Imagi(ni)ng ‘alternativity’: Loslyf, mainstream Afrikaans pornography and post-apartheid Afrikaner identity

Marnell Kirsten
Part-time lecturer, Visual Arts Department, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa.
marnellkirsten@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

At the time of its launch in June 1995, Loslyf was the first and only Afrikaans pornographic magazine in South Africa. Editor Ryk Hattingh was the primary creative force behind the magazine for the first year of its publication. During this time, Loslyf contributed towards the broader project of democratic expression in an expanding South African visual economy, as a simultaneously well considered and underrated (at the time of its publication) cultural product. As a powerful contributor to an Afrikaans imaginary (and a representation of a new Afrikaner imaging) emerging at a time of political renewal, Loslyf provides a glimpse into the desires, tensions and tastes of and for an imagined community potentially still shaped by a past ruled by censorship. The magazine can be seen as an example of an attempt at reinvesting the prescriptive and seemingly generic genre of pornography with cultural specificity and political content, with a view to making this genre more interesting and relevant, alongside an attempt to imbue stifling visualisations of Afrikaner/Afrikaans identity with the same characteristics. Whilst Loslyf succeeded in fracturing the “simulacrum” of pornographic representation, it also demonstrated that an image of this kind of “alternativity” is difficult to sustain.

Keywords: Pornography, censorship, South Africa, media history, visual studies, negotiation of post-apartheid identity.

Introduction

The South African media sphere of Afrikaans mainstream sexual and pornographic material was virgin territory, until Loslyf pierced this innocence in June 1995 (Figure 1). In the mid-1990s, a period in South Africa characterised by political transition and the unofficial termination of stifling state censorship laws, the launch of Loslyf...
by JT Publications appeared an overdue symbolic celebration of an ability to express and imagine through this type of publication – the first and, at the time, only Afrikaans pornography magazine. Political scientist, Thomas Blaser (2012:9), asserts that ‘particularly in times of vast transitions, such as the movement away

Figure N°1

Cover of the inaugural publication of Loslyf, June 1995.
from apartheid to democracy, our social imaginary is transformed as a new moral order emerges’. It is at such moments of change that, as anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff (2005:35) suggest, an emphasis falls on a ‘mode of citizenship which aspires to be global even as it registers a vague sense of national belonging.’ Loslyf, as mass media cultural product, appears to be an example of a creative project that reflects global modes of pornographic representation and imagination, but does so in a culturally specific, Afrikaans vernacular that speaks of, and speaks to, new formulations for the expression of such a ‘national belonging’.

Ryk Hattingh (2013a), the avant-garde Afrikaans writer and publisher and first editor of Loslyf, between June 1995 and May 1996, describes the period in which Loslyf emerged:

Those were strange times indeed. The old order was in its death throes and the new one was being born with great enthusiasm and idealism. There was a lot to catch up on because the country had been isolated from the rest of the world for so long. There was a kind of euphoria in the country; promises of unity and a myth of a rainbow nation filled people with excessive idealism.

It seems that in these ‘strange times’ the idealism associated with the notion of inclusivity and the ‘promises of unity’ were tied to a simultaneous troubling of cultural definition and identification. Loslyf, as sex magazine, illustrates the aggravation of such divisions insofar as pornography tends to be characterised by its transgression of social and cultural standards (Kipnis 2006:124). The publication of Loslyf indicates an implicit understanding that this kind of sexual representation would be perceived as alternative, precisely because it was “pornographic”, and thus, at least in the popular consciousness, “transgressive” and “other” to all that came before. Hattingh (2012) describes the laissez-faire attitude of the time:

The Nigerians took over the Johannesburg cocaine market from the Israelis and suddenly democracy in all its beauty and terror descended on South African society. At this stage a new regime seemed inevitable and the ancient regime was over. It seemed that everybody wanted to gain as much ground as possible before the new government would come into complete power with new rules and regulations. It was almost as though everyone could suddenly breathe for the first time.

In a post-censorship media context, it would seem that a pornographic mode of sexual expression in Afrikaans was a necessary rite of passage towards a legitimised inclusion in a democratic visual economy.
To an embryonic post-apartheid, post-nationalist, and even postmodern, Afrikaner cultural identity and Afrikaner cultural projects, possibilities for the acknowledgement of fragmented and multiple identities were enabled, characterised by fractures of
2. In pornographic photography the images of sex, the superficial reality as portrayed by its representations, appears to be all that can be possessed and accessed; Žižek (1977:177) locates the façade of pornography in its pretense “to show everything”. Pornographic photography consequently becomes only what it superficially portrays to the viewer, while simultaneously signifying all it proposes to reflect. Annette Kuhn (1995:275) comments on the superficiality of pornography. “Pornographic images participate in photography’s more general project of privileging the visible, of equating visibility with truth. But porn inflects this concern with its own ruling

The lived experience of Afrikaners under apartheid rule was, however, arguably more diverse and fractured than I seem to acknowledge or that appears when looking at the popular culture and print media of the day (Nash 2000:349), but this is the exact point of contention. In attempting to control the sphere of representation, the government effectively created a skewed visual archive, which inevitably leads to a flattened remembrance of identity politics under apartheid. Loslyf, as cultural artefact, plays on this “flattened remembrance”, resulting in views of the magazine as “transgressive” and “alternative” to normative conceptions and representations of Afrikaner cultural identity.

At the time of its launch, Loslyf was intended, from the editor’s side at least, to be original in the way in which pornographic content was juxtaposed with writing in Afrikaans, a language formerly associated with morality and piousness. Apart from this, the content of the magazine diverges from what is accepted as “traditional” in mainstream pornographic publications. Loslyf is therefore ostensibly finely balanced on the edge between mainstream conformist pornography (Figure 3) and “alternative” and avant-garde content and presentation (Figure 4) (Hattingh 2013b). As a magazine in which the specific content is required to arouse (Figure 5), the blurs between purely pornographic material and avant-garde contributions by prominent Afrikaans literary figures such as Marita van der Vyver (Figure 6), extends Loslyf’s reputation as “alternative” and “transgressive”. The diverse contributors to Loslyf, a combination seen for the first time in a popular/populist Afrikaans publication, signifies elements of cultural subversion, political subtexts (Figure 7), and arguably a diversified representation of sexuality. This collaboration between artist-writers and a commercial publisher of pornography enabled Loslyf to undermine notions of cultural identity, sexuality, class, and taste by virtue of defying the implicit hierarchies in each of these.
obessions – sexuality and sexual differ-
rences. What the pornographic photograph
portrays is therefore fantasy and the ob-
sessions of sexuality, concealed behind
a veneer of confusions of visibility and
truth, claiming both the surface and its
beyond as “true”. Photographic nudity and
the excessive display of sexual deeds,
on the one hand, mask the pornograph-
ic imaginary's lack while, on the other
hand, concurrently attesting to the exist-
ence of what it seemingly portrays – the
promise of a reality beyond what the gaze
can observe on the surface.

3. Ryk Hattingh’s (Loslyf June 1995:26, 
27, 29, 46) interview with Marita van der
Vyver regarding issues related to writing
about sex in Afrikaans, is an example of
how Loslyf gave voice to prominent Afri-
kaans literary figures, potentially casting
them in a new light, while, by implication,
seemingly attempting to do the same for
the Afrikaans language.

4. One such an artist-writer is Eva
Landman, author of the investigative ar-
ticle Tussen hamer en eenvoud: Politie-
hond vreet polisiehond na politieke
gatromswaaie (Between hammer and anvil:
Police dog devours police dog after po-
itical circumvention) (Figure 8), person-
ally chosen by Hattingh to contribute to
Loslyf, and increase the level of literary
dialogue in the magazine.

"Ek is lief vir kuns, dol op die natuur, maar my
groots't liefde is vleeslik van oard. Wat help
dit 'n mens sien al die mooi dinge in die
natuur raak, maar ontken die natuur binne
jouself? Dit help jou niks en laat jou onvervuld.
Seks is iets waarvan ek nie maklik genoeg kan
kry nie, beken die bekoorlike Gina.

FIGURE Nº 3

FIGURE № 7

Me Tarzan ... You fired. Loslyf, June 1995:77.

FIGURE N° 8

Loslyf’s ‘Inheemse blom van die maand’ (Indigenous flower of the month) spread Dina: by die monument (Figures 9, 10, 11) from June 1995, is the one that Hattingh (2013b) is proudest of; he says that through Dina he symbolically achieved what he aimed to do with the magazine in general during the time of his editorship. The spread establishes Dina as a symbol of an attempt at a symbolic relocation of Afrikaans culture and language. Sexuality becomes a metaphor for and a voice of the representation of an Afrikaner cultural identity in its entirety. Alongside this, the Voortrekker Monument is employed as a symbol of Afrikaner culture, apartheid, and former repressions. Of course, Dina becomes equated with a flower, waiting to be plucked – an image continued in the landscape in which she is photographed. Art and photography specialist John Peffer (2005:53) notes that when the ‘l’, the illustrated flower, is plucked from the logo, ‘blom’ becomes “bom” (bomb). In combination with Dina’s ambiguous name, referring to dynamite, and the dynamite stick in the logo of Hattingh’s editorial and its title Losbars! (explode/burst loose) (Figure 2) (Peffer 2005:53-54), this may indicate a break with, or bursting loose from, restrictive Afrikaner culture and identity. Furthermore, Dina’s representation becomes pluralised – she is not merely an innocent and helpless little flower.

With the Dina spread, Loslyf attempts a re-appropriation of the Voortrekker Monument as conventionally “divine” symbol of the “permanence” of Afrikaner nationalism. The magazine assails the symbolic significance of the monument, while the written text declares itself on the side of Afrikaner traditionalists; the text proclaims that Dina ‘doesn’t beat about the bush when she speaks of her love for Afrikaans and Afrikaans culture’ (Loslyf June 1995:125). As a result, there is a destabilisation of the “permanence” and “stability” of Afrikaner culture, as it was supposed to be symbolised by the Monument, at a time when the meaning of Afrikaner cultural identity was already being called into question. The constitutional right and freedom Dina has in a post-apartheid context to expose herself in this way becomes conflated with a freedom previously viewed in a very different light. This former freedom, and the history of which it is a metaphor, is undermined while Loslyf purportedly excuses itself by the way that Dina cheekily proclaims that ‘if you mess with/touch my symbols, you mess with/touch me’ (Loslyf June 1995:125).

Laura Kipnis (2006:119-120) says that in order to ‘commit sacrilege, you have to have studied the religion’. As a manner of ‘studying the religion’, Loslyf deliberately sets up an imaginary Voortrekker ancestry for Dina in order to desecrate it and transgress expectations tied to her ancestry and her presence at this “sacred place”. The irony, and subsequent deflation of this expectation, lies in Dina’s profession of her pride in this heritage and admiration for her supposed great-

5. The potential for subversion that the flower image and its context afford Dina, simultaneously problematise this specific spread, as it does the entire magazine, as this equation perpetually reduces Dina to a space of feminine fragility. Resonating with the evident sexism that pervades a project in pornography (implying a gendered focus that I deliberately de-emphasise as it falls outside my primary emphasis in studying Loslyf as pornographic product), the Dina spread may be said to undermine its own seductive capacity, and already anticipate Loslyf’s inability to maintain “the interesting”.

6. The Voortrekker Monument is employed as a symbol of Afrikaner culture, apartheid, and former repressions – in this instance by implication primarily sexual repression. Dina, as the ‘blom’, becomes a metaphor of Afrikaner women and her sex becomes the symbol of her significance. Monuments are described as a ‘means of fixing history’ (Rowlands & Tilley 2006:500); in their literal monumentality they attempt to provide stability to public memory and permanence to the collective imagining of an associated cultural identity. With the Dina spread, Loslyf succeeds in renegotiating the significance and place of the Voortrekker Monument, as conventionally “divine” symbol, in the construction/imagining of a monolithic Afrikaner identity.
Inheemse blom van die maand: Dina by die monument. Loslyf, June 1995:125.
great-grandfather, well-known Voortrekker, Hendrik Potgieter, and her passion for the monuments of the ‘Afrikaner nation’. The Dina spread alludes to a possibility of a post-apartheid Afrikaner visual identity which moves away from monolithic and narrow modes of identification, popularly associated with a conflated view of “the Afrikaner”. Dina becomes a symbol of postmodern Afrikanerdom in which a variety of seemingly competing qualities harmoniously co-exist in an effort to redefine Afrikaner cultural identity, while debunking previous representational (albeit stereotypical) modes of it.

Even though Dina is included in Loslyf as a ‘los lyf’, the stylistic composition of the shoot and the way the accompanying text ‘is in communication’ (Barthes 1977:16) with the photographs, aligns her more with “alternative” content in Loslyf than with the stereotypical pornographic shoots otherwise included in the magazine. Hattingh explains that the presence of Dina as the ‘inheemse blom’ (indigenous flower) sexualises the Voortrekker Monument as symbol of the ‘Calvinist puritanism of Afrikaner nationalists’ (Coombes 2003:40). By the styling of particular codes of significance, and the curated ‘communication’ between image and text, the photographs convey a sense of visual subversion (Hattingh 2013b); Dina destabilises notions of femininity (and masculinity), as associated with an Afrikaner paradigm, by elements of visual misappropriation and cultural irreverence. Of normative representations of Afrikaner women in an apartheid context, Elsie Cloete (1992:51) notes: ‘The male constructed images of the Afrikaner woman … emphasised her role as servant to the volk, as nurturer, keeper of moral standards, educator and promoter of the language.’ The role of Dina, as male-constructed image of an apparently proud Afrikaner woman, however, is in no sense parallel to the roles Cloete explicates. Dina is not represented as the archetypical Afrikaner mother and procreator of the nation, but is shown exposing herself to the gaze of the viewer in front of the Monument, taking sex and sexual excitement away from a conservative conception of sexuality that Michel Foucault (1976:3) refers to as the ‘function of reproduction … [and] the parents’ bedroom’, into the open air and concentrating on it as sex-for-sex’s sake. The ‘volksmoeder’ figure, that is so diligently focused on in the mythology of the Voortrekker Monument, is further nullified by Dina’s khaki outfit, associated with safari attire, the idea of a “wilderness” to be tamed, and very explicit notions of (Afrikaner) masculinity related to such dress and connotations. Annie Coombes (2003:43) says the following of Dina:

[She] disrupts the versions of both femininity and masculinity … played out in the monument, providing a kind of composite figure in which … gendered … identifications are deliberately confused.
While Dina’s shoot interrelates with the other more normative pornographic content in Loslyf and the terms of gender relations involved in the perusal of pornography, the representations of her also direct attention towards broader ideas of cultural re-evaluation and re-appropriation. The iconoclastic effect of Dina by die monument and its attempt to imbue an ‘object of power with a semantic twist’ (Peffer 2005:59), reverberates throughout Loslyf by means of similar constructions of subversion by way of the connotations of the visual composition itself and its accompanying text.

The Dina spread is one of only three photosets conceptualised and executed entirely by Loslyf’s editorial staff, and most prominently Hattingh. The other photosets were bought from international syndicates, emphasising pornography’s generic quality. Hattingh attempted to imbue these spreads with cultural specificity by the use of accompanying text and back-stories of the ‘loslywe’, and the juxtaposition of these sets with other content. Political subtexts form a leitmotif in Loslyf; the way these subtexts communicate with tensions of the time of publication is evident in the Katalien: Ballistiese nimf (Katalien: Ballistic nymph) spread (Figures 5, 12). Katalien is supposedly a ballistics expert from East Germany – echoing the allusion to communism and aligning her back-story with the connotations that South Africans, and specifically the Afrikaner community, associated with this ideology. Katalien proclaims that she accepted East Germany’s political propaganda without question and that she placed the country’s interests above her own: ‘placed my country’s interests above my own. But when the wall started to crumble, so did my inhibitions and my chastity’ (Loslyf June 1995:sp).

The text accompanying the Katalien spread creates a metaphor for apartheid rule; Katalien says she learned that ‘there is no political party in the world that can sexually satisfy citizens’ (Loslyf June 1995:sp). In this declaration, the control of the apartheid dispensation is equated in the text with those repressive political systems elsewhere with which it saw itself in conflict. The result is that Loslyf questions the credibility of Afrikaner nationalist rule and attempts to undermine its self-confidence, while celebrating the crumbling of South Africa’s metaphorical ‘wall’ of isolation at a time when the demise of Afrikaner political power and its ties to the prominence of Afrikaner cultural identity was widely received with uncertainty and anxiety.

Concerning the way in which the Katalien spread succumbs to generic codes of pornography, Katalien, represented as a ballistic Eastern bloc nymphomaniac (Figures 5, 12), is portrayed as a kind of woman that Robert Jensen and Gail Dines (1998:90-91) refer to as a stereotype that ‘resisted sex at first but [was] quickly …
10. The vagina dentata, the toothed vagina, is associated with castration fear. The vagina of the sexually voracious women, or the powerful woman, becomes a metaphorical instrument for stripping man of his phallic power, as metonymically linked to his power in general. The fear of castration is ‘more specifically, that of the castrating female. This terror can in fact act so powerfully as to render the subject impotent … So deeply rooted is it, that direct expression of it must necessarily be rare’ (Lucie-Smith 1991:227). This is especially true in the case of a pornographic magazine through which men prefer to be reminded of their virility and not their impotence. A capitalization of the rapacious or independent woman must ensure to ensure the male reader’s confidence in his masculinity.

11. See note 6.

12. In 1988, the Publications Board and the Security Police intervened in one of Hattingh’s projects and banned his drama Sing jy van bomme (Do you sing of bombs), bemoaning both a scene in which the male protagonist appears naked, as well as the play’s critical treatment of nationalist projects such as the Border War. Hattingh (2012) recalls that ‘a nude man was like a red cloth in front of an already raging bull at the time’ – even in the more “low-brow” medium of pornographic magazines depicting an erection was completely out of the question, as stipulated by legislation. Sing jy van bomme is based on South Africa’s Border War and the process of demilitarization. The ethos of the play resonated strongly with the aims and concerns of the End Conscription Campaign. According to Hattingh, Security Police approached him after the play’s first run, offering him employment in their service as a spy. They seemingly interpreted the play as a literal endorsement of the violence and tactics of the Border War, in Hattingh’s (2013a) view completely missing the ironic tone of the text.

13. Bitterkomix has a reputation for ‘tackling many of the taboos of Christian nationalism and ridiculing Afrikaner stereotypes’ (Davies 2008:107). Conrad Botes (in Vestergaard 2001:34-35) describes the goal of the magazine to overcome by lust and developed [a] voracious sexual appetite. Katalien’s professed sexual liberation is equated with Germany’s political liberation, but the new-found sexual appetite she is represented as having is portrayed as unthreatening. The proposed “masculinity” of her vocation as well as her libido is countered within the representation by the “femininity” of her make-up, poses, white clothing, and soft smile. Valerie Steele (1997:171) says that ‘clothing itself is generally associated with power, and nakedness with its lack’. Whereas Katalien is still semi-clothed in Figure 12, where the accompanying text describes her as an expert in her field, Figure 5 shows her as exposing her nakedness, surrendering the clothing as she supposedly did the power associated with her clothes. The vagina dentata has been warded off and the stereotype of ‘male dominance and female submission that is central in contemporary commercial pornography’ (Jensen 2004:246) is affirmed.

One of the main feature articles in the first issue of Loslyf was an investigation into the state of affairs in the South African Police Service (SAPS) by Eva Landman (pseudonym for Jan Taljaard) (Loslyf June 1995:50-59, Figure 8). The title, ‘Tussen hamer en aambeeld’ (Between hammer and sickle), recalls the figure of speech, “between a rock and a hard place” – a prelude to the content of the article and the magazine’s irreverent opinion of the SAPS’s post-apartheid position. Secondly, the title aligns signifiers of communist ideology with the state institution formerly tasked with the mission of eradicating the perceived “Rooi Gevaar” – only to be at the service of a dispensation associated with the “red menace” after South Africa’s political transition (Loslyf June 1995:50); ‘toe kom die verkiesing April verlede jaar. Almal sien die terts van vroeër gaan die nuwe regering word’ (then the election came in April last year. Everyone sees the former terrorists will become the new government) (Loslyf June 1995:51). Superficially, the content of the article seems to place Loslyf on the side of the frustrated policemen who lament the political changes and all the transformation it brought about in the service. Hattingh’s own history with the security apparatus of the old regime, however, creates the expectation that this article might be subversive and a continuation of the oppositional work he supports. This expectation is confirmed by the sarcastic “God was aan die Afrikaners se kant, sien” (God was on the Afrikaners’ side, see) (Loslyf June 1995:51) and is developed throughout the article.

A discussion of Loslyf’s style as undermining of Afrikaner tradition and history would be incomplete without mention of the works of the Bitterkomix artists. Loslyf November and December 1995 published visual parodies of traditional Afrikaner folk songs along with their lyrics. In Daar kom die Alibama (Figure 13) by Conrad Botes, or his pseudonym Konradski, a cartoon hybridising a variety of
'undermine the patriarchal authority represented by the father, priest, and principal. Under apartheid, such figures customarily left no space for independent thinking and questioning – people simply had to obey'. Bitterkomix characteristically includes images and content of an iconoclastic, satirical and pornographic nature – echoing these sentiments as central to Loslyf too. There is a disjunction between the work associated with Bitterkomix, as avant-garde publication, and Loslyf as mainstream consumer product – an opposition aggravated with time. As Loslyf illustrates, the combination of such genres of content can only exist alongside each other for a limited period before "the interesting" is eventually overpowered by "the generic". This was intuited by Hattingh (2012) and was one of the main reasons he agreed to be involved with the magazine, but only for the publication of 12 issues.

Dis moeilik om te glo die 24-jarige Katalien was op haar dag 'n ballistiese eksport en lid van die Oos-Duitse veiligheids-polisie, maar met die val van die Berlyne Muur het die onnatuurlike toedrag van sake vinnig verander.

FIGURE N° 13

FIGURE Nº 14

influences and codes in true postmodern parody, Alibama is a gigantic and masturbating sea-god, rising from the sea and ejaculating over the ocean with an onomatopoeic ‘aah’ and ‘tjirits’ (Loslyf November 1995:93). *Daar kom die Alibama* is a traditional *Kaapse Klopse* (Cape minstrel) song originating in the coloured community of Cape Town, but appropriated for white Afrikaner culture by Afrikaans *Boeremusiek* (a very specific form of folk music broadly associated with Afrikaner identity) bands – alluding to the hybrid nature of traditional Afrikaner culture that the *Bitterkomix* artists hint at with the image. The work’s iconoclastic nature resides largely in the intertextuality of cultural sources and their juxtaposition in this image. The result is an affirmation and ridicule of the inexclusivity of a purportedly “pure” Afrikaner identity. *Siembamba* by Botes (Figure 14), is a seven-frame strip illustrating each line of the violent lyrics of this traditional nursery song by staunch Afrikaner figure CJ Langenhoven (Loslyf December 1995:sp). In the last frame, the words ‘*dan is hy dood*’ (then he is dead) is accompanied by a human heart and the old South African flag in the background. Both these cartoons, which have ambiguous and aggressive undertones, are metaphors for cultural and political systems in which Afrikaners ostensibly placed unwavering belief and faith. These systems are symbolically questioned in both examples, but are unequivocally proclaimed dead by the *Siembamba* strip’s final frame, insofar as the old South African flag is metonymically linked to Afrikaner history and tradition.

The works of the *Bitterkomix* artists contribute to a formal departure from the medium of photographic pornography. This diversion is emphasised by the undertones of contempt for hegemonic masculinity displayed in their works – an element that the reader may recognise as a leitmotif in *Loslyf* under Hattingh’s editorship. The impetus behind their work in *Loslyf*, as pornographic publication, was to undermine the Afrikaner man: belittle him, take advantage of his fears and anxieties, and challenge what men found “sexy” in the world of pornography (Kannemeyer 2012). Nina Martin (2006:193) investigates the relation between pornography and humour and finds that the two elements do not work well together, since ‘porn conventions emphasise not only the size of the penis, but its requisite, and often perpetual hardness’. The works of Anton Kannemeyer and Conrad Botes in *Loslyf* speak of Afrikaner masculinity in a mocking and humoristic tone, highlighting that, as Martin (2006:193) puts it, ‘any insertion of laughter and levity in regards to the penis smacks of derision, and implies inadequacy’. The work in Figure 4 by Joe Dog (Anton Kannemeyer) portrays a man in the background, reading a newspaper entitled *Die Patriot* (The Patriot). From the title of the newspaper and the man’s attire – safari-type clothes echoing those worn by Dina in Figures 9 to 11 – it can be ascertained that he is an Afrikaans man. In the foreground is
a woman on a bed, masturbating with a rolling pin\textsuperscript{14} next to her. The man is seen, significantly, through the woman’s legs, a position he would have been in if he was practising oral sex on her, but distanced from her, and by implication from an assertion of his masculinity, by his lack of interest. The text asks ‘geniet Afrikaanse mans politiek meer as seks?’ (do Afrikaans men enjoy politics more than sex?) and the woman orgasmically answers ‘JA JA JA’ (YES YES YES) in moaning pleasure. A portrait of ‘Pappa’ (Daddy) hangs on the wall above the woman, providing an ever-present gaze and Father-God-like presence. In this example, the penis is not ridiculed per se, nor is the man’s adequacy, but his initial interest in sex, his interest in metaphorically proclaiming his manhood, is brought into question. It is not necessary to mock his ineffective penis, since he shows no interest in it to begin with. The metaphorical significance of this example casts Afrikaner men as inadequate, not because of the ineffectiveness of their manhood, but because of its non-existence. Whereas Martin (2006:194) says that ‘the notion of surprise and the unexpected in porn produces a loss of the superiority and control invested in the penis’, the surprise in this instance is evoked by the man’s lack of interest in sex and a consequent understanding of the penis, as seat of phallic power, as absent.

Liese van der Watt (2005:119) explains that the mid-1990s was a time in which the ‘perception [was] that white males, especially, [were] under threat in a rapidly changing dispensation’. The anxiety resulting from this seeming threat meant that ‘popular culture and mass media started capitalizing on changing conceptions of whiteness’ (Van der Watt 2005:122), while artists, cultural commentators and “alternative” Afrikaner figures played on this anxiety and questioned the position of the white Afrikaner man with ‘humour and mockery’ (Van der Watt 2005:124). The Bitterkomix works in Loslyf undermine conventional male gender ideals and their relation to the power of Afrikaner male identity, as the incontestability of this identity is embedded in Afrikaner culture (Figure 15). Such belittling is something an Afrikaner man would arguably not want to encounter visually in a magazine he buys to get a sense of confirmation of his manhood, as provided by the implied sufficient sex drive and functioning penis. By means of such ridicule Bitterkomix critique both standardised pornographic elements and Afrikaner masculinity as experienced in the 1990s. Kobus du Pisani (2001:171) explains that in the post-apartheid environment in which ‘the Afrikaners have lost their political power … WAMs (White Afrikaans Males) have felt threatened by affirmative action and gender equality campaigns’. As a way of illustrating a perceived post-apartheid threat to Afrikaner male identity and its former association with supremacy, Joe Dog creates a cartoon advertisement for ‘U dienswillige dienaar’ (Your obedient servant) blow-

\textsuperscript{14} The presence of the rolling pin signifies both the woman’s abandonment of domestic activities in favour of masturbation and a phallic symbol, a replacement penis in her acts of self-pleasure because of the man’s lack of interest in sex. While it binds her to the home, the rolling pin also becomes a weapon of castration, implied by its ready replacement of the penis.
FIGURE No 15

up dolls (Figure 16). The advertisement offers a way of countering this loss of official power and alleviating the anxiety resulting from this uncertain position by providing men with an ‘obedient servant’ over whom they can impose their own male identity as superior. The doll can ‘be deflated in minutes and fits conveniently into a briefcase’ to travel with its owner, affirming his masculinity wherever he goes. The text proclaims that ‘the more firmly you blow her up, the tighter her pussy will be’, placing even the anatomy of this replacement woman within the man’s reach of power. Sexual control over women is conflated with a broader sense of control and a superior cultural position. While the content of the advertisement employs stark delineations of power relations regarding gender identity and roles, it simultaneously distances itself from such conventional predispositions by employing an ironic and sarcastic tone of voice and implicates the reader (and the creators of Bitterkomix, and the editor of Loslyf) by virtue of the joke they share.

The ‘threat’ towards white Afrikaans men and their resulting anxiety are viewed through a racialised lens, as is illustrated by Joe Dog’s work in Figure 18. As Afrikaner men are replaced by affirmative action in the workplace, Mister Kotze is
replaced by his gardener in bed. The derision implied by the image is firstly directed toward Mister Kotze’s masculinity, once again represented by his penis and his (in)ability to satisfy his wife sexually. Phineas is portrayed as the stereotypically well-endowed black man. Such typecast representations are prominent in pornographic discourse and Jensen and Dines (1998:85) refer to them as the mention of the “big black cock” … signifying some sort of extraordinary sexual size and prowess. Mister Kotze, as metaphor for Afrikaner men, becomes redundant in the political sphere, the workplace and now in bed, a portrayal highlighting the ambiguous position of Afrikaner masculinity at the time – both hypervisible and expendable. Phineas is portrayed as more proficient than Mister Kotze, a commentary on the broader socio-political context of the time, but once again reduced to being represented by sexual connotations. The image derives further significance from the political context in which it is published – South Africa is under a new constitution and anti-miscegenation laws have recently been abolished, but their underlying anxieties and ideologies seemingly still prevail. Abby Ferber (2004:45) notes that the prohibition of ‘interracial sexuality is part of the process of boundary maintenance essential to the construction of both race and gender identity’; the fragility of Afrikaner identity at the time is further aggravated by the perceived “danger” of interracial sex. At a time when the survival of Afrikaner identity was already a matter of dispute (Vestergaard 2001), sex between Mister Kotze’s wife and Phineas – not to mention what Phineas’s virility symbolises – is not only a threat to Mister Kotze’s sexual aptitude, but also to the “purity” and “survival” of the Afrikaner “nation”.

Apart from a contestation of traditional conceptions of Afrikaner identity, the works of the Bitterkomix artists contribute to a formal departure from the medium of photographic pornography. Whereas pornography functions within a simulacrum, the Bitterkomix strips rupture this enclosure to highlight, by their illustrative and overtly authored nature, the visual construction of pornography and its lack of “realness”, even, or most especially, when photographic. The illustrative Bitterkomix works undermine the formulaic and fragmentary scopic regime employed in the pornographic language, sans auteur. It appears as though Loslyf contests a notion of universality that pervades the pornographic genre and instead creates fractures through visual composition of content, inserting elements of “the real” and breaking with pornography as a ‘self-enclosed world of imagination’ (Paglia 1994:65).

Vetkoek, a double-page serial strip, is the best known and most prominent of the Bitterkomix contributions to Loslyf (Figure 17). The strip shows scenes of a graphic sexual nature and a strange storyline, which grows more abstract and “surreal”
FIGURE No 18

during the course of the eight parts it appeared in the magazine (Kannemeyer 1997:58). At times it would seem that the almost forced written text is redundant and exists only to support the illustrative pornographic depictions, albeit in a negligible manner. The nature of strip art, which does not represent a physical reality but an overtly imagined one, calls into question the “real” of the entire context in which it is published. If the simulacrum of pornographic representation is broken and exposed to the viewer/reader, the gaze turns in on her/himself (Žižek 1997:178), sexual desire is reversed and the viewer/reader arguably feels rebuked when the “reality” of pornographic insularity and her/his ensuing desires is uncovered.

Concluding remarks

The publication of Loslyf was of symbolic value on a number of different levels, not least because Ryk Hattingh held the explicit conviction that the symbolic history of Afrikaner cultural identity needed correcting and he approached the project of Loslyf by, metonymically, attempting to “correct” Afrikaner sexual identity – indicated by the magazine’s language of publication as cultural signifier. It is arguable that the significance of Loslyf resides in its ability to retrospectively speak to, and reinvigorate the social imagination of, a group reductively designated as “Afrikaner”. In understanding elements of fiction and mythology involved in such a provocation of social imagination, Loslyf provides at once a myth of a narrowed representation of Afrikanerdom against which the magazine and its vision is seen as “alternative”, and a creative act toward expanding Afrikaner cultural identity. Of the relation between Afrikanerdom and so-called “alternativity”, Hattingh (2013b) says: ‘I have always struggled with the term “alternative”, even though I was also labelled as such. I could never help but wonder, “alternative to what?” Surely the Afrikaner holds within himself an entire spectrum of human emotions and political sentiments?’

The magazine became a symbol – at a time when “alternative” perhaps already became irrelevant – not only of the collaborators’, but also of the readers’ represented rejection of former methods of control over such publications, while providing a platform for the expression/imagining of their sexual fantasies and experiences.

Loslyf certainly made contributions to the pornographic genre, whilst simultaneously breaking from this language too; thus, even as a postmodern creative cultural project, the magazine exhibits elements of the generic. Even though Loslyf seems to be an exemplary exercise in finding the equilibrium between moments of being funny and clever, political and politically incorrect, kitsch and avant-garde, it can
be concluded that such a ‘magic suspension’ (Žižek 1997:178) is not a sustainable endeavour, and the “generic” eventually overpowers “the interesting”. Efforts to maintain “the interesting” in *Loslyf*, and postpone its waning as far as possible, involved employing elements of irony, satire, self-awareness, criticality and humour. These elements extend beyond the reach of its Afrikaans and/or Afrikaner target audience and develop connections with a greater South African population, for whom even the most insular example of visualised cultural complexity is arguably of benefit. I would argue that *Loslyf* contributed to the broader project of democracy, specifically visual democracy, in South Africa in the mid-1990s, illustrating the power of images in this regard. The relevance of a contemporary study of *Loslyf* is highlighted by attempts to once again suppress and control the dissemination of images deemed “shocking” to moral or cultural sensibilities. Even, or especially, after giving such a narrowly sampled and inevitably simplified account of its significance, a worrying suspicion pervades *Loslyf*, as it does the study of the magazine: ‘No one can say if sex has been liberated or not, or whether the rate of sexual pleasure has increased. In sexuality, as in art, the idea of progress is absurd’ (Baudrillard 1987:35).

REFERENCES


