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Quo Vadis Domina? Reflections on What We Have Become and Want to Be

Zusammenfassung:

Dieser Essay geht zurück auf einen Vortrag der Autorin im Januar 2011 in Groningen. Im Fokus standen die Gender Studies, deren Entwicklung in den letzten Jahrzehnten und die unterschiedlichen Forschungsfelder, die sich in den Niederlanden, in ganz Europa und generell in den Bibelwissenschaften – speziell in der alttestamentliche Forschung – ergeben haben. Die Hauptthemen, die in diesem Essay kurz andiskutiert werden sollen, sind: die verschiedenen Definitionen von feministischer Kritik beziehungsweise Genderkritik, Errungenschaften und Misserfolge der Forschenden auf diesen Gebieten und die Fortschritte, die es in diesen Forschungsbereichen gegeben hat. Am besten ist es, diesen Artikel zusammen mit den anderen Beiträgen der Konferenz in Groningen in dieser Ausgabe der *lectio difficilior* zu lesen. Zudem befasste sich bereits der 2010 in der *lectio difficilior* veröffentlichte Artikel von Cheryl Exum mit dem Titel “Where Have All the Feminist Gone? Reflections on the Impact of Feminist Biblical Exegesis on the Scholarly Community and Women’s Lives” mit demselben Themenbereich.

Disclaimer

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מאין באת ולאן אתה הולך ולפני מי אתה עתיד לתן דין וחשבון
(*Mishna Avoth 3:1*)

Tractate *Avoth* [“fathers” or “fundamentals”] of the Mishnah is a collection of ethical sayings, not of *halacha*, that is placed at the end of the Mishnaic Order called in Hebrew *Neziqin* and dealing with damages – material, social, mental and others – in human societies and their reparation. In it, in chapter 3 section 1, there is a saying attributed to the sage Rabbi Aqaviah son of Mehallalel, who probably lived in Jerusalem or near it at some time between 200 BCE and the commencement of the Common Era. This is what he is reported saying, in translation:

Reflect upon three things and you will not fall into the clutches of transgression:
 Know from whence you come,
 whither you are going,
 and before whom you are going to have to give a full account [of yourself].
 (Trans. J. Neusner, Mishna-N in the Accordance electronic Program)

I am taking this quote out of context. R. Aqaviah, let him rest in peace, meant something completely different from what I am going to present now, as the next few lines of the Mishnah make clear. The explanation to his instruction, in context and as given in the following lines of the Mishna, is:

“From whence do you come”? From a putrid drop.¹
 “Whither are you going”? To a place of dust, worms, and maggots.
 “And before whom are you going to give a full account of Yourself”? Before the King of kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed be he.” (Trans. Neusner)

But no matter: I chose R. Aqaviah’s words as a motto for my paper since, like in many of the Avoth sayings, he touches upon so many issues in so few words: sex, procreation, life and death and in between, ethics and faith and giving account, here and in the hereafter. This seems appropriate to me since this short paper, now rewritten from a short talk at the Groningen Conference on Gender Studies (January 2011), pursues the purpose of the conference in which it was delivered. The aim of the conference was to reflect on the recent past and coming future of gender studies, within the framework of not only religious studies per se but also of religious studies as relevant to life and death of religious and non religious women (and men) in their contemporary communities. And because I know and acknowledge that you, my colleagues and readers, are versed practitioners and interested parties, standing before you – metaphorically – causes me no little anxiety. A task writing about the state of the art of gender studies *anno* 2012 is, for me, a task I approach with trepidation. And another reason for this quote, which is personally directed at all of us it seems, summing up a human condition shared by many, is, that although I am going to proceed inductively, from my own experience onto a general assessment, I am reasonably sure that my experience is shared. And so to my task – that is, to give a concise review of what I know about academic gender studies in the western hemisphere, at this time, especially in biblical studies and especially around Europe and the US.

Gender Studies: Certainly a Success Story

Things have changed for gender studies in the last decades, for better and for worse, as is widely acknowledged I think. Historically, gender- and gender-affiliated studies were gradually introduced into Academia as a cluster commencing from the emphasis on female issues, after earlier arrangements coyly labeled “women studies” that, paradoxically, often contained an element of feminist criticism stronger than that of gender studies. This in itself, the coming of age so to speak of such studies as academic subjects that matter, is no mean victory. But beyond this bare factual progress, not always easy for practitioners as well as for objectors, how do we measure the success or failure of this ostensible integration into the academic world? Regrettably, the academic world – at least in the Humanities – is quite conservative. For a new cluster of topics to enter it as units, departments, colloquia, seminars that remain around for students and teachers and researches alike, in the short span of a couple of decades, is no mean feat. But what does this serious inroad actually mean?

Gender Studies and the Workplace: Parameters for Evaluation

Let us not forget in our intellectual and moral zeal that the academic world is, among other things or first and foremost, also a workplace, a marketplace. So we can begin by being pragmatic. Let us divide “success” in the workplace into two clusters. The one cluster is more emotional/mental: it includes wishes for recognition, acceptance, feeling at home, freedom to choose, right to happiness or at least fulfillment, satisfaction, and the power to make social difference. The second is more practical: wishes of actually having work, influence, equal pay, equal economic opportunity, and the formal appreciation that leads to professional advancement, with all that this entails. The two parameters actually overlap in many places, since both centre on the broad concern of *access*. And, in the academic world, the issues boil down to *four* important categories: *jobs and financing*, as conditioned *inter alia* by *publications*, the opportunity and space to publish and to be read and known; *influence*, including power positions (in administration); and *syllabus planning*, that is, determining acceptable fields of study and their contents.

Before commencing I shall emphasize briefly what has already been implied earlier: increasingly, for many scholars and certainly for me, “gender studies” as it has developed is more inclusive now. It is not just a glorified name for feminist criticism in any field, although feminist criticism is what started it all. No: the term also includes historically derivative and ideologically close – albeit burgeoning into prominence

status – fields, such as queer studies and the study of masculinities. Those areas may now claim a nascent independent status but they were made possible thanks to feminist studies that began by focusing on women and literary woman figures. Looking back from this angle, viewing how the coy “women studies” of the 1970’s have changed the world of legitimate scholarly inquiry while it was changing itself, is even on its own a formidable success story. Opportunities certainly opened up there, and another inclusive academic discourse emerged.

A Closer Look into Publication as Success Parameter: The Case of Biblical Studies

Let us think then about the current situation regarding feminist and gender studies specifically in my own field, biblical studies, in the area of *publications*, the sacred cow of academic survival and advancement. I will chart some roads travelled, first in feminist bible criticism and then – albeit briefly – in the emerging biblical queer studies. My survey will relate to bible research done mostly in English, since this is what I know best; and since Americans, and to a lesser extent English-speaking European women, were at the forefront of early (so called “third wave”) feminist research in the late 1970’s and through the 1980’s to the early 1990’s.

When I wanted to start the *Feminist Companion to the Hebrew Bible* series in the late 1980’s, it took four years of intensive and at times humiliating search before a publisher willing to invest in anything bigger than one volume of collected essays, and to give it the explicit title “feminist,” was found.² Until then, whole books about the subject numbered maybe ten, including essay collections. Indeed, essay collections or anthologies were the more common.³ By comparison: By 2004, when the *Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings* was beginning to take shape, it was enthusiastically planned as a much needed sequel.⁴ Moreover, less than twenty-five years after the forerunning anthologies of the early 1980’s and later, we now have, first and foremost, dedicated dictionaries and encyclopedias such as the *Women in Scripture* big volume (*WIS*).⁵ Who remembers that *The Women’s Bible*,⁶ and the European, German-language *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung*⁷ that followed, are less than twenty years old? From a modest beginning of one-volume short commentaries, nowadays there exists a plethora of feminist studies, from anthologies and subject collections to monographs to commentaries and reference works, to consult at your heart’s desire as a matter of course. Moreover, several very big series projects are currently in the making, over and apart from individual books or collections. There is the big European Commentary that is planned to be published in four languages;⁸ and the American Commentary given the name *Wisdom Commentary*, sixty-three volumes

planned and in various stages of preparation at this time.⁹ Let us note the shift from (anthologies of) articles into the “commentary” genre, reserved for hundreds of years only for elite guild members, males of course, and the willingness of established publishers to invest in such big and expensive projects. My own *Feminist Companion* series was reissued in 2010 as is, all volumes, no changes or updates. The *Feminist Companion to the New Testament* is nearly done; both series still fare well from the production angle in spite of changes in publishers, which indicate a readership and continued demand. And I know of other smaller, multi-volume projects that are being prepared as well. And all this is apart from the many, many monographs that are now available.

I would like to emphasize that the shift from collections/anthologies to commentaries represents a professional conquest of sorts. More and more individual female scholars who are not coy or diffident about defining themselves as feminists are commissioned to write commentaries to whole biblical books for the prestigious series, such as the *Anchor Bible (AB)* and the *Old Testament Library (OTL)* or the *Jewish Publication Society (JPS)*. This is perhaps more a personal victory for certain scholars than anything else, although it is in the spirit of the times; I could drop names and refer to individual authors here, such as Cheryl Exum on the Song of Songs¹⁰ or Julia O’Brien on Malachi,¹¹ but it is perhaps not necessary to do this much further. What is even more worth noting are that big series are brought out as dedicated feminist commentaries, not as anthologies, while – as described above – collections continue to be published as well. Consider, for instance, the award-winning *The Torah: A Women’s Commentary*, a Jewish commentary designated for communal as well as academic use.¹² All this indicates that feminist criticism of the bible has made serious inroads into mainstream biblical scholarship, however that “mainstream” is defined.

One more extended example will perhaps suffice to summarize this part of the discussion. In 1977 Marvin Pope, let him rest in peace, published his monumental commentary on the Song of Songs, all 750 pages of it, in the *AB* series.¹³ In it, on pp. 205-10, he refers to Phyllis Trible’s pioneering “Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation” article, originally published in 1973,¹⁴ an article that should be considered as the honored mother of feminist Song of Songs scholarship. In his review of Trible’s work, after summarizing her position, Pope states (p. 210):

Whether Trible’s effort at depatriarchalizing the Hebrew Scriptures will find favor with either conservative biblical scholars or anti-biblicists in the Women’s

Liberation Movement, remains to be seen. With regard to the Song of Song she is certainly correct in recognizing the equal and even dominant role of the female and the absence of male chauvinism or patriarchalism.

Marvin Pope died at eighty years of age in 1997. He was in a minority scholarly position concerning the Song of Songs, because he advanced the theory that it contained more than traces of goddess imagery and even goddess cult, which colored somewhat his report about Song of Song study as a whole and motivated his interest in studies of female centrality in that book. When he published his Song of Songs commentary, apart from Tribble's work he could refer only to few antecedents that recognized female exceptional position in that biblical work, such as C.D. Ginsburg's work from the mid-19th century.¹⁵ Terms such as gender studies, women studies or feminist bible criticism were not available to him. He must have referred to Tribble's work as he read it for the added value it granted his own theories – at least, this is my understanding.

And now, a little over thirty years later? The Song of Songs is one of the biblical books to have received the most attention from feminist critics over the last decades. That there is neither male chauvinism nor patriarchalism in it has been claimed or refuted time and time again, among others by Cheryl Exum, a feminist whose 2005 commentary on the Song of Songs, mentioned earlier, was published by the *OTL*, which is perhaps even more mainstream and respected than the *AB*, where Pope published his own commentary. Exum's work is now the leading commentary to consult while studying this biblical text – by all, whatever their convictions; ignore it at your peril, if you do you would be considered not only old fashioned but also an ill-informed and ignorant scholar. (Some scholars are notoriously ignorant, as paradoxically as this may sound.) Furthermore, new scholarly voices, also male ones, are now raised in favor of reading the Song of Songs from a queer, masculinist, or other agendas.¹⁶

I have used the example of the Song of Songs and the entry into the Commentary genre¹⁷ because both illustrate how women studies morphed into feminist criticism, then sub-headed under gender studies together with queer studies and others as fashion and progress unfolded, have influenced the guild precisely at its soft belly – the required “publish or perish” game. This is a serious game, as we all know. Our livelihood depends not only on publication quality but also on publication quantity.

Another aspect of publication is that of participation in periodicals, and in the scholarly or semi-scholarly societies that produce those journals, or with which the journals are somehow affiliated. The *JFSR* has been the first periodical of women studies in religion, a pioneer since 1985. Now, however, periodical publication and journaling in gender studies is also extended into the virtual worlds. Two examples will suffice here. The

first is *lectio difficilior*, published online bi-annually since 2000,¹⁸ and closely affiliated with the European society of Women in Theological Research (ESWTR);¹⁹ and the second is the *Reform Jewish Women's Archive* (since 1995) including archives, blogs and an encyclopedia.²⁰ This is perhaps the place to add that, in recent years, the general editors of the *Journal of Biblical Literature* and *Semeia/Semeia Studies* have often been women known for their feminist view; and more mainstream than those journals, in the US at least, is impossible.²¹

Changes in Subject Matter and Job Opportunities

Along the way, although our ability to change our own personal situation was not always that great (and of that a little later still), we did manage to revolutionize not only the appearance but also the contents of biblical studies. Women-, feminist-, and gender studies practitioners insisted all along that the personal may be political, the marginal can and at times should be centered, that the objective is a fallacy and the subjective may be an asset rather than a hindrance, that new topics can be brought into the discussion – and this resulted in opening up biblical studies in a way that would have been unthinkable, say, three decades ago. And if three decades seem a long time to you, just remember that the bible has been interpreted for two millennia and more now – mostly by males, and transmitted and copied by males, according to their own gender and class interests, as formulated so well by Phyllis Bird and others. Interest feeds publication opportunities and vice versa; if Marxist,²² queer,²³ and even social-Scientific bible criticism so called, and other approaches, are current in biblical studies today, from anthologies to ideologically and openly dedicated commentaries, as evidenced by publications and *inter alia* also by the SBL and other conference programs, this is to a very large extent due to the outstanding publication and teaching output of women-, feminist-, and gender studies practitioners in the western world, in the past decades and as it is being continued.

Yet another aspect of access is that of *job opportunities*. And this is tied up with the general outlook of the profession at this time, with contents as well as market conditions playing their part. It is no secret: for a while in the 1990's and early 2000' it was *PC* to create token “women studies” units at colleges and universities. Some of those units have remained and flourished and expanded, especially at private American universities and colleges, I guess mainly thanks to popularity and serious-minded external donors. In Europe and in other places many such units have dwindled into integration with main theological units, department, schools – not a bad thing in itself, but bringing about less jobs and less power. Most of those units that remained in existence have altered into

“gender studies” by necessity, content and at times definition. Furthermore, as Marvin Pope wrote decades ago, “conservatists” are not happy with relinquishing their power positions concerning religious matters. Inside the Guild and outside it, they would resist gender studies – as they have resisted women studies and feminist criticism – as less relevant than, say, traditional theology or textual criticism, old style. This is a power game, pure and far from simple, in which factors of gender, religion, confessional convictions, color, class, sexual preference, age, place – in short, ideologies and interests – have far more weight than considerations of scholarly practice, value, and substance. Did I say power game? We have learnt or we should have learnt – from Foucault and Barthes and Derrida and Deleuze, and others who continued in their footsteps, that culture is transmitted like all knowledge – as power. “Culture” by definition includes religion and religious texts. Now, perhaps since the very inception of the “classical” knowledge of religious texts, in the sense of textual criticism high and low, those texts’ ownership was assigned to certain gendered classes. The inferior practitioners of gender or gendered studies therefore turned to other spaces to find their operating niches. And while so doing, they enriched biblical studies by bringing in wider considerations, from psychology to literary criticism and much besides. Today at Tel Aviv University I have a very promising male student who is writing a dissertation on masculinity models in the Hebrew Bible, using all the cultural theories he can master, with emphasis on French theorists. Another young man defended his PhD in March 2011: he is from Sao Paulo, a homosexual examining the attitude in Deuteronomy towards those deviants, those LGBT, or call them GLBTQ if you wish, who form a distinctive class among others who “do evil in the eyes of the lord”. Such work for non-established scholars, at the beginning of their academic journey, would have been unheard of, not to mention unauthorized, even fifteen years ago. Such work is even now not carried out without institutional difficulties even at a place like Tel Aviv, a secular university, not to mention more confessional or traditionally conservative places. But this is, among other things, what we have done to biblical studies; this is the opening up we have created, not only for women but also for men, riding the wave of convictions and beginning to establish new license for academic subjectivity. A source of justified pride, I think.

And What Do We Want?

Here, once again, another complication intervenes. The question comes up, what will be the outcome of this strife for niche finding? While we are jostling for a position within biblical and religious studies, promoting our self-interests as well as the interests of

others, as indeed we should, there is a subtext at the background. Is this subtext the wish to change places, to acquire a self-satisfying seat in this musical-chair game, to get the power at last after centuries if not millennia of suppression, to get justice, to unseat injustice, to acquire privileges reserved to the self-styled majority? This is one way of seeing the situation, as a historical opening for revenge, ideologically and practically. Another way is to gaze at ourselves frankly and ask: What are we doing? Are we trying to decenter, unseat, the Masters – in order to secure their privileged spaces for ourselves, at long last? Ultimately, are we in this game in order to trade places, to use “Her Master’s tools”, as per the title of Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner’s recently edited volume?²⁴ Is this what it is about, inventing a new hierarchy that will suit us better as the daughters and sons of the socially, or sexually, or religiously oppressed and underprivileged? This is an issue that requires some reflection/reflexion.

The Times They Are A-Changing

The marketplace for biblical studies, as for religious studies in general, is changing. A fundamentalist and confessional interest in those fields remains roughly stable, but there – as Marvin Pope noted decades ago – inroads for gender studies are very slow. Among more moderate confessionals and non-confessionals that are interested in religion, Islam is now the politically preferred topic. This is a global tendency that is reflected in the number of academic jobs offered and in those jobs’ significance for the personal advancement ladder. The fact that in biblical studies, as well as in religious studies in general, the student gender balance is changing – the field is now feminized with all that this entails, such as greater curiosity concerning gender and related issues – does not have much impact on job finding. On the contrary: we see here a loss of status, similar to what is happening in other feminized professions. To give but one example: women are now a majority in most medical schools. But when they qualify, they become MP’s rather than heart surgeons, the latter being much more lucrative but considered more demanding and “a man’s job”. With the feminization of family medicine comes a status loss of that vocation, coupled with a potential financial loss – or does it happen the other way around?

So What to Do? 1: Integrate into Other Units, Forsaking the “Gender Studies” Banner?

So what to do, on that front? I have some thoughts although little advice.

It seems to me that each one of us, you, me, has a better chance if she indeed *integrates*

within a faculty on her topic of expertise, and not remain under the gender studies banner or umbrella. This is first and foremost a pragmatic suggestion. Research done under the auspices of any department that does not sell itself specifically by the F- or G-word is likely to be accepted more easily by the uninitiated, or the objectors. In addition, this suggestion has an ideological background. Women studies, or feminist criticism, or gender studies, is not a discipline. It is a cluster of approaches and critical practices, better than some, no worse than others. It has little to gain, apart from the creation of a very limited number of positions, from ghettoizing itself and staying isolated within and with its own converted disciples. Recognition of the non-value of inclusive exclusivity makes conversions and the attraction of neophytes much more viable. I am not suggesting that anybody should be coy about her area of interest: on the contrary. In years gone by I was proud of being a feminist critic and announced it to all and sundry: now it is so natural that it goes without saying. I simply marvel at people who think that gender issues, linked to class and other issues, are not important enough to require scholarly investigation from this subjective viewpoint. I am just suggesting what has been borne out by experience: integrating into a unit without agreeing to be or be called its fig leaf, even though in practice you may function as such, works better. Being indirect is no great pleasure, but at times more efficient than one would want. Some jobs may be lost in this way. *Touché*. But downsizing of academic religion units is now a global phenomenon. So jostle for place in this way and make yourself less vulnerable.

So What to Do? 2: Integrate Cultural Studies into Your Teaching

And this leads me to my next point. In the academic world most of us have to teach: very few have dedicated research appointments. In order to teach, we must attract students. Students, who have conservative, fixed ideas about religion or bible and what they want, attend seminaries to study theology more than universities that teach religious studies. (Institutions that teach both theology and religious studies side by side are still there but their number is getting smaller.) Theology students are not, as a group, our natural or willing audiences. Those students who choose to come to Humanities departments, where most religious studies units are now, are mostly less traditional, some outright secular. They would be interested in studying religions and their foundational texts as a cultural spectacle, or as interrelated expressions of the cultural web we call life. It is therefore correct to add general criteria, a wider knowledge base, to the classical “master’s tools” of the past, those tools that many of us adopt with enthusiasm so as to show the Masters our abilities or even superiorities in playing their

own game. Such anchoring of feminist wares in general theory and praxis is what is happening anyway in most western countries. Religious studies units are losing their former status as faculties wherever the church, any church, pulls out as chief supporter and financier. Former theology and religious studies faculties are downgraded to departments or sub-departments and incorporated into the Humanities. This is happening all over: I can name such occurrences in as disparate places as Israel, England, The Netherlands, The US and Hong Kong, places where I have taught over the last decade, to mention just a few. This is primarily an administrative move and aimed at saving funds. However, it also makes sense, given the cultural climate and Zeitgeist. Some of us may mourn the passing of classical theological supremacy, a process started already in the European Renaissance; others will welcome this opportunity to operate within a wider framework. This trend will undoubtedly gather more momentum in years to come (as will radical fundamentalism, on the other edge of the spectrum). If we join the downsizing integration trend willingly and see its advantages for us, we shall be in a better position in the coming years. If we see only the negative implications our situation, in a diminished workplace, will become even worse. Those of us who have chosen the path of cooperation in the last ten years have not always succeeded: I am a good (or shall we say bad) example of this, since my attempt to institute a bible-as-culture program in Amsterdam was not successful. It was my responsibility and therefore my fault and failure; nevertheless, this happened partly because I did not receive institutional support. I believe that this institutional support is coming; it will arrive, when recognition of public interest in another kind of religion studies (a better term perhaps than the current “religious studies”), and bible studies, will register itself with the decision-makers. Islam is nowadays hot and sexy, but a certain and gratis renaissance of other monotheistic religions will soon follow, I do hope, even as Islam’s origins and takeoffs continue to be researched. Comparative study of current religions is ultimately much more attractive to contemporary students than the comparative study of ancient religions and ancient texts. Lamentable and short sighted? Perhaps. If we want to survive, and spread our messages, we had better join the trend and do what we can with it rather than lose the battle.

To Conclude

So where are we? Gender studies in religion have made a difference – a great difference. Feminist criticism revolutionized my own field of biblical studies, creating a wider, more democratic knowledge base: listening to voices never heard before, energizing a tired profession, creating a new academic arena, spilling over outside it

into society. Those are intellectual, ethical and at times even practical achievements. However, this success is so far not spectacular in that it is not fully translated into the workplace. Whether we can make it an equal workplace partner, whether we can fully integrate into biblical and religion studies academic units on our own terms, with academic positions to match our efforts and abilities, depends not only on us. These are not easy times. But in as much as it does depend on us, we would do well to move our quest to the cultural and intercultural arenas, past and present.²⁵ And this is already happening, so it seems.

¹ “Drop” here refers to semen. The word translated “putrid” is not pejorative but, according to most commentators, refers to the short productive life of human semen.

² Athalya Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, 19 volumes (Sheffield Academic Press then Continuum, 1993-2001; 3 volumes edited with Carole R. Fontaine).

³ Two of my favorites are: A. Yarbro Collins, ed., *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship* (Biblical Scholarship in North America; Society of Biblical Literature Centennial Publications. Chico: Scholars Press, 1985) and Letty Russell, *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1985).

⁴ Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff, eds., *A Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings*. 13 volumes so far (first Sheffield Academic Press, then Continuum).

⁵ Carol Meyers, Toni Craven and Ross Shepard Kraemer, eds., *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

⁶ Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., *The Women's Bible Commentary* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, originally 1992, expanded version 1998. Newly revised and updated 3rd edition 2012 (together with Jacqueline E. Lapsley)].

⁷ Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker, eds., *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung* (Guetersloh: Guetersloher Verlaghaus, 1999 [2007]).

⁸ Irmtraud Fischer with Mercedes Navarro Puerto and Aandrea Taschl-Erber, general eds., *The Bible and Women: An Exegetical and Liturgical Encyclopedia* (Kolhammer, Stuttgart). To the best of my knowledge, the Torah volume appeared in Spanish in 2009 and in German in 2010. Other volumes of this multi-language project are in preparation.

⁹ Barbara Reid is the general editor of this mega-project, with an array of editorial committee members, authors and editors. The project is to be published by the Liturgical Press.

¹⁰ J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary* (OTL; Westminster John Knox: 2005).

¹¹ Julia Myers O'Brien, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon, 2004).

¹² Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss, eds., *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (New York: WRJ, 2008).

¹³ Marvin H. Pope, *The Song of Songs* (AB; New Haven: Yale UP, 1977).

¹⁴ Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," *JAAR* 41/1973: 30-48.

¹⁵ Christian D. Ginsburg, *The Song of Songs and Coheleth* (New York: Ktav, 1970 [=1857]). As clear from his bibliography in his commentary, Pope did not know of S.D. Goitein's short but pioneering and original book, *Studies in the Bible* (Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1957), in which two chapters dealt almost directly with the Song of Songs and parallels to female prominence in it in modern life. The two chapters were later translated into English.

¹⁶ Fiona C. Black, *The Artifice of Love: Grotesque Bodies and the Song of Songs* (London and New York: T&T Clarke/Continuum, 2009). Roland Boer, "Keeping It Literal: The Economy of the Song of Songs," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 7 (2007), online; D. Clines, "Why is there a Song of Songs and What does it do to you if you read it?" *Jian Dao: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 1 (1994): 3–27. Stephen D. Moore and Virginia Burrus, "Unsafe Sex: Feminism, Pornography, and the Song of Songs," *Biblical Interpretation* 11 (2003): 24-52; Stephen D. Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor And Other Queer Spaces in and Around the Bible* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001).

¹⁷ I beg to be excused for not describing other self-defined feminist commentaries on biblical books, such as those written by Adele Berlin on Zephaniah (*AB*, 1994), Lamentations (*OTL*, 2002) and Esther (*JPS*, 2001; also in Hebrew); or Tamara C. Eskenazi on Ruth (*JPS* 2011). There are more. Citations here reflect personal taste as well as, in some cases, acquired prominence in the field.

¹⁸ The journal is published in English, German and French, and the editors are Silvia Schroer and Tal Ilan; http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/e/index_e.html.

¹⁹ "The *European Society of Women in Theological Research* (ESWTR) was founded in Switzerland in 1986 and currently has over 600 members. It is a network of women conducting academic research in the areas of theology and religious studies that provides opportunities for women from different denominations and religions as well as

from all of Europe, north and south, east and west, to meet and to dialogue. The Society organizes a European conference every two years. Conference themes are intended to raise important issues in feminist theology. Between conferences, women meet on national or regional levels as well as in thematic subject groups.” From the ESWTR homepage, available in three languages: <http://www.eswtr.org/about-eswtr.html>.

²⁰ <http://jwa.org/aboutjwa>.

²¹ The current general editor of *JBL* is Adele Reinhartz, the previous editor of *Semeia Studies* was Gale Yee. This is also the place to remark on the growing number of woman presenters in SBL and other scholarly conferences, in the committees thereof, and at the head of such societies.

²² Roland Boer, *Knocking On Heaven’s Door* (London: Routledge, 2002); Roland Boer with Jorunn Økland, eds., *Marxist Feminist Criticism of the Bible* (Bible in the Modern World; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008); Gale A. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve* (Indianapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003). From this year (2011) there is a new consultation at the SBL about poverty in the bible, which again will probably display not only socio-ethical concern but also Marxists views.

²³ Ovidiu Creanga, ed., *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011); Ken Stone, ed., *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Continuum, 2001); Ken Stone, *Practicing Safer Texts* (New York: Continuum, 2005); Teresa J. Hornsby and Ken Stone, eds., *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship* (Atlanta: SBL, 2011).

²⁴ Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, eds. *Her Master’s Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse* (Atlanta: SBL, 2005).

²⁵ It is instructive to learn from Letty Russell and Phyllis Trible, two of the prominent matriarchs of contemporary feminist bible criticism, who already in 2006 edited a book of essays called *Sarah, Hagar and their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives* (Louisville: John Knox Press).

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