed in Chapter Three, the stereotypical colours blue and pink are primarily used as a visual shorthand to signify masculinity and femininity – akin to the gendered branding of products seen in mainstream advertising (particularly that targeted at children). Nothing appears in between the two visually constructed gender poles – pink and blue – to represent diversity in lived performance of gender. Metaphorically speaking, one sees nothing on the continuum of gender identity, no purple (which might, according to this overly simplistic semiotic, represent homosexuality or bisexuality), bluish pink (masculine femininity) or pinkish blue (feminine masculinity). Indeed, through their strict polarisation of the sexes and their focus on marriage and traditional notions of family, the compulsory imperative of heteronormativity appears to be at play in the churches’ visual culture. It almost seems as though the male–female dualities discussed in Chapter One were used as a blueprint for gender portrayal by the three churches.

It was found in this study that the three selected churches maintain the “masculine masquerade” (Brod 1995:13) through depictions of heroic masculinity as active adventurers, career men and breadwinner fathers. Whereas male ontology is constructed as being physically active and adventurous in the visual data in this study, female ontology is constructed as being beautiful and through this beauty, acts as a symbol for the spiritual. Masculine ontology is therefore associated with *doing*, whereas feminine ontology is associated with *appearing*. As a result, decoration and beauty are strongly associated with Christian femininity. Attractive female models in white clothing, with slim bodies, soft facial features and long hair are commonly employed in the churches’ women’s ministries’ material. Close-up camera shots of female models are also frequently used, resulting in the abstraction of their bodies and faces, thereby objectifying their feminine forms. Male bodies are neither objectified nor eroticised in the data of this study (Nixon 1997).

All the feminine elements present in the visual material discussed in Chapter Four stand in stark contrast to the masculine elements discussed in Chapter Three. There is, therefore, a great visual difference between the representation of masculinity and that of femininity in the materials from Moreletapark, kerksondemure and Doxa Deo: masculinity is constructed as everything which stands in opposition to femininity and vice versa.

Stereotypically masculine elements are preferred in the churches' visual culture where men and their activities are depicted. Masculine colours, such as blue, grey and red are privileged and so are bold, static fonts and capital letters.

It is clear that Christian beliefs in essentialism and biological determinism are strong influences in the visual culture of Moreletapark, *kerksondemure* and *Doxa Deo*, which feature prominent depictions of dominant notions of both masculinity and femininity. Masculine essential instrumentality is constructed in opposition to feminine essential ornamentality. As representations are commonly understood to be idealised versions of the reality they depict, as discussed in Chapter One, one could argue that specific gender ideals regarding Afrikaner Christian masculinity and femininity are embodied in the data in this study. Ideal Christian masculinity is, therefore, constructed in the selected churches as physically active and adventurous, leading in both public and private spaces, whereas ideal Christian femininity is constructed as passive, beautiful, submissive and domestic.

One also sees no feminisation of masculinity, which occurs frequently in the media as well as in the visual arts (Solomon-Godeau 1997:11). Men's bodies are not eroticised and objectified as in the mainstream media (Nixon 1997). Neither are men shown as consumers, which has become common in men's lifestyle magazines and advertising. No emphasis is placed on the physical appearance of the male figures discussed in Chapter Three, but rather on their physical activity. The findings differ in this regard from the representation of masculinity in the mainstream media. In fact physical beauty, as is shown in Chapter Four, appears almost to be an exclusively female trait. One notices that masculinity is, therefore, constructed as not 'prettified', or as not-feminine for that matter.

Apart from male bonding activities, reference to male to male relationships is mostly avoided, whereas female to female relationships are frequently implied. Where men and masculinity are concerned, public life in terms of work and adventure is emphasised, whereas where women and femininity are concerned, the emphasis is on the private and domestic. This resonates with Connell's (1987) description of a "gender order", or "gender regime", which is based on categories of exclusion and inclusion (Prinsloo 2006:134). Within this order, "masculinity is constructed as powerful, physical, rational and located in the public sphere, and femininity as passive, dependent, emotional and inhabiting the domestic sphere" (Prinsloo 2006:134).

Notions of self-sacrifice and service to others are emphasised in relation to femininity. By contrast, individualism is strongly related to masculinity through the presence of the myth of the lone male hero – conquering nature and the business world – and references to male career advancement. No references are made in the data of this study to men serving others, except in the context of their immediate families in their role as breadwinners. In terms of family, a focus on romantic heterosexual relationships, especially in the form of marriage, is found in the visual data from all three churches as well as a preference for nuclear family configurations. Motherhood and fatherhood are also both frequently shown, although in different terms. These divergent conceptions of fatherhood and motherhood are also common in the mainstream media (see Prinsloo 2006:134).

Childcare and child-rearing are accentuated, but these concepts are highly feminised, as was demonstrated in Chapter Four. It was noted that no representation of fatherhood is present in the data collected from Doxa Deo. Motherhood, on the other hand, is found in the church's visual culture, and this firmly situates primary childcare as a female responsibility in Doxa Deo. In this study it became apparent that the roles of women, as portrayed in the visual culture of the three churches, are limited, especially when compared to those of men. This corresponds to practices in the mainstream media, as Prinsloo (2006:140) comments that The Gender Media Baseline Study conducted in Southern Africa in 2003 “found that men were represented in a much wider variety of activities than were women, but that they were rarely identified in terms of their relationships, as father or husband, for example, in contrast to women who were more likely to have such relationships ascribed to them”. I would argue that women are, to a certain extent, rendered complicit in their own oppression in the three churches. Judging from the activities of the women's ministries, it would appear as though women are co-opted to serve men, others and God in the church – a role which they seem to fulfil willingly. Questions about female agency (Connell 2001:43) in these churches arise, considering the extent to which women are pacified and subordinated.

These tendencies found in the visual culture of the three churches regarding parenting and work are problematic. Both work and family are potential sites where progressive social changes in the gender order may occur. When middle-class women work, their husbands tend to help out more at home and with the children. Stronger representations of employed women, employed outside the home or not stereotypically connected to children, could aid to normalise such progressive moves. When men, especially in the middle-class, start to

engage in primary childcare, progressive gender change can also become possible (LaRossa 1995:457; Morrell 2006:23; Silverstein *et al* 1999:668). This debunks the subordinating stereotype of women being primarily responsible for caring and raising children – a belief which has led many a mother not to return to employment after the birth of her first child. Gender role change in the family remains important in the quest for gender equality, as the family is often a microcosm for broader gender practices in society (Morgan 2001:226).

The emphasis of family values in the findings resonates with Viljoen's (2009:16) opinion that, "the Afrikaner 'imagined community' is both God-fearing and family centred". From the findings in this study, it is possible to argue that traditional gender dichotomies are enshrined in the visual culture of Moreletapark, *kerksondemure* and *Doxa Deo*. These dichotomies are, however, likely to be out of tune with the real life experiences of white, middle-class men and women in the Pretoria-Centurion area. These areas are affluent, white, middle-class areas and as such are more likely to exhibit progressive tendencies with regard to family structures and occupational situations (LaRossa 1995:475). Similarly, as Prinsloo (2006:134) contends, more and more South African women are heading households, especially in the face of male unemployment and absenteeism.

According to Morgan (2001:231-232), the study of the family remains important for gender analysis, as it is the site where people "do gender". Cultural beliefs about family are also ideological and serve to enshrine patriarchal power (Whitehead 2002:150). The family is viewed as an organising principle (Whitehead 2002:152) and an Ideological State Apparatus, in Althusser's (2002) terms. The family is also a unit of consumption and, like the Protestant work ethic, it serves capitalism. Political and fundamentalist calls exist for "good family values" (Whitehead 2001:150; Morgan 2001:230) and beliefs are held in certain factions that contemporary transformations in the family point towards social disorder (Whitehead 2002:152). It is therefore significant that one sees a promotion of traditional family configurations in the church imagery in this study, which portrays patriarchs, heads of households, breadwinners, home-bound mothers and happy children. Conservative notions of the nuclear family are commonly protected and preserved by the political right (Whitehead 2002:150). The protection of these family values is ultimately a preservation of male dominance (Balmer 2000:201), as wives are subjected to their husbands in these traditional ideals. The family is frequently viewed as a microcosm for broader gender relations (Morgan 2001:228, 232); controlling this microcosm is therefore a strategic project in the assertion of masculine hegemony.

In Moreletapark, *kerksondemure* and *Doxa Deo*, men and women appear to be represented as 'in their place', with certain roles, positions and functions assigned to each gender: worker, father, mother, caregiver, breadwinner, and head. What appears in the visual culture of these churches is a utopia of Christian gender relations, a fiction of idealised conservative Christian manhood and womanhood as essentially masculine or essentially feminine – constituting versions of both dominant masculinity and dominant femininity. These dominant ideals of gender are given legitimacy through signification in the churches' visual culture. The churches succeed in naturalising certain myths of gender (the myth of the male breadwinner, the myth of the female primary caregiver, the myth of male superior physical activity and the myth of passive female beauty) and therefore also in depoliticising these myths in order to make them appear to be the norm and natural (Barthes 1972:142). Popular media gender myths are, therefore, selectively chosen, oversimplified, and stripped of their diversity in the visual material produced by the three churches. This phenomenon represents the working of Barthean myth at its best as the hollowing out and theft of meaning and history of the sign (Barthes 1972:114, 117). The visual cultures of the churches in this study, therefore, construct their own systems of symbols, or iconographies, of gender representation.

Femininity and masculinity are both ideological formations in patriarchy – a type of social organisation (Solomon-Godeau 1997:19). Both dominant masculinity and dominant femininity serve to uphold patriarchy, as can be seen in the visual material in this study. Although the representation of both dominant masculinity and femininity supports masculinist and patriarchal ideologies in this study, these ideologies place a burden not only on women, but also on men (cf. Erasmus 1996:28), seen through the imperative for men to have gainful employment, as well as their visual exclusion from primary childcare. Representations, especially gender representations, are often viewed as idealisations resulting in a tension between the unattainable ideals depicted and the reality of people's lived experience (Solomon-Godeau 1997:36). Both masculinity and femininity are constructed as representations of ideals in this study, and as such would not completely approximate the real-life situation in the lives of the men and women in these three churches. Regarding the idealisation of masculinity, MacKinnon (2003:9) states that,

the culturally idealised form of masculinity may not be the usual form of masculinity actually practiced within a society's history at a particular time. The actual personalities of the majority of men may show little correspondence with the cultural ideals of masculinity. It may be, in fact, that hegemony needs fantasy figures to embody its particular variety of masculinity.

Where unattainable masculine and feminine ideals are concerned, there appears to be a gap between representation and reality. Lived experiences and performances of gender of the church members of Moreletapark, kerksondemure and Doxa Deo are, therefore, likely to be different from the idealised versions of masculinity and femininity represented in the churches' visual culture. Contradictions and compromises exist in real relationships, and one assumes that there would be clashes between perceived Christian gender roles and contemporary gender roles. In this vein, Faludi (2000:247) describes how Promise Keepers men confess that despite being instructed to do so, they were unable to dominate their wives at home and to make them submit. In current times men may want their wives to submit to their headship on a Biblical basis, but when their wives earn more money than they do or have stronger careers, it complicates the 'common sense' of female submission often espoused in the church.

At first glance it would appear that the churches in this study practice essentialism and biological determinism in their representational culture to such an extreme that it becomes conspicuous and seems to some degree strategic. One may then speculate that there is a correlation between a conservative and perhaps uncritical reading of the Bible and an adherence to the strict gender binaries as analysed here. Such a literal interpretation of the scripture on gender roles would not necessarily be the norm in all three churches, nor amongst all their members, but it might appear that such an application is at work in their visual material. One assumes that because the type of gender representation identified in this study is common in all three churches, these images are not contested and must surely resonate with the audience at some level. It could be that the churches use conservative gender stereotypes from the mainstream media in order to connect with their congregation members.

However, from my observation of the communication processes at the three churches and discussions with their communication officials and leaders, I maintain that although these churches have dedicated communication teams and highly trained graphic designers producing their imagery, and do not regularly make themselves guilty of *conspicuous clip art pushing* (see Chapter Three), very little thought is put into the manner in which men and women are portrayed in their visual culture. I would argue that this is for two reasons. Firstly, in large and complex organisations such as the corporate church there are so many competing activities and matters that the issue of gender representation enjoys marginal, if in fact any, attention and is not mainstreamed – which is also the case in large secular corporations and organisations. Secondly, because gender is a highly contentious

issue in the church, many congregation members and leaders prefer to avoid dealing with the matter altogether. I therefore believe that the way in which men and women are depicted in these churches is not carefully thought out and planned (although their communication in general is) and that communicators and designers revert to using easily acceptable conservative and traditional gender images and roles which would be most recognisable, identifiable and palatable in a Christian setting. Such an un-self-aware and uncritical, albeit unconscious, use of stereotypical gender conceptualisations is, however, linked to certain ideological positions and is also not without problems and implications, as will be argued at the end of this chapter.

As indicated in the examples discussed here, there seems to be a lack of gender mainstreaming in the churches participating in this study, as ‘thorny’ gender issues appear to be sidestepped. It appears, therefore, that to maintain relevance in their communities, churches could benefit from proactively engaging with issues of gender for the following reasons. Firstly, women are increasingly entering the workforce and gaining responsibility, compensation and status in their careers and will, in all likelihood, not remain content with the secondary and subordinated roles and status assigned to them in churches. Secondly, with the naturalisation of homosexuality and resultant homonormativity in the mainstream media, the church would need to find a way to be more accommodating to persons of alternative sexual persuasions, instead of aiming symbolic ostracism at them, which is the current practice. Thirdly, men in South African churches, especially traditionally white churches, are experiencing real difficulty in coping with their current status as the politically and economically disowned. Judging from the portrayals of men and masculinity in this study, churches are failing to provide realistic answers to the problems of white manhood in post-apartheid South Africa. One notices that apart from the anti-feminist Promise Keepers and Angus Buchan, there are no other successful attempts to address Christian men’s issues. I believe that there is, therefore, a need for churches to articulate vernacular, non-dominant, counter-hegemonic and pro-feminist masculinities. It could be maintained that the churches in this study fail to provide authentic depictions of vernacular masculinity (Viljoen 2008:ii), as their representations appear to be removed from reality. These representations of masculinity are idealisations and at best they represent vernacular ideals.

When considered in the light of the current South African context of transformation from apartheid to democracy the images analysed in this study show possible traces of the assertion of white hegemonic (Afrikaner) male power. Over the past few decades,

masculinity has been viewed as being in a state of crisis in the Western world owing mainly to feminism, changing social norms and economic pressures (Whitehead & Barrett 2001:8). White masculinity in South Africa has been increasingly under threat in the context of Black Economic Empowerment employment practices in the workplace, whereby not only people of other races, but also women are favoured. I would argue that the visible presence of the cult of corporate masculinity in the churches' visual culture serves as a reassuring fiction for white men not only under pressure at work, but in danger of losing their jobs, or perhaps already retrenched. In the tidal shift of transformation from apartheid to democracy in South Africa, crisis tendencies may be expected and the type of essentialism visible in this study functions to protect and preserve what little is left of white masculine power in the unpredictable throes of transition.

I would also argue that the masculine culture of corporate organisation influences gender ideology in these churches, because they are run as organisations. This practice could be the result of Western global corporatisation and creeping managerialism. Through this dominance of masculine culture in these three churches, one sees a "predictable masculine discourse" (McKay *et al* 2005:283), which in turn results in the prescription of androcentric protocols (Doty 1993:17) where the representation of women and femininity is concerned. Through the analysis in this study, it becomes apparent that the representation of masculinity in the three churches constitutes a negation of femininity (Bartkowski 2004:51) and ultimately a devaluation thereof (MacKinnon 2003:5-6). This corresponds with Landman's (1994) contention that Afrikaner Christian women exist as a subculture in Afrikaner Christian culture. According to Solomon-Godeau (1997:11), the "dominant iconographic role of masculinity" is parallel to political and social developments. Masculinity embodies the apex of a culture, and this is also the case in the visual culture of the three selected churches. The ideal male body is a vehicle for the public, social and political; it carries these higher ideals and "public" values and in this regard it performs "symbolic labour" (Solomon-Godeau 1997:12). It could be argued that the dominance of masculinity in the visual culture of Moreletapark, kerksondemure and Doxa Deo, contributes to the constitution of masculine iconographies of power, which also feature prominently in mainstream Christian popular culture (cf. Viljoen & Koenig-Visagie 2011). In this regard I also find it highly problematic that leadership is mostly attributed to men in the three selected churches. The churches might need to heed Swart's (2001:86) warning that in post-apartheid South Africa, "[p]aternal leadership figures serve to replicate patriarchal society in a new constitutionally non-sexist environment".

5.3 Limitations and contribution of study

The study on Moreletapark, *kerksondemure* and Doxa Deo focused on a specific set of churches – Afrikaans corporate churches – in a small geographical area – the Pretoria-Centurion area. The findings of this study can, therefore, in empirical terms not be generalised as applying to all Afrikaans churches – nor to all South African churches for that matter. The findings do, however, offer rich, qualitative descriptions of the representation of gender in the three selected churches, as well as a theoretical and analytical basis for further research. Although the visual material of only three churches was used in the study, one might venture to speculate that, owing to their specific positioning as part of larger organisations, some of the findings could be applicable to other congregations within those organisations (although it must be admitted that every congregation in these organisations would, to some extent, have its own unique culture besides the organisational culture). Both the DRC and the AFM are major and influential religious denominations in South Africa. The DRC boasts a staggering 1 184 congregations with about 1.2 million members¹ and the AFM claims to be the oldest and largest Pentecostal church in South Africa.² The churches in this study, therefore, represent a significant part of South African Christendom, especially Afrikaner Christendom. Certain components of an Afrikaner gender ethos, intertwined with a Dutch Reformed gender ethos, could therefore be assumed to be present in the churches in this study.

A further limitation to the research is that Moreletapark, *kerksondemure* and Doxa Deo archive their own visual data in a very informal and unstructured manner. It is therefore difficult to determine whether all available visual material was considered in the sampling of data. The age of the data sample might also be considered as a limitation, as it represents the visual culture of the three selected churches from 2007 and 2008. The various difficulties around obtaining this sample and my decision not to repeat sampling were explained in Chapter One. Although the data sample is, by the time of the submission of this dissertation, already four years old, it still aids in providing a contemporary description of the representation of gender in the Afrikaans church, principally in light of the fact that no other study like the one undertaken here exists from South Africa, as discussed below.

¹ This information was obtained from the DRC's website (Dutch Reformed Church).

² This information was obtained from the AFM's website (Introduction).

Finally, my own subjectivity in growing up in an Afrikaans church-orientated environment may result in a certain bias prevailing over this study, but I believe that my embedded background provides me with insights into the ideological workings of the visual texts under consideration in this study, as well as the context in which they are produced, which I would not have acquired under different circumstances. I am, however, aware of my subjectivity in this matter and wished to test my assumptions and answer my research questions through careful deliberation, analysis and argumentation.

Through the research undertaken here, I have sought to fill a gap in the available literature regarding the representation of gender in the visual culture of the church and in Christianity, especially regarding men and masculinity. Through a review of the literature I found that only two other South African studies dealing with men and masculinity in the church and in Christianity exist, namely Cloete (2001) and Viljoen (2008, 2009, 2011). Cloete's study is done from the perspective of practical theology and does not consider the visual culture of the congregations participating in his study. Although Viljoen's study operates from a visual culture perspective, the data she uses is not from the Afrikaans church, but from a magazine aimed at Afrikaans Christian men. My study, therefore, offers the only qualitative description and analysis of the representation of gender in the visual culture of selected Afrikaans churches available from South Africa. Considering the limitation of the archiving of the three churches' visual material discussed above, this dissertation also provides a systematic documentation, as far as possible, of visual material depicting gender from Afrikaans corporate churches, which did not exist prior to this study.

Like Viljoen's research, my study offers one of the few studies which problematises gender and masculinity in the Afrikaans Christian or church context focusing specifically on representation and on visual culture. It could be argued that studies which focus on gender in the Afrikaans Christian and church context, contribute significantly to the destabilisation of old South African power structures, as the Afrikaans church and its objectionable gender and racial practices were not generally openly challenged during the apartheid era. I believe that the Afrikaans church is still not sufficiently challenged in either of these areas, even today. Furthermore, in the South African milieu, studies on men and masculinity in Christian and church contexts are particularly relevant, considering the close ties between Afrikaner Christian masculine hegemony, the Dutch Reformed Church and the ideology of the erstwhile apartheid regime.

5.4 Suggestions for further research

More research into gender in Christian contexts in South Africa is needed, especially studies aimed at researching men and masculinity, as there is a prominent lacuna in research into this aspect. I support Viljoen's (2008) call for more description and analysis of "vernacular masculinities", to which the need for the acknowledgment of "multiple masculinities" (Whitehead 2002:3) may be added, especially in light of South Africa's demographically diverse population. One could safely assume that an array of Christian masculinities exists in the South African context, ranging from conservative to liberal, with nuances across every culture and ethnicity. Furthermore, churches could enjoy increased attention from scholars as ideological spaces, and studies on the visual culture of churches could serve as an entry point into such enquiries. One could safely argue that this would be the case, particularly in large congregations where the use of communication and the constitution of visual culture is prolific and central in the creation of unity in expansive churches. The phenomenon of Christian visual culture or popular Christian culture also needs description, especially the gendered aspects thereof.

A study such as the one undertaken here could be repeated with data samples from different (Afrikaans) churches of various sizes, and from other denominations and churches catering for people of different cultures, languages and races. I would find it particularly interesting to compare the findings of this study with a similar study conducted in an alternative and more liberal congregation – such as the Johannesburg-based, gay-friendly Afrikaans congregation, *Mosaïek* (Mosaic) – where one would assume that gender representation would be more current with gender changes in society, but such an assumption would have to be tested.

The use of different theoretical frameworks and methodologies in a study on gender in Christian or church contexts could also be useful for the nuancing of the available knowledge on the topic. In this regard, the appropriation of Critical Discourse Analysis, or Social Semiotics would be equally applicable to Barthean semiotics used here – although Barthean semiotics did serve the purpose of answering the research questions and testing the assumptions of this study well. I would, however, not recommend the use of quantitative content analysis in a study of gender in Christian and church context, because such analyses were used in the past to gather evidence in support of the segregated nature of gender roles as noted in Chapter Three (see Fejes 1992). Judging from my findings, this could be highly problematic without qualitative critique in the context of the

three churches in this study, as their gender representations are so conservative and stereotypical.

Different types of data might also yield illuminating findings. In order to limit the scope of this dissertation, I resolved not to venture into audience research. I would, however find a contrasting of this study's findings with that of focus groups inquiring about the gender beliefs of the church members from Moreletapark, *kerksondemure* and *Doxa Deo* revealing. This contrasting would be instrumental in determining whether there is a gap, as I assume there is, between the gender representations in the churches' visual culture and members' real life experiences of their gendered existence. Faludi's (2000) participant observation of men in the Promise Keepers found that the real life experiences and actual gender beliefs of the Promise Keepers members are remarkably less conservative, essentialist and fundamentalist than those espoused by their leaders. I strongly suspect that this will be the case concerning Moreletapark, *kerksondemure* and *Doxa Deo*; my assumption is that the ideals of Christian masculinity and femininity prioritised by church management and communications teams are more conservative than the church members' beliefs and experiences.

Another area ripe for further research could be an enquiry into how the type of Christian gender ideals found in this study are contested and subverted, not only from within these churches, but also from alternative Christian culture, as well as mainstream culture in South Africa. Drawing from Barthean semiotics, Reid (2012) develops a theoretical framework regarding the functioning of counter myth in South African film. This framework could be useful for the analysis of alternative or counter gender myth in Christian culture, especially considering that Reid explores how stereotypes can be countered and challenged through the construction of counter myth. Although no examples of counter myth or subversion of conservative Christian gender stereotypes are present in the data for my study, they might be found in other data.

5.5 Concluding remarks

I find it problematic that the gender ideals depicted by the three churches in this study are highly conservative and mostly outdated, which confirms my initial assumptions upon starting this study. According to Barthes (1972:127), "[m]yth prefers to work with poor, incomplete images, where the meaning is already relieved of its fat, and ready for signification, such as caricatures, pastiches, symbols etc.". This statement is applicable to

this study, where it was shown how oversimplified images serve to uphold essentialism and biological determinism. As Barthes (1972:131) maintains, myth creeps in through nature, but where gender is concerned, nature's givens are not necessarily natural in a social sense. Biological determinism serves to uphold the so-called natural order of things (Whitehead & Barrett 2001:10-11). It would appear as though it is in the church's interest to keep the gender poles so far apart in order to uphold the natural Christian order of things. But ultimately, it is difference that signifies (Hall 1997:27) and a breakdown in difference could entail a breakdown in signification and in representational practice – perhaps resulting in a breakdown in the entire system of language. Patriarchy, masculinism and capitalism continue to successfully resist challenges to the structural integrity of such systems of representation.

When the legitimacy of masculinity is threatened or questioned, hegemonic masculinity will attempt to restore itself (Connell 2001:45). Such attempts commonly manifest in machismo and aggressive masculinity, a turning to outdoorism, as well as homophobia and anti-feminist backlash, which culminated in the rise of new men's movements in the 1990s alluded to previously. In practices of anti-feminist backlash, myth signifies the resistance which is brought up against it (Barthes 1972:135). MacKinnon (2003:10) also maintains that, "the survival of hegemonic masculinity depends on a form of incorporation of critiques of it". Myth neutralises resistance through naturalisation and depoliticisation, as is seen in this study in terms of the construction of dominant masculinity and dominant/complicit femininity. The power of patriarchy to re-invent itself and to re-articulate itself constantly and in new ways should not be underestimated. The "dominant fiction" of male supremacy can survive and absorb all forms of ambiguity and contradiction (Solomon-Godeau 1997:41). Repeatedly, patriarchy has risen, like the proverbial phoenix, "retooled and reconstructed for its next historical turn" (Solomon-Godeau 1997:40). Some might even say that its new name is "post-feminism" – one of the most ingenious pacifications of women and depoliticisations of their issues in all of history.

What is interesting, in terms of this study, is the relationship between gender conservatism, anti-feminism and the advent of new religious fundamentalism. According to Whitehead and Barrett (2001:3), "the rise of religious fundamentalism [is considered to be] a direct response by men to the changing position and expectations of women". Men have the capacity to resist these changes and challenges to their power, as Whitehead and Barrett (2001:7) state that, "many men are now actively resisting women's burgeoning demands for equal rights, and doing so increasingly through recourse to discourses of

religious fundamentalism, not only Islamic, but also Christian and Jewish”. The conspicuous essentialism in the churches in this study should therefore be viewed not only against the background of global crisis in masculinity tendencies, and the South African context of the seemingly politically and economically disenfranchised white man, but also against global anti-feminism and religious fundamentalism.

Authors such as Hofstede (1998), Faludi (2000), Whitehead and Barrett (2001), Young (2005:509-518) and King (2006) have asserted the idea that the rise of religious fundamentalism in today’s world is a direct backlash against the rise of feminism. The fruit of feminism is the exposure of the hegemonic power and practices of men (Whitehead & Barrett 2001:3), but fundamentalism appeals to godly authority for a cure to the vexing ‘woman problem’. Religious conservatism propagates the following kind of traditionalist gender reasoning:

Fundamentalisms reinscribe traditional gender roles based on the view that men and women, if considered equal at all, are “separate but equal”, and that women should act and are free in their own (usually highly circumscribed) spheres. If women seek to act outside these spheres, they are flouting not just social custom, but also the laws of the universe that have dictated men’s and women’s status and roles from eternity (Young 2005:514).

King (2006:83) believes that new forms of exclusion are created through the revival of religious fundamentalism, which appropriates the language of gender and religion to political ends. Bourdieu (2001:85) sees the church as deeply anti-feminist, and Reynaud (2004:140) issues the following warning: “Through its various transformations, [Judeo-Christian ideology] has served as a foundation for the most powerful form of patriarchy, which now threatens to destroy the world in its struggle for hegemony”. This study views Christianity and its main manifestation, the church, as an institution of power, an Ideological State Apparatus, in Louis Althusser’s (2002:139-141) terms. As with all institutions of great power, a demystification of its social and cultural substance is necessary. I do not, however, seek to argue that the three churches in this study *are* patriarchal and fundamentalist in their gender beliefs, but that elements thereof, as described by King and others, are visible in their representational cultures and that this tendency is disconcerting.

In a transformational context as in South Africa, the strict essentialised gender scripts provided by the three churches in this study are not constructive. Women’s issues and

those of the gay community continue to be sidelined. In the struggle for the abolishment of apartheid “national liberation came first and women’s liberation second” (Bonnin, Deacon & Morrell 1998:114) and this seems to be an ongoing legacy. The end of the rule of white superiority did not mean the end of patriarchy in South Africa (Bonnin *et al* 1998:115). South Africans are fighting the battle for racial equality, but have barely even engaged in the struggle for gender equality. In fact, from the visualised material discussed in this study it seems as though some South Africans are not even always sure whether they want to.

Bonnin *et al* (1998:114) argue that “attempts to subvert and dismantle dominant gender relations must necessarily go beyond binary oppositions towards a form of coalition politics”. Only by moving into a ‘third space’, which is beyond dichotomies – neither a patriarchal present nor a feminist utopia (Bonnin *et al* 1998:127) – can one hope to achieve some measure of transformation. According to this line of thinking, the representation of diversity, whether gendered or racial, seems to be the key. The churches in this study fail to portray gender realistically or diversely and do so against the problematic backdrop of a likely move towards the reaffirmation of white masculine power in South Africa, as well as the global rise of new religious conservatism.

In this study, I have tried to illustrate how three Afrikaans corporate churches represent gender and why the way in which they do so is significant. I acknowledge, however, that the churches I have considered are mainstream South African churches and that there is a possibility that alternative, fringe or niche congregations or Christian organisations might represent gender in more diverse, complex and realistic ways. I argued that the way in which Moreletapark, kerksondemure and Doxa Deo represent gender, consciously or unconsciously, is essentialist and biologically determined and that such representations are complicit with Christian conservative and fundamentalist discourses. I also maintained that the churches’ essentialist portrayal of gender is problematic in the current South African context, as it is counter-transformational and bears traces of the re-assertion of white male dominance, even allying itself with religious authority. Gender myths and stereotypes are rendered not only normal, but something which Christian men and women should aspire to. As mentioned previously, a further question to ask would be how these gender scripts relate to the actual real-life experiences of Christian men and women in Moreletapark, kerksondemure and Doxa Deo, but such a question is held over for further research.

It is problematic that the three churches are mimicking and distilling dominant gender mythologies. Should the church not strive to set an example of healthy gender representation? Furthermore, could the church not benefit from making itself relevant to a larger segment of the general population by representing realistic and contemporary versions of male and female personhood? This is even more important for Afrikaans churches with admitted dubious pasts in patriarchy, homophobia and racial prejudice. Perhaps in this light, a more diverse picture of race and gender would be called for. In this regard, I conclude with the following piece of thought-provoking scripture: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28 New International Version).