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Assessing the Use of Gender in Current Biblical Scholarship.

A Panel Discussion at the IOSOT Congress in South Africa

Abstract

Die hier dokumentierte Podiumsdiskussion fand am 8. September 2016 während des Kongresses der Organization for the Study of the Old Testament (IOSOT) in Stellenbosch, Südafrika, statt. Die beteiligten Theologinnen aus vier Kontinenten sollten zwei Fragen beantworten: 1. Was ist aus ihrer Erfahrung und für ihren Kontext der größte Gewinn, wenn Sie die Genderkategorie als hermeneutischen Schlüssel für die Interpretation des Ersten Testaments nutzen? 2. Was ist die größte Herausforderung für ExegetInnen, die an „Gender“ interessiert sind, vor allem im Blick auf den Diskurs über Kontexte und Kontinente hinweg? Alle Diskussionsbeiträge weisen auf die Bedeutung der Erkenntnis hin, dass „Gender“ eine soziale Konstruktion ist und gendergerechte Exegese diese Konstruktion in den Texten aufdeckt und kritisch hinterfragt. Außerdem betonen alle Beteiligten die Bedeutung des Kontexts der Auslegenden für die Exegese, in den Worten Jacqueline Lapsleys: „Es gibt zwei Arten von Theologie oder Exegese, solche, die bewusst kontextuell sind und solche, die sich ihres eigenen Kontexts nicht bewusst sind.“ Aus den Beiträgen wird zum einen deutlich, wie die Biographie der Exegetinnen in die Arbeit einfließt und welche Konsequenzen ihre exegetische Arbeit für die jeweilige Biographie hat, zum anderen aber, wie sehr feministische bzw. gendergerechte Bibelauslegung im Gespräch mit dem biblischen Text auch die soziale Situation der jeweiligen RezipientInnen in den Blick nimmt. Aufgrund unterschiedlicher Bedingungen und Kontexte ist feministische bzw. gendergerechte Exegese vielfältig und kann keine global gültige Lösung bieten. Ihre kritische Perspektive trägt jedoch dazu bei, Diskriminierungen im Blick auf Geschlecht, Ethnie, soziale Schicht und Religion aufzuzeigen und sich aktiv für eine gerechtere Welt einzusetzen.

Introduction

Christl M. Maier and L. Juliana Claassens

The International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament (IOSOT) was founded in 1950 in order to foster collaboration between scholars from the different nations, which had been at war with each other, by way of organizing a triennial international conference. The organization held its 22nd congress in Stellenbosch, South Africa on September 4-9, 2016, the first one on the African continent, and only the second outside of Europe. It was hosted jointly by Stellenbosch University (SU) and the Old Testament Society of South Africa (OTSSA) while the South African Society for Near Eastern Studies (SASNES) cooperated in organizing the program. At Stellenbosch University, the Department of Ancient Studies (at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences) and the Discipline Group Old & New Testament (at the Faculty of Theology) took responsibility for the practical arrangements of the congress. Besides the main papers delivered by invited speakers and a number of short papers, there were nine seminars that discussed current scholarly issues pertaining to the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in its ancient Near Eastern context, among them also some that focused on contemporary contexts and readings.

The seminar on Gender in Current Biblical Scholarship, the contributions of which are published here, was jointly organized by L. Juliana Claassens, Stellenbosch University, and Christl M. Maier, Philipps-University Marburg, Germany. The participating panelists were feminist/womanist scholars from four different continents. The invitation read as follows: In biblical studies, the analysis of gender has still not reached the main stream of exegesis, yet contributed a great deal to the development of new perspectives, especially in literary methods and socio-historical investigations of Hebrew Bible texts. Within the last decade, gender studies have focused on the intersection of different categories of discrimination such as race, class, gender, age, sexuality etc. This broadening of perspective led to acknowledging differences in scholarly approaches and contexts. The seminar has two goals. First, it aims at reviewing the impact and benefits that gender as a category of analysis has in the field of biblical exegesis. Second, it aims at evaluating the global discourse that a gender perspective promotes. The panelists are asked to reflect on the following questions: 1. In your experience and scholarly context, what has been the greatest gain for using gender as a hermeneutical lens for reading the Hebrew Bible? 2. What would you say is the greatest challenge faced by scholars interested in gender and the Bible, especially with regard to a discourse across contexts and continents?

The invited panelists, all outspoken feminist/womanist scholars, come from different continents and contexts. Christl M. Maier, who was also presiding the seminar, teaches Old Testament at Philipps-University Marburg in Germany; Madipoane Masenya(ngwan'a

Mphahlele) chairs the Department of Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at the University of South Africa (UNISA) in Pretoria; Jacqueline E. Lapsley teaches at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey in the USA and is Director of its Center for Theology, Women, and Gender; Charlene van der Walt is the Gender, Health and Theology Coordinator at the Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University and also the Research and Program Director of the newly established Gender Unit at the Faculty of Theology. The response was offered by Mercedes García Bachmann, until recently Professor at the Bible Department of the Instituto Superior Evangélico de Estudios Teológicos (ISEDET) in Buenos Aires, Argentina. As Juliana Claassens, who teaches Old Testament at Stellenbosch University and is the Director of the Gender Unit at the Faculty of Theology, was not able to attend the conference due to a research visit in the United States, she here provides her concluding reflections based upon the written statements.

At the IOSOT panel on Gender in Current Biblical Scholarship, the original contributions generated a lively discussion that emphasized the multiplicity of the various contexts and discourses of feminist biblical interpretation. As organizers of the panel, we thought it a worthwhile endeavor to have the panelists rework their contributions so as to be able to present it to a broader readership. The organizers would like to thank Silvia Schroer and Nancy Rahn for accepting to publish these statements, the response and further reflections.

Christl M. Maier

It is a great pleasure for me that we were able to organize this seminar on *Issues of Gender in Current Biblical Scholarship* at an IOSOT conference, especially since this learned body of scholars has not particularly embraced feminist or gender studies in the past. At this conference, however, three of our panelists, Mercedes García Bachmann, Jacqueline Lapsley, and Madipoane Masenya were also invited to give a main paper in the plenary sessions of the IOSOT congress. As an introduction to our discussion, let me first present some personal reflections on the impact and benefits of gender as a category of analysis in the field of biblical exegesis:

My own studies in theology and exegesis in Germany in the mid-1980s were dominated by the historical-critical paradigm and at least 95% of my professors at the universities in Tübingen and Western Berlin were male. Since there was hardly any seminar on feminist or gender analysis available, we female students started to read feminist books in student groups. During my time as PhD student and Assistant Lecturer in Berlin in the 1990s, feminist biblical interpretation was a burgeoning field of interest in the humanities, yet still marginalized in biblical studies. For myself as a young scholar, a critical feminist approach and the use of gender as a category of analysis, however, was essential. For instance with reference to my PhD topic—the portrait of the so-called “foreign” woman in Proverbs 1-9—I would not have been able to write a dissertation on this text without this feminist critical lens.

During the 1990s, I was glad to see the evolution of gender studies in the humanities in Berlin and I even took part in designing and implementing a graduate program in gender studies. Yet, I also experienced the harsh debate among feminist scholars, for instance the controversy between gender equality and gender difference as contrasting definitions and models of political agency.¹

In my experience and scholarly context, the greatest gain for using gender as a hermeneutical lens for reading the Hebrew Bible is to reveal the constructedness of male and female experience and how it pertains to the roles of men and women. As these gender constructs are dependent on specific societal and cultural traditions at a particular point in time, they can change and be transformed. Here, I concur with Mercy Amba Oduyoye, who by introducing Musimbo Kanyoro's feminist cultural hermeneutics, states, "feminist methodologies challenge the assumption that the roles of men and women have been fixed, either by the Creator or by culture."² A feminist, gender-sensitive perspective not only exposes an androcentric bias present in biblical texts but also in their interpretation and interpretative communities. The critical exploration of gender hierarchies in societies both ancient and modern challenges male experience, narrowly defined, as the norm for identity and for political and clerical authority. In my German context, it initially supported the claim of feminist scholars and pastors to get positions in the academy and the churches.³ While feminist exegesis still does not belong to the main stream of my academic discipline in Germany, there are quite a number of feminist exegetes and theologians working in higher education in my country. The results of feminist exegesis steadily found their way into commentaries on Old Testament scriptures and are widely known in both Roman-Catholic and Protestant congregations in Germany.⁴ Moreover, feminist interpretations and reflections increasingly are finding a growing readership in Christian circles and many female pastors use feminist insights in their bible studies. This increased exposure may be due to the efforts of feminist scholars at European universities, who in recent years have published anthologies on feminist exegesis.⁵ I vividly remember a conference about the hermeneutics of liberation held in 2000 in Ascona, Switzerland, at which feminist scholars from 17 countries discussed varied interpretations of the Bible.⁶ Moreover, the *European Society of Women in Theological Research* organizes an international conference every second year and publishes both the papers and thematic issues in its journal.⁷ Finally, yet importantly, the European electronic journal of feminist exegesis *lectio difficilior* provides an open access space for feminist interpretations of biblical and extra-biblical texts.

My own focus on gender led me to analyze critically the "master narratives" and the unquestioned traditions of my guild as well as the current methods of analysis. In gender-sensitive literary studies that focus on the modern readers, I encounter the limits and blind spots of the historical-critical approach. Since the mid-1990s, however, it has become obvious that gender can no longer be the only category of analysis. In my German context, US-

American Jewish feminists challenged Christian feminists by revealing anti-Jewish arguments in feminist biblical interpretations.⁸ Even without knowing the concept of intersectionality coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989,⁹ who theorized race, class, and gender as a trilogy of discrimination, we experienced the challenge to identity politics along gender lines. Although there were hardly any exegetes of color, or at least from other European countries, working in Germany, the concept of intersectionality is calling for a widening of perspectives beyond gender issues.¹⁰ Acknowledging whiteness and middle-class status as privileges socially constructed in a grid of power relations, for instance, revealed that feminist scholars in Germany experience discrimination with regard to their gender, but benefit from privileges with regard to class or race. This diverse experience became even more evident when I moved to the United States because my feminist studies had hindered me from finding a position in Germany. While teaching at Yale Divinity School in 2003-2006, I encountered a completely new world of exegesis, including theories of space, trauma studies, and postcolonial perspectives. Thus, my focus on gender widened significantly and included other categories of discrimination.

In my view, the greatest challenge facing scholars interested in gender and the Bible, is to know enough about other contexts—both ancient and modern—as well as to recognize the situation of women in other continents. It is my aim to analyze biblical texts intersectionally, i.e., not only with regard to gender, but also considering class/status, race/ethnicity, religion, and so on.¹¹ Yet, the information that I need in order to do this is hard to obtain since such analysis requires a deeper understanding of history, archaeological finds, and cultural settings of the ancient texts. In terms of my German academic heritage, I consider it important to evaluate the situation of the ancient biblical authors and their implied audience adequately. Historical inquiry in the twenty-first century can no longer be naïve, of course, about the values and biases that interpreters bring to their readings. Yet, it remains essential to analyze critically the ways in which texts as cultural productions reflect the historical circumstances of their composition and editing. Besides the historical inquiry, I feel challenged to interrelate the situations of ancient and modern readers of the Bible in a way that is perspicuous, methodologically sound, and inspiring. My solution to this challenge is to abandon the idea that one category fits all. Instead, I would opt for a discourse of different voices in feminist scholarship, a discourse between women from different continents and different traditions—just as we organized it in this seminar. There is not just one interpretation to any given biblical text but a multitude of perspectives and legitimized readings. What seems essential to me is an insight that the literary critic Stanley Fish formulated already in 1980. He posits that the reader is the one who ‘makes’ literature. Yet Fish situates the reader in an interpretive community that would select specific readings and contain the number of possible readings.¹² Following Fish in this respect, I would argue that each feminist scholar should aim at recognizing his or her own interpretive context and community and then should explain which

categories he or she foregrounds and for what reasons. Additionally, one should know the studies of other feminist scholars around the world in order to realize whether one's own stance unduly negates other perspectives. If we are clear about our hermeneutic presumptions and the effects of our reasoning, a fruitful discourse among exegetes will ensue. Thus, I argue for naming our own social, political, theological, and cultural commitments in an academic guild that has embraced for far too long the chimera of neutral, "objective" interpretation. The flourishing of feminist and postcolonial criticism marks the end of the hegemony of the historical-critical model of interpretation and thus helps to secure the future of biblical interpretation.

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Madipoane Masenya(ngwan'a Mphahlele)

Navigating a Gender-Unconscious Biblical Studies Academic Context: One African Woman's Reflection

In order to situate the concept of gender within my African-South African context, I start with a narrative that will hopefully give a reader a glimpse about being female in the preceding context.

O feleseditše ba bangwe, “she has accompanied others”, could be one of the remarks of ushering a new baby girl onto Mother Earth in the Northern Sotho/Pedi¹³ African-South African context. Right from the moment of her birth, the sex of a baby girl would have determined the value that a patriarchal culture would place on her. In the Zulu culture, argues Krige (1956: 62), marriage is regarded as complete only after the birth of a child. The first child, especially a boy, is very important to this group. The naming of a new bride in my Northern Sotho/Pedi culture for example, points in the same direction. My bridal name, MmaNape, was already pointing to the expectation that my firstborn child had to be Nape, a male person after whom the expected baby boy would be named.

It can be argued that the male has thus basically been the norm since the beginning (read: pre-colonial Africa), through the two eras which though were marked by their foreignness to Africa, have left a permanent foreign mark on African-descended people in South Africa, that is the colonial and the *apartheid* eras. Ngugi wa Thiongo cites as one of the examples of this persistent Europhone memory, the naming of Africans by foreign names: “As a result, European names, like the iron brands of Sembene’s film, cling to the bodies of many African peoples, and whatever they achieve that ‘name’ is always around to claim its ownership of that achievement. A name given and accepted is a memory planted on the body of its grateful or unquestioning recipient. The body becomes a book, a parchment, where ownership and identity are forever inscribed.” (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 2005: 158)

The male still pretty much remains the norm even up to today, not only 22 years into a democracy, but sixty years after the 1956 march of South African women to the Union Buildings. It could thus be safely concluded that when colonial and *apartheid* patriarchies saw it limping, they let it climb a mountain anyway¹⁴. In a nutshell, even in communal, family-oriented pre-colonial Africa, the male has been the norm, colonial and *apartheid* patriarchies thus only helped to exacerbate the situation of African women. Mercy Amba Oduyoye is thus on target that, “...it is too easy to lay the blame solely at the feet of westernization. We know that in the African religio-cultural heritage is to be found the seeds of objectification and marginalization of women. Colonial policies simply helped the process along, and it succeeded to the extent that it was advantageous for African men.” (Oduyoye 1994: 173)

Right from the moment of her birth, a baby girl's sex would determine her value in a patriarchal culture. In varying African contexts, cattle used to be (and still is) one of the significant markers of a male's possessions. Hence a bigger kraal could also determine whether a man would be polygynous or not. More girls born to a family thus meant a bigger kraal as more cattle would be given in exchange of their hand in marriage. So, in these supposedly communal, family and *botho*-oriented settings, one's gender determined not only the extent of one's foreignness within predominantly male households, but also, one's objectification as a part of male possessions. Female sexuality was/is possessed and thus contained by men.

The vocabulary of individual human's rights, or rather women's rights as are now enshrined in the South African constitution, seems to have been unknown then. What about today when South Africa is boasting about a wonderful constitution especially in terms of its affirmation of human rights?¹⁵ Is the community of the powerful, those occupying the top rung of the *kyriarchal*¹⁶ ladder, the male, the white and the rich among others, albeit aware of these rights, ignoring them?

Pertinent questions must be asked though: In light of the scenario painted in the preceding paragraphs, would it be precise to argue that African women were/are powerless, helpless and pitiable human beings without any influence in their own settings? Could they have been segregated within their own ethnic groupings just because they were Northern Sotho/Pedi women for example?

Although African women were marginalised basically on account of their gender, basically subordinated by members of the male folk, women had power¹⁷, albeit their power was not legitimated by patriarchy. What could African communities do without mothers, these important carriers of male lineages? How could African families have survived without wives and paternal sisters for example? What could have held African families together amid the cruel monsters of *apartheid* male deaths, exile and migrant labour? African women could and still can thus, like women in the book of Proverbs in the Hebrew Bible, either make or break a man (cf. Bird 1974).¹⁸

Although post-1994 South Africa has had its gains regarding the empowerment of the female folk, thus also entailing that some of the preceding marginalizing tendencies could be on the decline, the lot for African women, especially in academic biblical studies is far from over. The academic department, to which I presently belong, can serve as a case in point. The erstwhile Department of Old Testament, now the Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies which has existed for more than five decades now to my knowledge produced less than 5 doctoral theses which focused on gender criticism. Since 1996, when I was named not only the first black female to get a PhD in biblical studies in South Africa, but also the first PhD candidate to approach the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible from a womanhood perspective at UNISA, I cannot recall any other black South African PhD which the department has

produced in that regard except the Congolese Rev. Dr. Marthe Maleke Kondemo whom I have produced last year, almost two decades down the line! Another female Congolese PhD was produced in September 2016, when the IOSOT conference was on. I do not think though, that the situation is the same in other theology disciplines like Missiology, Church History, Systematic theology and Practical Theology for example.

Prospects

The preceding scenario has hopefully shed light on the very long journey still ahead, a journey hopefully to be walked by the upcoming Hebrew Bible scholars. To my knowledge, within the new merged Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies at UNISA, only two undergraduate modules focus on the Bible, gender and sexuality. At Honors level, there is a paper on Bible interpretation, one that can, depending on the discretion of a specific academic, integrate the gender category. At Masters and Doctoral (M and D) levels, students have the option of approaching their individual topics from a gender perspective if they so wish, the challenge though lurks in the latter option.

The first question we were requested to address was on *the greatest gain for using gender as a hermeneutical lens for reading the Hebrew Bible*. To the preceding question I now turn: Given the history of scholarly deprivation on contextual approaches to the study of biblical texts, especially studies which would have enabled me to make more sense of the South African context with its racial history among others, the integration of the category of gender in my doctoral research, writings and teaching enabled me to have a more nuanced understanding of my context and the contexts which produced biblical texts. The critical skills gained in my studies of gender criticism in biblical studies also came in handy not only within my inter/multi/trans-disciplinary interactions, but also in one's daily life. Such skills though, are not always taken kindly by those close to one's life. On the church front, one can cite an incident where, after I was given an opportunity to address a women's session during the District conference, the following morning, women pastors/elders were allowed to serve at the communion table! The District Secretary, an elderly man, explained to the audience that the District Office was prompted to include the women by the message in which I had revealed that in Christ there was neither male nor female. At the moment, there is one female member within the District Office of the presbytery to which I belong, something that is herstoric for that specific office. Although one may not with confidence argue that one's contributions in terms of one's participation in the church, both locally and nationally might have directly contributed to such a bold step, it would also not be an exaggeration to argue that my voice, one that was/is not always popular, made a contribution in that regard. I must say though, that one of the greatest gains, that I hope to forever cherish, is that of producing PhD candidates whose work would have included a contextual slant in general, and an African-conscious

gender slant in particular.

The second question which we were asked to address was: *What would you say is the greatest challenge faced by scholars interested in gender and the Bible, especially with regard to a discourse across contexts and continents?*

The main challenge is that the category of gender, especially as it affects the lives of African women on the African continent still struggles to have its way into mainstream biblical studies, both in South Africa, and dare one say, also on the African continent as such. Also, research has shown that while African scholarship uses the canons of Western biblical scholarship perhaps even in a routinized way, the opposite state of affairs occurs with regard to the use of African female scholarship by Western scholars. African canons hardly make it to the West. The case of the use of Renita Weems as a source within the commentaries on the prophetic metaphor of Yahweh as Husband and Israel as wife might be cited here (cf. my response to the Twentieth Edition of Women's Bible Commentary at the 2012 Annual SBL Meeting). In that case, the notion of a global village gets problematized. It is however affirming to see and engage with the works of Circle women within the Organization called the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. According to Isabel Phiri, one of the former general coordinators of the Circle, the main objective behind its establishment was "to build the capacity of African women to contribute their critical thinking and analysis to advance current knowledge using a theoretical framework based on theology, religion and culture" (Phiri 2008: 67). At the local levels, depending on the functionality of the various Circle chapters, the mentor-mentee relationships take place. Noteworthy also is the fact that the College of Human Sciences at UNISA has made strides of success in its mentorship program.

For activist scholars who also choose to plough back into their faith communities, especially within conservative ecclesiastical circles, foregrounding the gender category within one's sermons and teachings may in extreme cases lead to ostracism (cf. Masenya[ngwan'a Mphahlele] 2016).

In conclusion, it may be argued that while the struggle for the integration of the category of gender, including other categories such as social class, culture, empire, race, and ethnicity within mainstream biblical studies is far from over within the South African academy, there are positive pointers that if what has been started could continue to be cultivated and nurtured, it could prove to be fruitful and rewarding for especially future biblical scholars.

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Jacqueline E. Lapsley

When it began in its modern form several decades ago, feminist biblical scholarship was at first attentive to representations of women in biblical texts, and then, furnished with the insights of newly emerging feminist theory, slowly grew to include increasingly sophisticated investigations into patriarchy and androcentrism in its various ideological manifestations, along with signs of resistance to those ideologies. Intersectional approaches (Crenshaw 1989), which have become typical of feminist exegesis, have intensified the sophistication of these approaches. The ways in which gender, class, race, disability, sexual identity, and other markers of identity are intertwined among both the producers of texts, and their recipients, have illumined the biblical texts. But it is a sign of the times that the question for the panelists is framed not in terms of feminist analysis, but in terms of gender analysis. In recent years, feminist studies in the wider academy has expanded beyond a feminist orientation alone, to include attention to gender issues more broadly. We know that biblical studies works on a time-delay, picking up trends in other fields as though in another time zone. Thus, because the wider academy began the move from feminist studies to gender studies decades ago, especially after Judith Butler's groundbreaking theory of gender as performance in her 1990 book, *Gender Trouble*, biblical studies has now been following suit. Women are no longer the only focus of gendered readings of biblical texts, but work in this area now includes a burgeoning sub-area of masculinity studies, and critical attention to the ways in which modern Western binary understandings of gender cloud our view of the ancient texts and contexts.

1. In your experience and scholarly context, what has been the greatest gain for using gender as a hermeneutical lens for reading the Hebrew Bible?

I would name three gains in particular to the use of gender as a category of analysis in my context: First, exegesis that illumines the ways in which gender is *constructed* in the biblical texts—that is, *the fact* that gender is a social construction—in my experience has helped readers to observe the ways in which gender is constructed and performed in our own society. Most significant in revealing the constructed nature of gender in the Bible is the growing body of literature within masculinity studies. Martti Nissinen and others have produced important work on the construction of masculinities in the ancient world and in the Bible in particular, much of which, unfortunately, has not yet influenced other areas of biblical studies as much as one might hope.¹⁹ Among this work, for example, is a discussion of the ways in which the so-called eunuchs, Heb. *sarisim*, disrupt the gender binary that is supposedly in place in the biblical material.²⁰ Fascinating studies of both dominant, aggressive forms of masculinity in the Bible exist alongside studies of alternative masculinities present.²¹ Masculinity studies is

closely related to gender fluidity, and the representation of non-binary gender in the Bible—there was even a recent Op-Ed in *The New York Times*, showing how much the question has surfaced in the public arena.²² It is beneficial to observe these constructions in the biblical texts because seeing the variety of constructions destabilizes the idea that there is one normative understanding of gender that the Bible promotes. And seeing the variety of gender constructions in the biblical texts, my students and I observe the constructions also present in our own society.

As I review my panel contribution, it is one week before the U.S. presidential election (2016). Having studied gender performance theory, I have a new appreciation for the ways in which Donald Trump as a candidate for U.S. president is *performing* a certain kind of aggressive masculinity, and that it is primarily his *gender performance*, not any policy that he advocates, that attracts so many white men without a university education to his candidacy. This group feels demasculinized, and they long for an aggressive dominant male to instate or reinstate their own masculinity. The fact that Mr. Trump's behavior is overtly sexist is relevant to the question under discussion: I am convinced that one of the keys to the liberation of women and gendered minorities from the oppressions of patriarchy and its twin, misogyny, is not feminism itself, but masculinity studies. Only by exposing the ways in which certain types of toxic masculinity are performed and codified as normative will we make progress in gender justice.

Secondly, attention to gender in the biblical texts has helped readers to see the connections between the oppression of women and minorities in the biblical texts, and the oppression of women and minorities in society. The first fifteen years of my teaching career I lamented with my feminist colleagues how the younger generation of women in the U.S.—our students—did not consider gender an important category of analysis. They considered the oppression of women a problem of the past. By contrast, we are now seeing among students renewed interest in gender as a site of oppression, now intersecting with other forms of oppression in complex ways. My students are much less sanguine than previously that we have arrived in a post-feminist, post-racial America.

Thirdly, gender analysis has helped to open the eyes of readers of the biblical texts, whether students, pastors, or colleagues, to the fact that *all* exegesis is contextual. The phrases “contextual exegesis,” and even more often, “contextual theology,” are still prevalent in theological academic circles in the U.S., and feminist exegesis and feminist theology give the lie to this terminology at every turn. The idea that theologians who study Karl Barth are somehow doing “theology” but theologians of Ivone Gebara are doing “contextual theology” persists (or the idea that Pentateuchal criticism is not contextual, but feminist criticism is somehow “contextual”). These descriptions obscure the way context works in all interpretation, and in obfuscation lies undisclosed ideology. But such distinctions are undermined by the robust results of the gendered analysis of biblical texts. One can say there

are two types of theologies or exegesis, those that are *consciously* contextual and those that are unconscious of their contexts. The practitioners of the latter are in need of being “woke,” as those younger than me would say.

2. What would you say is the greatest challenge faced by scholars interested in gender and the Bible, especially with regard to a discourse across contexts and continents?

When it comes to challenges for discourse about gender, I would name three: the first challenge is the old one of being taken seriously by so-called mainstream scholarship. Some progress has been made in this area, but there is still much work to be done. The second challenge for discourse across contexts and continents is precisely the diversity of those contexts. Issues of sexual orientation, sexual identity, the status of women, and so forth, are so different in different contexts. In some places the dignity of homosexual persons is still disrespected and even threatened, whereas in some places, including my own institution, the conversation has largely moved on to other issues, such as non-binary gender identities. Finally, there is the problem caused by the success of “gender” as opposed to “women” as a defining category of analysis. As Maricel Mena-López and María Pilar Aquino have said in their introduction to their edited volume on *Feminist Intercultural Theology: Talking about “gender” instead of “women” can be a “strategy for minimizing critical feminist discourse and can depoliticize feminism and coopt “the category of gender for the purpose of reducing feminism’s political impact.”*²³ I experience this problem quite directly in my work at the Center for Theology, Women, and Gender at Princeton Seminary. Among the women I work with, alums and students, some worry that the attention to gender as a category, instead of women, will cause women to lose the political and social gains for women that the feminist movement achieved. But others, often younger persons, reject the gender binary itself and ask: if gender is fluid and constructed, why do we persist in speaking about the category of “women” at all? Is not the path to liberation to show how there is no such thing as a “woman” in any case? Navigating these different perspectives, both of which have certain merits, in my view, is a particular challenge for me in my context.

As I now finish editing my reflection from the panel, it is one week since Mr. Trump has been elected President of the United States, and with his victory arrives the defeat of concern for women and minorities of every kind. But that defeat must be temporary. The vision of a world in which all persons and the created order as a whole might flourish still feeds us, and many will continue to work for its realization. After the crucifixion of Jesus, when his disciples had lost hope that the world he announced would take hold in this one, the ones who went to the tomb to lament, and who became the first bearers of renewed hope, were women (Mark 16:1). The tasks before us are clear: to be vigilant in tending the truth, and in defending the vulnerable against injustice, and so to go forward, bearing the flame of hope.

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Charlene van der Walt

1. Experiences within the Stellenbosch scholarly context

I am extremely thankful to be part of this panel and to explore within the confines of the IOSOT meeting, for the first time on the African continent, the importance and relevance of doing Old Testament scholarship by engaging and taking seriously issues of gender. I am doing this reflection self-consciously from this place and will briefly reflect, in the first place, on the development and status of OT Gender Scholarship at the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University and the importance and relevance of doing this work as an African University. Following from this brief contextual reflection I will focus my attention on the challenges and opportunities for growth concerning this line of theological reflection. It is a great privilege to share this space of reflection and contemplation with scholars from various contexts, showcasing a variety of interpretative tools and contextual foci, and yet, scholars always connected due to the common aim of laboring toward flourishing and communal wellbeing, and in so doing, expressing in an unambiguous way that our wellbeing is deeply contextual and profoundly communal.

I am deeply thankful to be part of a growing community of scholars within the Faculty of Theology concerned with contextual issues situated within the complex intersection gender, health and theology. As a community of scholars we are deeply indebted to those who have blazed the trail for gender scholarship within the faculty. Denise Ackermann, who functioned in the capacity of an extraordinary professor in the department of Practical Theology at the faculty, has been instrumental in asserting the importance of scholarly engagement developing out of a grounded contextual situatedness and directed to the development of a live giving community for all. Ackermann defines the liberatory aim of a feminist theory of praxis, as proposed and developed by her, as follows: “The commitment to the praxis of liberation for women from all that oppresses us. Feminism does not benefit any specific group, race or class of women; neither does it promote privilege for women over men. It is about a different consciousness, a radically transformed perspective which questions our social, cultural, political and religious traditions and calls for structural change in all these spheres.”²⁴

Where Ackermann introduced issues of gender to the curriculum and local research landscape, other scholars soon followed, which increased teaching and research capacity within this field.²⁵ Of particular importance to the discipline of Old Testament scholarship and the establishment of a gender focus within the discipline has been the appointment of Juliana Claassens within the Department of Old and New Testament. Professor Claassens is a dear colleague and friend to all of us on the panel and in a certain sense our reflections today are

because of her commitment to the establishment and enhancement of a gender focus within the confines of Old Testament scholarship. After teaching for a number of years in the USA on the completion of her doctoral studies at Princeton University, Claassens was appointed within the Department of Old and New Testament with a special mandate to pursue research which contributes significantly to the research aim identified for the Faculty of Theology as part of the Hope project, namely human dignity. Doing Old Testament Scholarship with a focus on human dignity enabled Claassens to combine her love for the Old Testament with the embodied contextual concerns and realities faced by so many on the African continent, which strip people of their sense of worth and human dignity.²⁶ The passion, energy and commitment brought to the field by Claassens has led to the development of major research publications, the fostering of a community of scholarship around these themes, and the transformation of especially the undergraduate curriculum.²⁷ Beyond an excellent and rapidly expanding team of scholars involved within gender research and teaching at the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University, one of the most pertinent developments has been the impetus of the MTh Gender and Health program. In 2012 we were invited to develop a Master's program exploring issues situated within the complex intersection of gender, health and theology. The invitation sprung from a growing concern regarding the lack of sufficient progress being made in addressing two of the United Nations' Millennium Goals, namely maternal health and infant mortality. In the initial 2013 Pilot Program phase, the Church of Sweden, in collaboration with the Swedish Government Development Agency (SIDA), invited academic institutions, organizations engaged with the training of church leaders, and contextual impact partners to communally explore contextual issues situated within the intersection gender, health and theology.²⁸ Since its inception in 2013 the program has enabled 10 richly diverse students per academic year from a variety of backgrounds, and with a diversity of research interests, to engage in research combining the established knowledge base from the various classic theological disciplines with insights from gender scholarship in order to work toward health flourishing communities which encompass the following:

- communities in which people are free to realize their Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR);
- communities which affirm the dignity of all people regardless of their gender, race, class, sexual orientation, marital status, and religion, and where there is no discrimination on the basis of any of these;
- transformed faith communities in which religion is not functioning as a barrier in the realization of SRHR but where religion acts in life-affirming ways.

The program aims at contributing to these transformed communities by developing competent and engaged change agents through the process of education. Fundamentally, the program is aimed at assisting students to develop the vocabulary to engage with issues within their various communities pertaining to gender, health and theology and to understand something

of the complex constellation of factors constructing embodied realities such as HIV and Aids, sexual violence, toxic masculinity construction, and exclusivist practices of heteronormativity located within the intersection.

Old Testament research developed within the program has picked up on the important challenge identified by Serene Jones when she implores scholarship to find new routes through old landscapes: “The cartographical metaphor makes clear feminist theory is concerned not so much to reconstruct the terrain of faith as to provide markers for travelling through the terrain in new ways.”²⁹ The research developed within the program testifies to the imperative of reading texts from the vantage point of contextual settings and to employ the tools of various methodological schools namely: gender, post-colonial and queer. The aim is not to ignore or reject problematic or seemingly life denying texts within the Hebrew Bible, but to read these well-known texts “from this place” in the words of Teresa Okure³⁰ and to discover how these narratives become important reflective surfaces for contemporary readers as a space for the development of moral imagination as Martha Nussbaum proposes.³¹

2. Challenges

The ongoing scholarship being developed and research produced within the program has challenged us to continuously reflect on a number of issues and I would like to reflect briefly on three theoretical concerns. Firstly, seeing that the research done within the program develops from the basis of theory inherent to the classic theological disciplines that function as a springboard into the intersection gender, health and theology, it has been a great exercise in finding ways to mainstream gender theory into the theoretical landscapes of different theological disciplines. The most creative discussions within the program has been at the critical intersection points of discipline specific theory and method and the insights from gender theory. The program has greatly enhanced interdisciplinary discussions amongst students and staff. Secondly, it has been a serious and continuous challenge to stay true to the imperative of doing theological reflection from specific embodied contexts. Rather than exclusively focusing on theoretical problems, students are encouraged to develop their research from real concerns that they themselves experience or witness in their society. Thirdly, one of the greatest gains of the program has been the insight that, in order to truly engage the complexity of embodied contextual realities, it is vital to take into account the intersectional nature of issues informing oppression. The intersectional approach engages with gender concerns not in isolation but by reflecting on the relationship with race, class, sexual orientation, culture, and religious identity. By exploring intersectional axes of oppression, the discovered imperative of queer theory to destabilize the norm has lead us to the understanding that our work will always be on the margin. Constant reflections on power dynamics encourage us to position our work in such a way as to trouble, destabilize, question, push

back, and deliberately choose against dominant ways of speaking, writing, and being.³² In conclusion, I would like to briefly and personally reflect on a number of challenges faced when journeying through the Old Testament landscape from the starting point of contextual gender concerns and by employing tools developed from this theoretical basis. It is remarkable to note that the work being done from a feminist, post-colonial or queer perspective and concerned with intersectional issues related to gender is still often considered ‘soft science’. Within international conference settings, work done beyond the mainstream is often grouped together in sessions and in the process remains on the isolated fringe. It is noteworthy that this approach in terms of conference scheduling was not followed here at the IOSOT and work being done with a gender focus was incorporated into discipline informed sessions, leading to sometimes awkward, yet always new, creative and dynamic conversations within Old Testament scholarship. Secondly, considering the contextual starting point of this work, it remains ever evolving and never complete as the faces of oppression change and new unholy alliances are formed. Resisting injustice, dehumanization and the erasure of people is work that never ceases and can take its toll personally, intellectually and emotionally in the long run. The importance of a community of scholarship and care cannot be underemphasized and making fragile connections in our states of vulnerability opens up the possibility of compassionate solidarity. Michael White suggests that, when people stand together in solidarity, however briefly and partially, it “...provides us with the opportunity to look back on our taken-for-granted ways of thinking and being in the world.”³³ White believes that this makes it possible for people to “think outside the limits of what we would otherwise think, to challenge aspects of our own participation in the reproduction of dominance, and to identify options for action in addressing disadvantage and inequality that would not otherwise be available to us.”³⁴ Finally, and probably most importantly, the incomplete, unfinished, ever changing nature of scholarship involved within this complex intersection challenges scholars to continuously ‘lean into discomfort.’ This scholarly discomfort is often painful but remains a shadow of the experience of those living their lives in the often dehumanizing intersection of gender, culture and religion in Africa.

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Mercedes L. García Bachmann

Response

Thank you very much for inviting me to be part of this honorable group. Good company and a supportive community are at least as important as good theory, isn't it?

I will start by highlighting a few issues that I have heard from my colleagues who have been part of this panel; elements that strike me as common to what many of us had been experiencing. Afterwards I will add a few concerns from my home region, Latin America (or at least its southernmost corner).

1) There certainly have been gains in using gender as an epistemological or hermeneutical tool. When applied to exegesis, it illuminates the way gender is constructed both in the ancient and in our contemporary worlds. Therefore, academic feminist biblical interpretation provides resources for parish bible studies and for other interested (women's) groups.³⁵

2) I would concur with you, however, that gender/feminist studies have not become mainstream although there is ample recognition of its value among us. Connected to this issue is the experience of many feminist and gender-identified theologians, past and present, ranging from being not taken seriously to feeling ostracized. At the risk of interpreting what Madipoane meant by this term, I would think that the feeling does not originate in lack of feminist sisterhood throughout the globe but in a lack of recognition by many colleagues, which results in always being scrutinized and pushed to the margins. In this regard, the lack of graduate-level work that includes gender categories as analytical tool (e.g., dissertations) also can be seen as a consequence of this marginalized status of gender studies. This is evident in two ways: One is that many male scholars have left gender and feminist studies to their female colleagues, so that whenever someone wants to venture into the field, they call on the female colleagues who have distinguished themselves as feminist scholars. And since we are chronically overloaded with academic and grassroots work and often with administrative responsibilities as well, our own projects and active "advertising" of gender/feminist studies are neglected. Charlene van der Walt considered the question whether it is advisable and/or desirable to become mainstream. I have also thought of this question and think that it depends on what we mean by "mainstream." If we infuse the word with a negative connotation as if it were the same as "malestream" or patriarchal, obviously I would not want feminist interpretation to be "mainstream" but rather remain on the margins. However, if by "mainstream" we mean that gender would affect every academic field (as well as church communities), then yes! Let feminist interpretation become "mainstream," so that the world starts to be fairer to groups that have been despised thus far!³⁶

3) Regarding further concerns and challenges, I want to highlight the contested status of gender. On the one hand, one finds that students challenge the category of gender in itself and

argue that the binary concept of male and female is out of date. On the other hand, there is the concern that a broader concept of gender – often used to replace the category “feminist” – would conceal women’s ongoing struggle for equal rights.

4) Finally, I perceive that my colleagues, while recognizing and celebrating contextual interpretation, feel challenged by their awareness of just how different one context is from another. The question remains how one may continue to be faithful both to our local context and broaden our horizons at the same time. Frankly, I do not have an answer to this dilemma. Perhaps, the best one can do is to be conscious of one’s own context, making explicit efforts of explaining it to others, and to listen with open ears and an open heart to what others share about their own struggles. This means that we would be unable to go on alone and would always need the other to interpret texts and reality.

In this vein, I would like to raise a few other issues that are important for my context, Latin America, and were not mentioned thus far. I have identified three points:

a) Lack of Teaching Positions

The first point concerns the absence of feminist theologians in the academy, by which I mean seminaries and universities. Theological schools in Latin America (and even in the Caribbean) are very rare and within them, there are few women teaching in key theological fields, and even fewer feminists among them. For different reasons, many of which have to do with the patriarchal settings, in which they tried to fit but could not, several well-trained feminist theologians in the last ten to fifteen years have left their academic jobs. Some have migrated to other countries and some have sought to work in NGOs and other political realms. Thus, on the one hand there is joy that their wisdom will be put to good use somewhere else (and one might also mention that their leaving also has made room for younger scholars).³⁷ On the other hand, losing skilled and resourceful women is serious because it takes a heavy toll on both the institutions that count on them (and especially the students who will *not* be influenced by their feminist approach), and also on the women themselves, who would not leave their positions had they better working and living conditions. In particular, we see the impact on the larger network of feminist scholars in that we are constantly forced to start over and to establish new connections.

b) Slow Influence on Academic Spaces

Although biblical studies that include feminist and gender criticism have been published for decades, there still is a large portion of colleagues who do not acknowledge this work. I dare to say that this very conference serves as an example in that few of its main papers addressed their respective subject with any kind of gender awareness. Other factors could also be

examined, such as the ratio of male to female presenters (as main speakers and in thematic groups).

c) Persistent Hegemonic Masculinity

Insofar as we as of yet have been unable to influence the binary approach to the world, which includes challenging traditional masculinities, there is little hope for real change in this patriarchal world.³⁸ There are many examples worldwide – but in Argentina, female (and child) trade and trafficking³⁹ as well as femicides are some of the ugliest and most common issues. Trafficking has several faces, so I will here speak of one in particular. One of the best-known cases of trafficking for sexual purposes in Argentina is that of María de los Angeles (Marita) Verón, who had been abducted from her city, Tucumán (in the Northwest of Argentina) when she was 23 years old.⁴⁰ Her mother has been searching for her since 2002, even disguising herself as a prostitute in order to find her. By means of her personal actions and later through establishing a foundation, Susana Trimarco managed to rescue several women (including Argentineans brought to Spain), but so far has not found her daughter Marita, alive or dead. In the process of Susana's struggle, a large net of crime and corruption by the "legal" system has been revealed and brought to court.⁴¹ In response to her efforts, Susana has received several awards.

Unfortunately, femicides are neither restricted to my area of the world nor to one particular group or social class. Although in Argentina, much has been done in the last decade to address this issue politically and socially, we still have been found wanting.⁴² Since the issue of gender violence is a complex one, I will not go deeper onto its causes, but my hunch is that the increase in femicides⁴³ may be a reaction to social and cultural changes not easily accepted by many men. This includes increased education and job opportunities for women, female rights being addressed in terms of human rights, media rejection of gender violence, and an increasing number of public demonstrations against femicides—tagged “Ni una menos” (literally, “not one woman less”, meaning we cannot tolerate another dead or missing woman) —all of which have resulted in a more fluid and somewhat more equal gender status for women. In addition, laws allowing same-sex marriages and legal identity change for transgender people have altered perception of “masculinity”—meaning hegemonic, idealized, essentialist masculinity. While many men are embracing new masculinities, others may feel threatened and resort to violence against those whom they perceive as responsible for their loss of status, namely, their female partners and sometimes their own children.⁴⁴

The pervasive influence of violence is too large in the world to be solved by feminists or by any other group by itself. However, we as feminist theologians have a responsibility to work with others toward a better, fairer world, including churches and academic settings. In order to achieve these goals, we urgently need gender roles that respect the dignity of each individual;

more academic and popular voices against gender inequality, and for economic and technological justice; governments with zero tolerance toward injustice, violence, and femicides; and anthropologies, theologies, and ecclesiologies that are attuned to the dignity of all creation.

It is this vision of the world that I try to convey when I write, teach or preach. Within this too large “world” requiring better stewardship, I choose for underprivileged groups, particularly women and indigenous groups. While I need more siblings to walk with me, I am thankful for the many that I already have.

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L. Juliana Claassens

Final Reflections

As I am writing this reflection, I am very much under the impression of just how interconnected our world has become. I sensed something of this in September of this year when while many of my international colleagues were gathered in my home town Stellenbosch, I was in the United States on sabbatical, teaching for the fall semester at Davidson College in North Carolina. Moreover, I felt this even more intensely this past week when the shock election results with Hillary Clinton *not* becoming the first female president of the United States reverberated throughout the world. One already sees the impact of this election not only in the United States but also in South Africa as it is giving permission to little “trumps” to reassert their power.

For me, one of the most difficult things about this election is what it says about gender. A Huffington Post opinion article argues that Hillary Clinton’s loss reveals something of the deep-seated levels of misogyny and patriarchy in the United States that in the end made it impossible for men, and also a significant number of women, to vote for a woman president despite the terrible things her rival candidate said about women, immigrants and the LGBTIQ community.⁴⁵

Actually the esteemed collection of Old Testament feminist/womanist scholars from four different countries reflected in this IOSOT panel on Gender and Biblical Scholarship corroborates something of this never-ending struggle for gender justice amidst the explicit and implicit manifestations of patriarchy in their respective contexts. This is evident in the title of Madipoane Masenya’s contribution, “Navigating a Gender-Unconscious Biblical Studies Academic Context,” as well as in the many instances cited by the panelists that reflect the difficulties experienced by women in academia all around the world. This includes amongst others a limited number of available academic positions with many female scholars struggling to find full time employment, as well as the ongoing struggle to convince the guild that feminist/womanist biblical interpretation is a worthwhile pursuit after all. As Christl Maier points out, even something as obvious as that value neutral, objective interpretation does not exist is still not accepted by everyone in our field.

But probably even more disconcerting is Mercedes Bachmann’s recognition of a form of masculinity that in her context has led to the most tragic examples of femicide. Also Jacqueline Lapsley reflected on this issue a week *before* the U.S. election in terms of what she calls an “aggressive” or “toxic” masculinity that she associated with the rise of Trump and his supporters, which as we now have seen had an distinct effect on the outcome of the election and conceivably also the future of not just the United States but also the world.

So within this reality named by the panelists, which also to some extent was reflected in the U.S. election and its aftermath, what are we as feminist/womanist biblical scholars to do in the “gender-unconscious,” or even worse, deeply patriarchal and misogynist world, in which we live and work? Based on the contributions of these IOSOT panelists, I would like to highlight three points:

First, writing from this particular time and place, and reading the thoughts of this diverse group of scholars, I am more convinced than ever about the importance of *embodiment*. The mere fact of this IOSOT panel on gender at a conference that traditionally has not made space for such concerns is an achievement in itself. This is also the reason why my co-organizer and I felt it so important to get these responses in written form, to publish them as a unit, in order to reach a wider readership but also to create space where more feminist voices may become audible. This collection of viewpoints that reflects on what it means to do gender and biblical scholarship in a world today that is not always friendly to women is a visible sign that we as feminist/womanist biblical scholars are here and collectively have a stronger voice than on our own.

Second, what this panel accomplishes is to highlight the importance of *community*. Charlene van der Walt speaks beautifully about “the importance of a community of scholarship and care” that by “making fragile connections in our states of vulnerability opens up the possibility of compassionate solidarity” (p. 20). It is so important though that this show of “compassionate solidarity” extends beyond our intimate circles and our comfort zones to cross boundaries and perhaps even barriers or walls that exist in terms of race, class, sexual orientation and geography. I am greatly inspired by Judith Butler that consistently challenges us to forge connections, to build coalitions, to step into one another’s shoes in order to intentionally see the world from another place.⁴⁶ I am proud to say that this IOSOT panel is one such an attempt.

Finally, I am more convinced than ever of the importance of *persistence and resilience* in what we do. In our different corners of the globe, and particular in light of the uncertain future that faces all of us in our interconnected world, we are called to keep on writing, teaching, speaking and most importantly living the values in which we so deeply believe. We are called without ceasing to have conversations regarding the intersectional understanding of gender as well as the performative nature of gender that are highlighted in these contributions. We need to continue to affirm in our writing and teaching the contextual nature of biblical studies. And we have to keep on highlighting the importance of values such as human dignity, justice and equality that ought to inform and shape all of our interpretative practices. In this ongoing endeavour, no matter how difficult at times, the voices and courageous examples of the colleagues reflected in this panel inspire us not to lose heart, to keep on working wherever we are for a world where love and compassion, justice and equality reign supreme.

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¹ See Seyla Benhabib et al., *Der Streit um Differenz: Feminismus und Postmoderne in der Gegenwart* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1993); Hadumod Bußmann and Renate Hof, eds., *Genus: Zur Geschlechterdifferenz in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1995).

² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Do You Understand What You Are Reading? African Women's Reading of the Bible and the Ethos of Contemporary Christianity in Africa," in *Faith and Feminism: Ecumenical Essays*, ed. B. Diane Lipsett and Phyllis Trible (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 217–232, 225. Cf. also Musimbo R.A. Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2002).

³ The implementation of feminist theology in the German academy and churches is documented in Gisela Matthiae et al., eds., *Feministische Theologie: Initiativen, Kirchen, Universitäten – eine Erfolgsgeschichte* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2008).

⁴ In Germany, there is an online study course on Feminist Theology available for lay people, see <http://www.fernstudium-ekd.de/theologie/theologie-geschlechterbewusst.php> [accessed 30 October 2016] as well as seminars and lectures at church academies and in women's networks; cf. *Feministische Theologie: Initiativen, Kirchen, Universitäten*, 89–190.

⁵ The first to publish anthologies of feminist interpretations was Athalya Brenner, who produced two series of *Feminist Companions to the Bible* on specific biblical books starting in 1993, for which she collected articles of authors from many countries, mostly Europe and Northern America. A German production is Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker, eds., *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 1998); its translation to English was published as *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature* by Eerdmans in 2012. See also the 22-volume project *The Bible and Women: An Encyclopedia of Exegesis and Cultural History*, edited by Christiana de Groot, Irmtraud Fischer, Mercedes Navarro Puerto, and Adriana Valerio in English, German, Italian, and Spanish with various publishers.

⁶ Cf. the proceedings of this conference, Sophia Bietenhard and Silvia Schroer, eds., *Feminist*

Interpretation of the Bible and the Hermeneutics of Liberation, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series 374 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003).

⁷ *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* (Leuven: Peeters, 1993ff).

⁸ See, e.g., Judith Plaskow, “Blaming Jews for the Invention of Patriarchy,” in *Nice Jewish Girls*, ed. Evelyn T. Beck (Trumansburg: Crossing Press, 1982), 255–265; Susannah Heschel, “Altes Gift in neuen Schläuchen: Anti-Judaismus und Antipharisäismus in der christlich-feministischen Theologie,” in *Querdenken: Beiträge zur feministisch-befreiungstheologischen Diskussion*, ed. Frauenforschungsprojekt zur Geschichte der Theologinnen (Göttingen; Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1992), 65–77. An outcome of this debate was the volume *Von der Wurzel getragen: Christlich-feministische Exegese in Auseinandersetzung mit Antijudaismus*, ed. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker, Biblical Interpretation Series 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

⁹ Cf. e.g., Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1991): 1241–1299.

¹⁰ Among the first studies to assess whiteness as a category of privilege in Germany was Eske Wollrad, *Weißsein im Widerspruch: Feministische Perspektiven auf Rassismus, Kultur und Religion* (Königstein: Helmer, 2005).

¹¹ Cf. Christl M. Maier, “Der Diskurs um interkulturelle Ehen in Jehud als antikes Beispiel von Intersektionalität,” in *Doing Gender – Doing Religion: Fallstudien zur Intersektionalität im frühen Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, ed. Christine Gerber, Ute Eisen and Angela Standhartinger, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 302 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 129–153.

¹² See Stanley E. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 340–45.

¹³ Northern Sotho/Pedi is one of the indigenous languages in South Africa; with other African languages, it has also received the status of an official language post-1994.

¹⁴ The Northern Sotho/Pedi proverb, *Wa re o e bona e hlotša, wa e nametša thaba* (while you saw it limping, you still let it climb a mountain anyway). The tenor of the proverb reveals that a specific situation is being exacerbated.

¹⁵ In Chapter 2, Section 3, p. 1247 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa we read, “The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against any one on one or more grounds, including race, gender, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.”

¹⁶ In the tradition of patriarchal Greek democracy, Western society and family are not just male, but they are patriarchal (rule of the father) or, more accurately, kyriarchal (rule of the master or lord), because elite propertied men have power over those subordinate to and

dependent on them (Schüssler Fiorenza 1992: 117).

¹⁷ The Northern Sotho/Pedi proverb says: *Naswa ya mošate e fenyā e sa rage*, ‘a black royal cow prevails even if it does not kick.’

¹⁸ Phyllis Bird reasons, “Women are not chattel in Proverbs, nor are they simply sexual objects; they are persons of intelligence and will, who, from the male’s point of view expressed here, either make (cf. Woman Wisdom, good wife and Woman of Worth) or break (cf. loose woman and other/strange woman) a man” (Bird 1974: 60; brackets mine).

¹⁹ Martti Nissinen, “Biblical Masculinities: Musings on Theory and Agenda,” in *Biblical Masculinities Foregrounded*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă and Peter-Ben Smit (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014), 271–285.

²⁰ Martti Nissinen, “Relative Masculinities in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament,” in *Being a Man: Negotiating Ancient Constructs of Masculinity*, ed. Ilona Zsolnay (New York: Routledge, 2016), 221–247.

²¹ See for example, Christine Mitchell, “1 and 2 Chronicles,” in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, 3rd ed., ed. Carol Newsom, Sharon Ringe and Jacqueline Lapsley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 184–191.

²² Mark Sameth, “Is God Transgender?,” *The New York Times*, Aug. 13, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/13/opinion/is-god-transgender.html?_r=1h. The Op-Ed has been widely criticized for misunderstanding Hebrew grammar (e.g., Carolyn Klaasen and Jenna Stover-Kemp, “Bad Scholarship a Poor Solution to Anti-Trans Politics: A Response to the New York Times’ ‘Is God Transgender?’”, <http://religiondispatches.org/bad-scholarship-a-poor-solution-to-anti-trans-politics-a-response-to-the-new-york-times-is-god-transgender>, accessed October 31, 2016).

²³ Maricel Mena-López and María Pilar Aquino, “Feminist Intercultural Theology: Religion, Culture, Feminism, and Power,” in *Feminist Intercultural Theology: Latina Explorations for a Just World*, ed. María Pilar Aquino and Maria José Rosado-Nunes (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2007), xx.

²⁴ Denise M. Ackermann, “Meaning and Power: Some Key Terms in Feminist Liberation Theology,” in *Scriptura* 44 (1993): 19–33, 24.

²⁵ Both Elna Mouton and Jeremy Punt from New Testament studies have done important work in the establishment of a gender focus within the discipline through high quality research publication and teaching and in so doing has contributed greatly to the development of young scholars within the field. Research and supervision capacity within the faculty involved with the development of gender research now extends to a number of engaged academic scholars within all the major disciplines and from various centres connected to the faculty.

²⁶ For more on the Hope project initiated by the late rector of the University, Russel Botman, please see: <http://www.sun.ac.za/english/Documents/Rector/speeches/Advancement.pdf>.

²⁷ The undergraduate curriculum at the Faculty now boasts a number of courses including insights from gender, post-colonial and recently also queer scholarship.

²⁸ The four academic institutions from the African continent involved within this collaboration has been the Faculty of Theology of Stellenbosch University together with partners in South Africa (UKZN), in Tanzania (TUMA University) and Ethiopia (Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology).

²⁹ Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 19.

³⁰ Theresa Okure, “Reading From This Place: Some Problems and Prospects,” in *Reading From This Place: Volume II. Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspectives*, ed. F.F. Segovia and M.A. Talbot (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 52–66.

³¹ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 183.

³² In line with Bronwyn Davies I choose to use the term ‘troubling’ which she describes as follows: “The particular meaning of trouble that I am intending here is the same as when we say ‘the seas were troubled,’ where trouble means to agitate or to make rough. I use the word troubling, rather than ‘deconstructing’ or ‘putting under erasure,’ since I find that too many readers of deconstructive texts take deconstruction to mean dismantling that obliterates the binaries and the boundaries between them. Binaries are not so easily dismantled, and deconstructive work often can do no more than draw attention to the binaries and to their constructive force. For some people, in some readings, deconstructive work may facilitate a different take-up of meaning, beyond the binaries. But this does not undo the continuing force of relations of power that operates to hold the binaries in place. I choose the word *troubling* to represent more closely what it is that deconstructive work can do.” Cf. Bronwyn Davies, *(In)scribing Body/Landscape Relations* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), 14.

³³ Michael White, *Narratives of Therapists’ Lives* (Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications, 1997), 141.

³⁴ White, *Narratives*, 141.

³⁵ Many of us regularly publish in journals (those from our own universities and others) and books (particularly in English or German, published in the North-Atlantic world); see, e.g., *Revista de Interpretación Bíblica Latinoamericana RIBLA*, accessible through the page of the Latin American Council of Churches, <http://www.claiweb.org/index.php/miembros-2/revistas-2>. The collection *La Biblia y las Mujeres. Colección de exégesis, cultura e historia*, edited by Irmtraud Fischer, Mercedes Navarro Puerto, Adriana Valeria and Jorunn Økland/Christiana de Groot, is a welcome resource, although not many of its authors are from Latin America.

³⁶ Of course, we could push the issue farther and ask whether gender would still be able to affect society were it to become “mainstream” or whether the issue would disappear. The

latter, however, seems unlikely given pervasive ways of patriarchy to remain in power for at least the last four thousand years, despite many changes.

³⁷ For a review of female Old Testament scholars in Latin America and their contributions, see Mercedes L. García Bachmann, “Thirsty Enough For Feminist Biblical Interpretation? Contextual Readings by Women from Latin America,” in *Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Retrospect, II: Social Locations*, ed. Susanne Scholz (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), 97–117; “Leer el Antiguo Testamento en clave feminista. Mapas sobre teólogas feministas biblistas en América Latina,” in *Teología feminista a tres voces*, ed. Virginia R. Azcuy, Nancy E. Bedford and Mercedes L. García Bachmann (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2016), 39–64.

³⁸ I do not mean that nothing has been achieved in this field, but there is certainly much room for improvement. This is not the place to produce a whole bibliography, because my main point is not with what biblical scholars have done, but with what society at large—at least in my home country—has *not* done. Traditional patriarchal strongholds such as churches, politics, and armed forces have been slow at best to deal with much needed changes in terms of hegemonic masculinity.

³⁹ See <http://www.fundacionmariadelosangeles.org/micrositios/delito-de-trata-de-personas/zaida-gatti.pdf>, <http://fundacionmariadelosangeles.org/index.htm>. There is also a large network of trafficking for labor enslavement, particularly for textile designers and producers, closely related to rich people (including political actors), which is not gender-determined because it usually involves whole families (and children) brought in from the countryside or from neighboring countries under false promises. See <http://www.fundacionalameda.org/>.

⁴⁰ Abduction from the street and seduction under false promises of work are two major sources of recruitment of girls and women for slave prostitution.

⁴¹ Part of the system’s corruption may be seen in the fact that the thirteen persons brought to trial (at which many victims testified with an enormous psychological stress) were first absolved by the state’s (province) judges in 2012. This had been the first trial of an illegal association profiting from prostitution and therefore the court verdict was shocking; political and social reaction to it were strong and loud. The decision was appealed and in December 2013 the thirteen accused were found guilty.

⁴² In the last fifteen to twenty years, some laws were approved in Argentina, protecting women from domestic violence and sexual harassment; also special police stations, courts, and places of refuge were created to ensure victims’ protection (including better treatment by police officers), safety for them and their children, psychological and legal advice, and so on. In the last months, however, several of these services have been cancelled because of the government’s budgetary cuts.

⁴³ Since it is debatable whether femicides have increased or whether they are now reported to the police, I base my affirmation on research made on cases published in the newspapers and

tried in court, in Argentina, from 2008 to 2015. In that period the number of known cases grew from 208 in the year 2008 to 286 in 2015. If other people directly affected are counted (those who tried to prevent the murder as well as the victim's and often the aggressor's children), the count is higher; see <http://www.lacasadelencontro.org/femicidios.html>. Research is available in Spanish at <http://www.porellaslibro.com/libro> [accessed Oct 4, 2016]. Some of the main difficulties that victims experience when they try to break free of actual or former relations-become-abductions are: socio-economic and legal hindrances that prevent many victims from seeking legal help because it is complicated for them, they do not like police offices, who are often reluctant to take up the criminal complaint, they feel ashamed, etc. Furthermore, there is often lack of compliance by the aggressor of court restrictions (when there is restriction), failure of public force to ensure these restrictions, and lack of financial backing by the victim's family to pursue legal measures against the murderer.

⁴⁴ The latest of these demonstrations happened on October 19, 2016, prompted by a very cruel crime against a teenager. See <http://www.buenosairesherald.com/article/223313/a-brutal-murder-becomes--a-rallying-call-for-a-nation>, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/20/argentina-women-south-america-marches-violence-ni-una-menos>, <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1948374-el-paro-nacional-de-mujeres-se-replicara-en-otros-paises-de-latinoamerica-y-europa> [all accessed Oct 20, 2016].

⁴⁵ Jessica Samakow, "This Election Showed Men How Our Country Has Always Treated Women," 11 Nov 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/this-election-showed-men-how-our-country-has-always-treated-women_us_580f7ff5e4b02444efa57999.

⁴⁶ Judith Butler proposes that individuals and groups who find themselves in situations of precarity due to unjust power structures should act in solidarity with one another, forming alliances across barriers of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation in order to resist injustice together, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 43–49. Butler moreover points out that "such an alliance would not require agreement on all questions of desire or belief or self-identification," *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2009), 32.