Background

'Were you criticized when you came to power in 1948?'…

'It is hard to describe now, but you felt that you were thought of as a one dimensional being, as if you had no ancestry, no culture that would be able to give you real depth. If you did something worthwhile, it was purely by chance, and tomorrow it would be exposed as stolen or mistaken' …

Stella Viljoen

'Imagined Community': 1950s *kiekies* of the *volk*[1]

'But how did you deal then with criticism in the fifties and sixties?'

'We minimized contact with it. We stopped reading their newspapers – why should we expose ourselves to daily ridicule? We didn't go to their universities, we didn't listen to their radio programmes. If we had a need for something we created it ourselves, our own films, our own books, our own history, our own Afrikaner businesses and millionaires. We appointed our own people to build up our confidence. We looked after our own poor. If it wasn't for that, we'd still be skulking around feeling inadequate.'

Antjie Krogh in conversation with her mother (*A change of tongue* 2003:68-69).

Huisgenoot[2] was founded in Cape Town in 1916 against a backdrop of shifting political and cultural alignments within Afrikaner[3] culture. In the aftermath of the *Vryheidsoorlog* (South African War) (1899-1902), two streams of Afrikaner alignment emerged. The first supported the reconciliatory rule of Louis Botha and Jan Smuts, who ushered in political coalition between the British and Afrikaners. The second sought to mobilise Afrikaner culture, through the vehicle of language, in reaction to British imperialism and domination. The Afrikaans media house, Naspers, founded *Huisgenoot* against this backdrop of post-war poverty and what was frequently perceived to be the cultural humiliation of the British policies of Anglicisation. According to media theorist JD Froneman (2003:1), *Huisgenoot* was founded with a two-fold motive: 'to financially support the struggling political mouthpiece of the Cape National Party, *De Burger*, and to provide the Afrikaner *volk* (people) with the inspiration, information and light entertainment it desperately needed' in the wake of the *Vryheidsoorlog* and ongoing First World War. In other words, *Huisgenoot* needed to balance its political agenda with public appeal. *De Burger* and *Huisgenoot* may be seen as the political and popular manifestations of the need for Afrikaner solidarity as identified by Naspers. The fact that these were Afrikaans publications probably carried significant political charge since the Anglicising of schools, introduced by Lord Milner in 1901, had created some division amongst the Afrikaner community. The subtitle to *Huisgenoot* in 1916, 'Verenigd met ons Moedertaal' (United with our mother tongue), testifies to the significance of language to the Afrikaner at that point in South African history.

As an Afrikaans family magazine, *Huisgenoot* was thus initially centred on what Froneman (2003:1) terms the 'idealism of Afrikaner nationalism', meaning that the magazine promoted a sense of Afrikaner heroism and community. At that point, *Huisgenoot* was largely positioned within idealist or aspirational culture (see Muller 1990: 256-257). This is evident in the elevated tone and subject matter of most of the articles and 'artistic' flavour of the design that frequently drew from patriotic images by South African artists for its covers. *Huisgenoot* succeeded in achieving most of its goals by the late 1940s: it became the centre of Afrikaans cultural life, helped to establish Afrikaans as a written language, created a reading habit amongst Afrikaners, and provided a forum for Afrikaans writers and poets (Spies 1992: 353). This was followed, however, by a period from the 1950s until the late 1970s in which the magazine experienced considerable financial difficulty. Froneman (2003:2) conceptualises the resultant changes in the magazine's content and brand identity as a move from 'idealism and formalised cultural life' to 'profit-driven populism'.

This article investigates aspects of the cultural and gendered conceptualisation of the Afrikaner 'imagined community' as depicted on the covers of *Huisgenoot* in the 1950s. The reason this article is concerned with the covers from the 1950s is related to the particular tension between idealism and profit at that time in South Africa. This tension, played out on the covers of *Huisgenoot* in the 1950s, situates the magazine at the point of intersection faced by the Afrikaner community between a vernacular politics and identity and a secular, globalised paradigm. On the one hand, for instance, the abundance of visual advertisements in the 1950s issues embodies the South

African culmination of what Daniel Boorstin (1961) terms the Graphic Revolution and the rise of mass culture production. This phrase refers to the explosion of mass produced imagery that dominated the previously word-orientated western world from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.

Jane Graves (1996:34) has noted the manner in which the abundance of commercial imagery world wide in the 1950s typically represented a gendered view of women as 'the angel of the house' in order to help secure the job market for men after the Second Word War. Whether these images reflected the reality of women at the time or not, they seemed to suggest that consumption was an important part of the responsibilities of a wife or mother. In order to understand the manner in which the visual articulation of the 'feminine' contributed to the establishing of an Afrikaner 'imagined community', this article critically analyses three tropes of gendered representation prevalent on the covers of *Huisgenoot* in the early 1950s.

On the other hand, *Huisgenoot* in the 1950s can be seen to reflect the idealist politics of its youth, both in its articles and in the design of its covers. This idealism was presumably ignited by the rise of the National Party to power in 1948. For this reason, it seems necessary to firstly, outline the body politic of the 1950s Afrikaner *volk* (people) and secondly, to couple nationalism with the analysis of the 'feminine' as this appears on the covers of *Huisgenoot* in the 1950s. The association of nationalism with 'femininity' is necessary since as Anne McClintock (1993:61) states, '[a]ll nationalisms are gendered'.

The 1950s 'imagined *volk*'

In his seminal investigation on nationalism and nationhood, political theorist Benedict Anderson (1983) amalgamates the notions of social and cultural nationalism in the central conceptualisation of an 'imagined community'. He describes this community as 'imagined' because the members do not all know each other, and as a 'community' because in the minds of each there is a shared image of their communion. Anderson (1983:44-46) proposes that the sense of nationhood shared by an 'imagined community' is made possible by modern media that build a shared network of symbols throughout the nation, thereby establishing the basis for an emotional community. The Afrikaner *volk* is not a neat example of Anderson's 'imagined community' (since they, alone, do not constitute a political 'nation'), but his delineation thereof does serve to highlight the degree to which Afrikaner identity hinges more on cultural consciousness and its dissemination in vernacular publications such as *Huisgenoot* than on geo-political location.

Anderson's (1983:44-46) analysis of books and newspapers as purveyors of national kinship, a concept he terms 'print capitalism', has obvious links to *Huisgenoot* since it seems to have been branded initially as a proponent of Afrikaner culture. What is, perhaps, more relevant to the analysis in this article is the extent to which elements of aspirational romanticism enter into the rhetoric of an imagined identity. Aspirational romanticism may be described as the *imagined* sense of Afrikaner-ness (as opposed to what this term represents demographically) and inform the focus of this article.

Historian Herman Giliomee (2003:356) has remarked upon the Afrikaner regime's ostensible need for a fortified and uplifted social reality that may be deemed to be at the heart of the many attempts at an aspirational rhetoric emanating from the Afrikaner during the 1950s. In Giliomee's (2003:356) words, '[t]he relative economic, cultural and social backwardness of the Afrikaner community could only be overcome by their developing their own identity (the term 'nationality' was then used) as a community, and by establishing separate social institutions.'[4] Elsabe Brink (1990:274) notes that in the decades following the South African War (up until the mid-twentieth century) the concept of the *volksmoeder* added a further dimension to Afrikaner nationalism. She explains that the *volksmoeder* was depicted as both the centre point of the household and the primary unifying force within Afrikanerdom, and thus as a political role-player (Brink 1990:273). According to Brink (1990:274), the *volksmoeder* concept was propagated by Afrikaner nationalists who 'concerned themselves with the ever-increasing number of poor whites and the so-called degeneration of the Afrikaner'.

Against this backdrop of a culturally inscribed need for aspirational identity, it becomes difficult to examine the *Huisgenoot* covers of the 1950s as anything other than a part, whether consciously or not, of the nationalist ideal to elevate the Afrikaner imagined community. Furthermore, the notion of 'imagined community' is a useful concept in tracking the growth or reduction of the Afrikaner sense of community through an analysis of gender as a cultural construct in *Huisgenoot*. This gendered reading of *Huisgenoot* is particularly appropriate when applied to the 1950s, a time when the global preoccupation with woman

as consumer may account for the covers of *Huisgenoot* being almost exclusively occupied by women.

The feminine face of nationalism

The media critic Malcolm Muggeridge once referred to the *Time* cover spot as 'post-Christendom's most notable stained-glass window' (in Johnson 2002:sp). While Muggeridge was being facetious, the value of the cover in establishing the image of a magazine (and thereby procuring impulse buys at the newsstand) is evident to every magazine publisher. At *Huisgenoot's* inception in 1916, creating a brand identity was not the 'religion' it is today, but the target market of the magazine was clearly delineated and the editorial team apparently knew how to capitalise on the need for Afrikaner solidarity.

Photographs of male Afrikaner icons such as Paul Kruger and General Piet Joubert, as well as images of national monuments such as the Union Buildings, were prevalent on the early covers of *Huisgenoot*. Such politicised covers were especially popular at the various moments in South Africa's history that were significant to the Afrikaner, such as the centenary of the Great Trek in 1938, the inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument in 1947, or the country becoming a republic in 1961 (see Froneman 2003:1). Images of South Africa's natural beauty were employed frequently until roughly the 1970s, transcribing South African landscapes into the well-established canon of the picturesque while simultaneously and, perhaps ironically, evoking the colonial gaze. In a similar vein, the artworks of (white) South African artists such as Gregoire Boonzaier, Nerine Desmond,

Terence McCaw and Hendrik Pierneef, which depict familiar *platteland* (countryside) scenes, were often found on the covers of *Huisgenoot*. The layout and typeface of the masthead changed at least once every decade, but never so radically that it was not still instantly recognisable. By the 1940s, *Huisgenoot's* image was so established that advertisers capitalised on its cultural identity to market their products as typically South African.[5]

The 1950s present an interesting contrast to the preceding decades in that women occupy the covers of *Huisgenoot* almost exclusively. The earlier covers, occupied by male national leaders and imposing monuments, identified the needs of the nation with the frustrations and aspirations of men (McClintock 1993:62). But, as McClintock (1993:62) points out, 'the representation of male *national* power depends on the prior construction of *gender* difference,' a precept evident in the gendering of the various phases in *Huisgenoot's* history. The gender-based opposition between high culture and mass or popular culture, played out in the move from politically 'masculinised' covers to politically feminised covers, coincides with another opposition that is relevant in *Huisgenoot's* case, namely that between the public domain, which is conceived of as male, and the private domain which is seen as female.

In addition to this departure from the diverse trends that marked the earlier covers, the 1950s front pages are also predominantly photographic, an occurrence that may be indicative of the homogenising influence of modern technology. Marijke du Toit (2001:sp) has chronicled the influence of the 'Kodak revolution' in South Africa as it pertains to the formulation of Afrikaner ethnic identity between

1916 and 1929, noting that in this time, *Huisgenoot* extended the familial and travel album into the public sphere.

From its first issue, *Huisgenoot* ran a monthly competition inviting readers to submit photographs of South Africa's indigenous beauty. The best results, posted on the *Fotografie Wedstrijd* (Photography Competition) page, indeed seem to answer the call of the magazine for readers to wander 'met de Kodak gewapend door't veld of langs't strand van de zee … en't mooie wat men daar ziet op de gevoelige plaat op te vangen' (armed with their Kodak through veld or along the beach … to capture the beauty they see on sensitive plate) (du Toit 2001:sp). However, it was not only photographs of nature that were sent in but also the (white) people occupying it. Thus, images of leisurely family outings, hunting trips, vacations and portraits were all included. In this manner the magazine encouraged readers to visualise their understanding of the Afrikaner imagined community, which was transferred from the realm of private consumption to that of public identity, creating areas of fissure between the binaries of private/public, amateur/professional and imagination/documentation. Since *Huisgenoot* did not employ a photographer for the first seven years of its existence, the photographs sent in were liberally distributed throughout the magazine, with many of them ending up on the covers.

The covers from the 1950s are like a portrait of Afrikaner identity in which South African vistas and elegantly posed women set in nature serve as the personification of the Afrikaner *volk*. These *kiekies* (snapshots) of this imagined community reveal something of the nostalgia and romance that sit at the core of 1950s Afrikaner patriotism.

Figure1. *Huisgenoot*, 17 November 1950

The landscape covers from this period in particular seem to owe something of their tranquillity to the 'nationalist idealism' mentioned by Froneman (2003:4). The coupling in each cover photograph of familiar landscapes with elegantly staged portraits of women (occasionally with children), points towards land (which connotes nationalism) and family as the central concerns of the Afrikaner, both of which were personified by woman.

Once printed and reproduced, the personal narratives of each photograph are framed by the broader meta-narratives of commodification and mass-production. This massification of highly personal visual imagery into the collective trajectory of the Afrikaner imagined community (and global construction of gender identity) raises questions about the gendering of domestic space as feminine and the possibility of nature, as represented on the 1950s covers, signifying an extension of this domestic, feminised realm. The South African vistas that frame the women on the 1950s covers, in other words, present a privatised view of nature as cultivated, domesticated and unthreatening. In this way the South African landscape, as it appears here, presents an interesting variation on the 1950s 'cult of domesticity' that internationally situates women within the home (this is especially evident in advertising and television situation comedies). The same indicative signifiers of passivity and decoration (such as the sense of posed-ness conveyed by each image) are inscribed into these vernacular snapshots and are even evident in the types or genres of images that frequent the front pages of *Huisgenoot* in the 1950s. These depictions demonstrate the manner in which the public drew from genres of image making established by western popular culture (such as international picture postcards that were widely available

in South Africa at the time and advertisements for global brands published in magazines such as *Huisgenoot*).

This article briefly highlights three of these gendered genres to accentuate the particularly feminised nature (and Nature) of the 1950s covers. These are the *fraai vrou* (decorative woman), *plaas vrou* (farm woman) and *sublime vrou* (sublime woman). This discussion is not wholly representative of all the covers of the 1950s. Not all of them feature glamorous models (there are odd exceptions such as the 17 July 1959 cover of a man with a python), but as a collective body they establish a trope in which woman or visualised 'femininity' embodies the mythic significance of the South African landscape and Afrikaner family structure as the cornerstones of Afrikaner identity.

The *fraai vrou*

The word 'fraai' (pretty in a cute way) is a term largely absent from current advertising rhetoric, but is used in virtually every advertisement in the 1950s issues of *Huisgenoot* targeted at female vanity. In this vein, Gemey perfume and talc is described as 'Die fraaiste geskenk op aarde' (the 'fraai'-est gift on earth), Arwa hosiery conveys 'blywende fraaiheid' (lasting 'fraai'-ness) and Knight's Castile is 'die verfraaiende seep' (the 'fraai'-making soap). A number of the 1950s covers (including the one from 17 November 1950, figure 1) translate this notion of 'fraai' femininity into visual terms.

In these images, 'woman' is encoded as 'decorative' with pouting lips and coy eyes forming the undisputed accessories of 'femininity'. Whether the viewer is confronted

with an unabashed look (12 February 1954, figure 2) or a model supposedly unaware of her onlooker's gaze (15 May 1953, figure 3), the result is the same, a portrait of 1950s femininity as to-be-looked-at. Here there is no trace of Afrikaner identity; any hint at recognisable iconography has been erased by a globalised articulation of the feminine itself as picturesque.

The irony of this passive *fraainess* (decoration) is that it easily slips into the active practice of *verfraaing* or decorate-*ing*. Without straying too far from the realm of inert femininity, the taxonomy of woman as homemaker and thus decorator is most effectively conveyed in images that couple women and flowers (figure 4). In some cases, this marriage is somewhat pretentiously encased in the lofty tones of 'art' as

in 'Menslikke Vaas' (Human Vase, 10 April 1953) where contrived titles advance the association of artistry. Erving Goffman (1976:29) refers to the representation of women's hands in commercial advertising as referents of the 'feminine touch'. He positions the effect of 'just barely touching', as seen in this cover from 10 April 1953, as oppositional to the kind of utilitarian grasping or holding associated with male hands; the image is thus indicative of bourgeois femininity (Goffman 1976:29). The stark black backdrop and high contrast lighting, made all the more dramatic by the red *Huisgenoot* masthead,[6] seem to imbue the image with the connotation of 1930s avant-garde photographs in the tradition of the Modernist Americans Edward Weston or Alfred Stieglitz. The shock value of Weston or Stieglitz's art is replaced, however, with the genteel complacency of

'femininity' as decorative and decorating display, while the white arum lilies, indigenous to South Africa, connote the role of the feminised South African landscape in narrating Afrikaner identity.[7]

More typically, however, women are photographed either arranging flowers, as in the portrait of Mrs Beneke deftly arranging proteas (8 October 1954, figure 5) or simply holding them (20 June 1955, figure 6). In each case, the emphasis seems to be as much on the well-manicured hands or feminine touch of the decorator as the fragile nature of the flowers themselves. In contrast to these more domesticated enactments, one would expect representations of the 'farm woman' to be more robust and less transient, but this is not the case. Even here, the severity

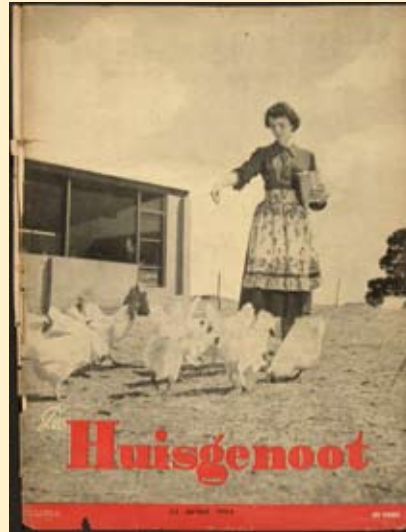Figure 5. *Huisgenoot*, 8 October 1954

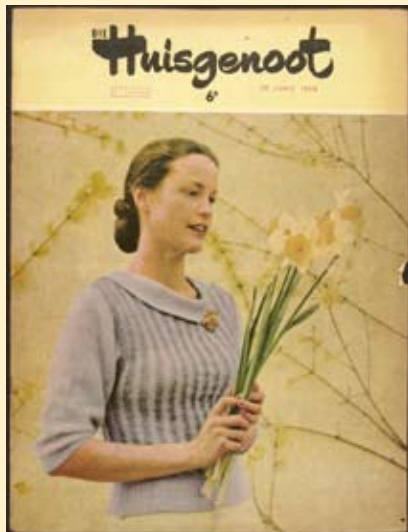Figure 7. *Huisgenoot*, 24 April 1953

Figure 6. *Huisgenoot*, 20 June 1955

Figure 8. *Huisgenoot*, 29 May 1953

of the African farmscape only serves to underscore the composed élan or femininity of the *plaasvrou*.

The *plaasvrou*

The majority of Afrikaners in the 1950s were urbanised, meaning that the farm had become a site of lost identity and subsequently nostalgia (*heimwee*) (24 April 1953, figure 7). Louise Viljoen (2005:101) remarks that this same nostalgia for a rural past is echoed in the fictional stories included in *Huisgenoot* in the 1950s. Despite the fact that the articles in these issues of *Huisgenoot* hint at intellectual sophistication and a lifestyle informed by the urbanisation of Afrikaners, the fiction seems to be stuck in the past, affectionately recalling an older way of life. Viljoen (2005:101) notes that the historiography of *Huisgenoot* confirms that this was a purposeful strategy by the magazine's editors to make the urbanising Afrikaner long for the simpler life that had been left behind on the farm (Muller 1990:565). It is therefore not surprising that the majority of the stories in the issues of the 1950s are informed by the belief that, in Viljoen's (2005:101) words, 'the farm constitutes the original and primary space of *Huisgenoot's* Afrikaner readers'.

The cover images that emanate from this rhetoric of return, cast the woman as a nurturing wife and mother (29 May 1953, figure 8), happily going about her daily responsibilities. As opposed to the images that feature women as decorative and decorating, these images convey a more conservative (less independent) view of women that paints a picture of rural life as innocent and good while at the same time relatively cultured.

In a painting entitled, *Darem betyds vir die pennie* (Just in time for the penny, figure 9), featured on the cover of the 15 October 1954 issue, the journey from town to the farm is dramatised.[8] As the title indicates, the narrative is centred on two black children, running to open the gate for a woman we presume to be the farmer's wife (or a visiting neighbour?), who, we are told, will repay their zeal with a penny. Since the woman in question is already at the gate when the boys run up to help her, she seems startled and, accordingly, throws her hands up in the air. She is fashionably dressed with a wide, leather belt accentuating her impossibly tiny waist; bright green shoes, scarf and earrings indicate a somewhat adventurous sense of style, and red lips and nails communicate an urbane sophistication. It is an image fraught with the highly charged insider/outsider rhetoric of apartheid South Africa. The children are neatly and cleanly dressed, as if to suggest an ordered and benevolent world, but the small, rural huts behind them remind the viewer that, while the farm is ostensibly the livelihood of their families, they belong outside the gates. The *plaasvrou*, with her elegant car and mannerisms, seems a confused signifier of farm life and thus seems to teeter on the threshold between town and country. This collapsed image of urban and rural space seems to hint at the 1950s Afrikaner's aforementioned longing for nature and farm life while being situated in metropolitan spaces.

A brief analysis of femininity in this scenic portrait hints at the otherness of the woman who must rely on the children to facilitate her entry to the farm. Frantz Fanon (1963:30) remarks that the look that the colonised turns on the coloniser's farm or town is a look of lust. This seemingly routine scene is, in other words, shaded with the disquieting notion