

Figure 9. *Huisgenoot*, 15 October 1954

that the farm wife is a symbol of lust, both to the colonised community and to the masculine in general. On the 1950s covers of *Huisgenoot*, women and femininity were positioned both inside Afrikaner culture, and as signifiers of it. As in *Darem betyds vir die pennie*, these images of women were duly charged with allusions to so-called Afrikaner identity as being family orientated, connected to the land, and God-fearing.

The sublime vrou

To the reader-photographer of *Huisgenoot* in the 1950s, the natural landscapes on the covers may have echoed the traces of religious thought prevalent inside the magazine, in the same way that Romantic landscapes from the nineteenth century aligned nature with the pantheistic presence of God. While the content may directly address the spirituality of the Afrikaner, such as Winie Schumann's article on the pursuits of the wives of Dutch Reformed ministers while their husbands attended the meeting of the Synod in Cape Town (*Huisgenoot* 4 December 1953), the covers reflect a more ethereal approach. In the cover images, whimsy and pathos point towards the sublime, not religion per se, but a more elusive formulation of nature and culture as awe-inspiring. Coupled with the ever-present feminine, romantic landscapes or solemn portraits of light seem designed to affect in a manner that invokes Edmund Burke's (1990) notion of the sublime as at once terrifying and beautiful.

The cover for the *Huisgenoot* of 4 December 1953 (figure 10) is the most sombre of that year and in its sobriety seems to hint at transcendence. The photographer, Ronald



Figure 10. *Huisgenoot*, 4 December 1953

Malan, entitled the image, *Nooiëntjie op die strand* (Young woman on the beach), but the cheerful props (sun hat, umbrella, children's toys), usually present in the 1950s seaside cover images, are noticeably absent. The model, Yvonne Needham, is furthermore presented without any so-called 'feminine' accessories such as upswept coiffure, blackened lashes or a frilly dress. Instead, she prefers a puritan, almost boyish haircut, still damp from her swim, very little, if any, make-up, and a black tank top.⁹

The 'femininity' of the image is evident in the way that the model has turned her face away from the camera. Her apparent imperviousness to the male gaze of the viewer, like the serene landscape behind her, protects her from the

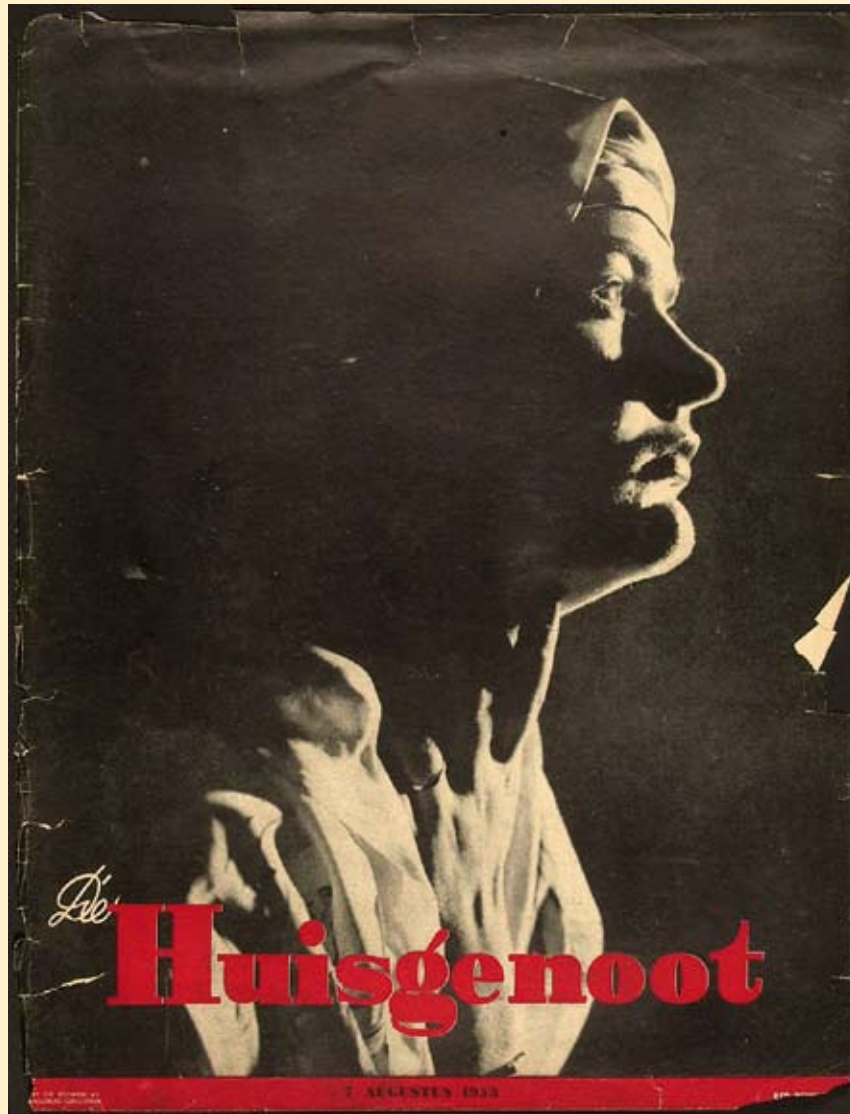


Figure 11. *Huisgenoot*, 7 August 1953

double-edged accusation of self-awareness: for, on the one hand, she appears not to have consented to the image, because this act might label her as vain and sexually assertive. On the other hand, she has not refused it, for in doing so she would shatter the illusion of passivity and denounce her femininity. Viewers suspend their disbelief and read the image as ‘stolen’, for the ‘feminine mystique’ (Friedan 1963) to remain intact. Because Needham becomes the inadvertent object of the reader’s gaze, she is sketched as an accidental participant in her construction as ‘visual pleasure’ (Mulvey 1975).

This static designation of femininity to the visual is all the more evident when imbued with a sublime inference. The photograph on the 7 August 1953 cover (figure 11) contains no explicit reference to religion, but *Nooi met die serp* (Woman with scarf) as the image is called, seems iconic in its allusion to pensive depictions of the Virgin Mary, not least because of the otherworldly light from an unknown source reflecting off the subject’s face. Umberto Eco (1986: 57) explains the relation between beauty and the sublime in the context of the Medieval understanding of Neo-Platonic beauty as ethereal rather than material. The most apparent and persistent symbolic representation of the kinship between godliness and beauty was thus light. The perception of light as the quintessence of ‘theophanic harmony, primordial causes, [and] of the Divine Persons’ (Eco 1986:57) is complemented by the archetypal reading of evil and subversion as dark. The dramatic chiaroscuro of *Nooi met die serp* may accordingly be indicative of the gulf between ‘good’ and ‘evil’, rather than merely being an aesthetic gimmick.



Figure 12. *Huisgenoot*, 16 May 1955

There are only a few overt references on the 1950s covers to the religious beliefs that seem so integral to the Afrikaner imagined community inside the magazine. The 16 May 1955 cover features a photograph of a young girl with her hands pressed together as if in prayer (figure 12). She is seated at a table with an empty plate and glass before her and a bowl brimming over with ripe fruit to her left. Inside the magazine, the reader discovers that the image is entitled *BAIE DANKIE!* (THANK YOU VERY MUCH!). The apparent moral of the story is that gratitude should come before indulging in the abundant blessings bestowed by God. This didactic image makes more sense once one discovers that the next, special issue of *Huisgenoot*, pivots



Figure 13. *Huisgenoot*, 2 September 1957

on the theme of local productivity and the abundance of natural resources in South Africa. The notion of the fruitfulness of the South African land is thus coupled with the feminine. Even here, the woman is portrayed in relation to her masculine other; she is the thankful, supplicating daughter to her physical, political and heavenly father.

The active/passive power relations presented in these covers, in other words, remind the reader that behind the veil of femininity as a signifier of nature, family and faith, pragmatism and patriarchy are apparently at the elusive core of Afrikaner identity.

Conclusion

The magazine's historians point out that by the 1950s, it was clear that *Huisgenoot's* loyal readership was starting to drift away from it. Spies (1992:353-368) explains that the demure and restrained style of *Huisgenoot* could not compete against the passion, outspokenness and provocative nature of contemporary films and imported magazines. According to Spies (1992:353), readers found the magazine 'te verwyderd, te eksklusief, te gesteld op waardigheid en goeie smaak en intellektuele weetgierigheid, te formeel' (too distanced, too exclusive, too set on dignity and good taste and intellectual curiosity, too formal). In lead articles published on 1 May 1953 and 25 December 1953 the editor asked whether the success of Afrikaans (the promotion of Afrikaans as an official language was one of the goals of *Huisgenoot* at its inception in 1916) could not also be seen as its downfall. The argument was that as *Huisgenoot's* readership grew to include people of all educational levels,

standards had to be lowered to cater for populist tastes. By 1959, the covers reveal a far less culturally specific conceptualisation of femininity than the covers of the early 1950s, as if already pointing toward the complete secularisation that was to take place. In the issues from the latter part of the 1950s, gender seems to be constructed in accordance with general westernised notions of femininity, and there are very few specific references to Afrikaner identity or the South African landscape. Whereas the covers of the early and mid-1950s hint at the link between Afrikaner identity and an idealised love for (feminised) nature and rural life, the *Huisgenoot* covers from the late 1950s feature a less cohesive visual trope with women occupying the covers less consistently. Interspersed with photographs of animals, children, nature and men, images of women tend to be framed in two ways.

On the one hand, there are occasional references to progressive women in the workplace, as in a feature on young women entering the job market (2 September 1957). The seriousness of these apparently enlightened reports is typically compromised by a paternal tone that emphasises the *fraai* aspects of such endeavours as entering a new career. The article on young women starting new occupations, for instance, is complemented by a photograph – enacted for *Huisgenoot* by a Mrs Jock le Roux and Miss Ada Stuyt – of a mother dutifully accompanying her bewildered daughter to her first job interview (*Huisgenoot* 2 September 1957:3, figure 13). In the caption explaining the image, the reader is told that the lock of hair the mother is tucking beneath her daughter's hat demonstrates the love and interest that will follow the young woman as she enters this intimidating new world.



Figure 14. *Huisgenoot*, 16 October 1959

On the other hand, there are many formulaic images of women that seem to reflect the gaudy glare and narcissism of secularised urban culture. The cover for the 16 October 1959 *Huisgenoot* (figure 14) is a photograph of the actress Miemsie Retief, who was used in this issue to model the skills of internationally acclaimed hairdresser, José Pou. Retief poses in a Japanese gown, with her head cocked to one side, against a face brick wall. The decade, in other words, ends in the globalised tabloid concern with the hairstyles of a local celebrity.¹⁰ The layout and tone employed for this cover represent city life as cosmopolitan, commercial and tawdry (the binary opposite of the 1950s ideal). Whether the tone is 'progressive' or picturesque, the covers from the late 1950s, in contrast to those from earlier in the decade, do not communicate any kind of unified 'imagined community', least of all a rural vision of Afrikanerdom.

An important change that put *Huisgenoot* on the road to financial recovery and stability came with the appointment of Niel Hamman as editor in 1978. He succeeded in boosting circulation from 192 000 in 1978 to a high of more than 500 000 in the mid-1990s before it dropped again, currently standing at around 350 000, with a readership of more than two million (see <http://familymagazines.media24.co.za/huisgenoot-circ.htm>). Hamman's editorial policy was based on his view that women buy magazines, and that *Huisgenoot* should therefore cater to their tastes if it were to succeed financially. This point is important for the investigation of *Huisgenoot* in the 1950s as it may answer, in part, the question surrounding the conspicuous presence of women on the covers.

An analysis of the construction of femininity on the covers of the 1950s issues inevitably turned on the magazine's move from the creative, the formal and highbrow (already in jeopardy in the 1950s) towards the populist, the informal and the lowbrow. The narratives constructed around *Huisgenoot's* history suggest that this move coincided with the shift from a family magazine in which the family is conceptualised as male-centred (with the father as head of the family) towards a family magazine in which the family is conceptualised as female-centred (with the father participating surreptitiously). This shift from a more intellectual magazine focused on men to a populist magazine focused on women coincides with the well-known opposition between high culture (male) and popular or mass culture (female). Andreas Huyssen (1986:47) notes that documents from the late nineteenth century ascribed pejorative (or negative) 'feminine' characteristics to products of mass culture such as serialised novels, popular and family magazines, and fictional bestsellers, confirming the notion 'that mass culture is somehow associated with women while real, authentic culture remains the prerogative of men'.

Finally, the Afrikaner imagined community, as it appears on the covers of *Huisgenoot* in the 1950s, seems to be as much about absences as presences. Since the photographic material chosen for the front pages is almost exclusively composed of white women, the absence of men and people of diverse skin colours becomes an important signifier of the imaginary nature of *volksseenheid* (national unity). Perhaps in this world, where women personify the sublimated hopes of a nation, the apartheid oligarchy is the (absent) husband and father to the feminine face of the Afrikaner *volk*. Like the

snapshots in a family album, the 1950s covers of *Huisgenoot* fondly immortalise the so-called happy days of this family at the expense of the less glorious ones, proving that the sense of community represented here, really is imagined.

Notes

- 1 This article, 'Imagined community: snapshots of the people', is based on research undertaken with Louise Viljoen (2005:90-118) for a chapter entitled 'Constructing femininity in *Huisgenoot*.' This former research comprises a critical analysis of two issues of *Huisgenoot*, one from December 1953 and the other from December 2003 and liberally informs the following article.
- 2 During the course of its history the title of the magazine changed from *De Huisgenoot* to *Die Huisgenoot* and finally to *Huisgenoot*, reflecting subtle changes in the magazine's cultural environment and policy. Although the magazine was called *Die Huisgenoot* in the 1950s, I will use the title *Huisgenoot* throughout this article.
- 3 The term Afrikaner is difficult to pin down since the political climate in South Africa between the 1950s and today is fundamentally different and this undermines the uniformity of the term. During the 1950s the people most likely to have identified with the word Afrikaner were white, Afrikaans-speaking South Africans who generally belonged to the Dutch Reformed religious tradition, but this is obviously too limited a delineation, since many Afrikaners were not, for example, 'believers'. Today the racial exclusivity of the term is contested in much the same way that the word 'African'

is no longer thought to include only black Africans. For the purpose of this article, the traditional delineation of Afrikaners as white, Afrikaans-speaking South Africans is used for the sake of convenience.

- 4 Notwithstanding the bipartisan nature of Afrikaner politics around the turn of the twentieth century (Afrikaners were predominantly split between the South African Party and the National Party), Giliomee (2003: 355-356) has outlined the consolidated effort on the part of Afrikaner politicians, civil servants and religious figures from the 1890s to the 1940s to integrate the white poor and a militant working class into a white ruling faction. Giliomee (2003:356) refers to the influential role that language played in this quest as articulated by National Party leader General Hertzog, who remarked in *Die Burger* (27 July 1929) that the Afrikaners had to wage a language struggle 'to stop considering themselves as ageterrers', a term used to refer to unarmed Khoikhoi attendants during the commando days. Similarly, in her decisive research on the series of Afrikaans children's fiction entitled, *Keurboslaan* (published between 1941 and 1971 in Afrikaans by Van Schaik Publishers), Irma du Plessis (2004-2006:1) has questioned 'the ways in which the ideas and ideologies of Afrikaner nationalism formulated by the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie were disseminated and turned into a form of 'mass consciousness'. In doing so, she has emphasised the emergent need for aspirational role models amongst Afrikaners in the 1940s and 1950s, particularly against the backdrop of the 'challenges facing the Afrikaner elite in its nation-building project' (du Plessis 2004-2006:1).
- 5 For example, the *Huisgenoot* of 22 October 1943 fea-

tures a Springbok cigarette advertisement on the cover. It shows an ox-wagon, iconic of the pioneer spirit of the Afrikaner, making its way across an arid stretch of semi-desert, probably the Karoo; beneath the sunset scene, the copy reads, *Tipies Suid Afrikaans* (Typically South African).

- 6 A red masthead seems to have been a popular trend in magazine cover design around the 1940s and 1950s since various other magazines including *Brandwag*, *Fleur* and *Horison* employed this formula. The brand differentiation of these magazines was conveyed in the tone of the photographs typically found on each cover. In this vein, *Brandwag*, for instance, employed photographs on their 1950s covers that generally seem more jovial and 'popular' and less tied to Afrikaner identity than those found on the *Huisgenoot* covers in the 1950s.
- 7 Other *Huisgenoot* covers that differ from the typical, early 1950s pin-up pose, include photographs of a French poodle (20 March 1953), a scene with a woman and two children doing needlework in a field (29 May 1953), and a close-up of two seagulls (19 June 1953).
- 8 A text box at the top right hand corner of the cover contains the teaser line, *Wat het van Pres. Kruger se nasate geword?* (What has happened to Pres. Kruger's descendants?). This is one of the earliest examples of teaser lines found on the covers of *Huisgenoot*.
- 9 The 1950s covers represent diverse feminine types ranging from the more sensual and voluptuous Jean Harlow-type models to those like Miss Needham who connote the 'liberal' or sophisticated femininity of contemporary European actresses such as Jean Seberg. The connota-

tions of European culture are amplified by the motifs on the textile Miss Needham holds, which are typical of the imagery found in the 1950s that use motifs suggestive of liberal French Left Bank culture. Not unlike the *plaasvrou* in *Darem betyds vir die pennie*, Needham thus simultaneously signifies a natural naiveté and contemporary urbanity.

10 In addition to local celebrities, international actresses such as Sophia Loren (21 March 1958) and Miriam Bru (22 May 1959) occasionally appear on the *Huisgenoot* covers of the late 1950s.

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