

HAS SCIENTIFIC BIBLICAL  
RESEARCH CATEGORICALLY  
ACKNOWLEDGED FEMINIST THEMES  
AND METHODS?  
A REVIEW OF FEMINIST AND  
TRADITIONAL EXEGESIS DONE ON THE  
LETTER OF JUDE

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The future of feminist biblical interpretation has recently been debated on several occasions and by several scholars, for example J. Cheryl Exum, Jorunn Økland, Caroline Vander Stichele at the international meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Tartu Estonia (2010), Sheila Redmond during the international SBL meeting in Amsterdam (2012), and Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza leading a discussion group during the annual SBL meeting in Chicago (2012), to name just a few. They have pointed out current trends and directions in the field and the issues feminist, women and gender studies are facing. This is also confirmed in the latest issue of *Bible and Women*, namely that a discussion of the field of feminist biblical studies in the twentieth century can be done only by pointing out areas of research that need further development (Schüssler-Fiorenza 2014: 17).

Too often I am confronted with the question of whether feminist biblical interpretation is still relevant. The question may be asked: Has feminist exegesis really made a difference to the way scholars, students and Bible readers interpret and apply biblical texts? Have feminist studies been taken seriously by traditional exegetes? And in this respect I want to point out that traditional exegetes are by no means solely male, but that the resistance is also coming from female traditional exegetes. Are we losing ground to renewed fundamentalist approaches to the Bible? Do we need new paradigms, redefinitions, new actions?

This discussion is divided into two sections. First is a brief overview of the development and status of feminist biblical interpretation. Second is an outline of various interpretations of the Letter of Jude: the historical-critical and newer interpretations of Jude; the themes and methods applied

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by *female* authors; and research based on a feminist approach to the Letter of Jude. In conclusion the question is asked whether traditional exegetes acknowledge the research based on feminist exegesis.

### **Brief Overview of the Status of Feminist Biblical Interpretation**

The field of feminist and women's studies, as a forum for creating knowledge through women-centred research, analysis, theoretical and methodological development, has by now established a virtually worldwide presence. Feminism has spread into "a multiple stranded network of ideas" that have and still give hope for marginalised groups in all their diversity for both women and men making them visible and giving them a voice (Clay 2012: 195). The purpose of feminism is to challenge traditional ways of producing knowledge generated within a disciplinary, primarily cognitive, context. These contexts are the traditional academic institutions that are hierarchically structured with fix rules and regulations concerning knowledge production by research published as peer-reviewed articles in accredited subject-specific journals. These paradigms define criteria for choosing problems and methodologies, and knowledge developed over long periods within the specifications of a paradigm (Starbuck 2006: 77; Schüssler-Fiorenza 2014: 5). And this is exactly what we are doing—we formulate specific paradigms in which we function and produce knowledge. This research paradigm claims objectivity, methodological principles and rationality. These traditional methods of knowledge production are motivated by economic power foundations, and research achievements are valued and measured numerically: more articles in accredited journals and books published generate more research grants for the institutions and ensure promotions and higher rankings for the departments and researchers. This form of knowledge production therefore influences career success and long-term economic welfare. Criteria for success are formulated in terms of output of contributions and not of the generation of genuine contributions to new knowledge. This is specifically applicable to the South African academic culture, where accredited journal articles are valued more than book publications. This is perhaps the very reason why traditional biblical exegesis that applies the historical-critical approach is still valued more highly than feminist and gender interpretations (cf. Nortjé-Meyer 2012: 26).

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Having its roots in the Aristotelian (384-324 BCE) sober analysis and formal logic, and finding its way through the early Christian School of Alexandria (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> CE)<sup>1</sup> into Christian thought, the historical-critical approach was anchored in the principle of the human reason characteristic of the progress of the natural sciences during the 18-19<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment (Oeming 2006: 10-12). The emergence of the evolution theory and the critical approach towards the biblical creation narrative, divine inspiration of the Bible, the virgin birth, miracles, the resurrection etcetera, led to scepticism about the divine infallibility of the Bible, and the Bible was perceived instead as a product of human creativity. In competing with the natural sciences, the human sciences and eventually Theology were determined to justify their existence as academic disciplines. Since then, the historical-critical method has been developed by the theological disciplines into many sub-groups and individual approaches to such an extent that the historical-critical method of interpreting the Bible is perceived as the prime achievement of academic theology. No wonder that the historical-critical method developed into the norm of academic standard which every student of theology in an academic setting must learn. Therefore, academic and scientific interpretation of biblical texts became synonymous with historical-critical interpretation (Oeming 2006: 31). To be able to achieve this scientific goal, the ideal of “complete” objectivity has been established.

Several theories have been developed to support the objective historical-critical research: 1. The researcher’s belief and value systems must be left behind. The researcher must be entirely “neutral” in her/his interpretation of biblical texts; 2. The researcher must set aside any personal opinion or judgment and reflect the facts as they occur in the text. 3. The researcher must observe the historical facts as presented by the original author objectively (Oeming 2006: 17-18). This implies that in the process of explanation and interpretation any contemporary as well as dogmatic and moral issues must be set aside. The researcher must become invisible—faceless, voiceless, clueless (having no opinion). As a result, the historical-critical research can claim historical and scientific veracity and theological approval—qualities feminist biblical interpretation has been denied.

However, the liberation movement started in Latin-America in the 1950-1960s brought new perspectives to biblical interpretation. This movement spawned liberation theology<sup>2</sup>, which arose principally as a moral reaction to social injustice in that region. This movement eventually put the focus on the readers of biblical texts and their worlds, resulting in

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the reader-response criticism, the discipline to which feminism, women studies and gender studies belong. In searching for meaning it became clear that meaning cannot be objective, but instead is rather constructed by the reader and influenced by her/his political, social and cultural context and sexual category. Therefore, interpretation became construction, production and re-reading, and eventually resulted in deconstructionism (cf. Exum 1996: 91). But traditional exegetes do not see it this way. Oeming (2006: 75), for example, is of the opinion that what feminists are doing is no longer drawing meaning from a text, but instead imposing meaning on a text. This is simply not true. Feminist exegetes focus on aspects in and behind the text that violate gender justice and social rights for the contemporary reader. It is about reading against the grain to reveal the harmful patriarchal and androcentric gender ideologies of the authors of biblical texts (Exum 1996: 89).

According to Scott (2001: 44), the developments in the field of feminist and women's scholarship involve an evolution from feminism to women's studies to gender studies. In the 1960s feminists were working for equal rights in the academy and workplace (e.g. the ordination of women as clergy), claiming that their interests and achievements were not represented (Bentley 1970: 11-12). However, the "issues they put on the table were considered partial as well as political, and perceived as in opposition to established professional standards favouring impartial and disinterested investigations" (Vander Stichele 2013: 2-3). In reaction, feminists questioned the kind of knowledge produced in the academy and the standards used to determine professionalism.<sup>3</sup>

Women's studies, which followed in the 1970s, featured women both as subject and object of investigation (Plaskow 2014: 21-34). Women's studies assumed a separate, common identity as women with a shared experience of oppression. The focus was on women in the Bible by women, outlining the category of "women". Women's experience became normative.<sup>4</sup> Traditional scholarship perceived these women's studies as lacking the objectivity required for scientific research, however. By the end of the seventies, women's studies were challenged by the growing awareness of the multiple differences between women. The objection was that the category "woman" referred to white, middle-class, heterosexual, Christian women, and therefore negated multiple differences between women such as race, economic status and sexual orientation. One of the central arguments of the critique by black feminists in the United Kingdom and feminist women of colour in the United States was that Western feminism was preoccupied with inequalities arising on the basis

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of gender relations, to the exclusion of race, class and other dimensions of social inequality. The concept of “gender” was introduced to problematise a unified notion of women’s identity and experience (Scholz 2014: 53-70).

Scott and Vander Stichele argue that there was no linear development from “feminism-to-women-to-gender studies”, but that “gender” was also used as a conceptual tool within feminist and women’s studies. Gender studies must therefore be seen as a further theoretical development generated by issues within feminist and women’s studies themselves. The boundaries are not as clear as would appear. Despite their common interests, the differences between feminist and gender studies must be taken into consideration. Although the ideological-critical perspective from feminist and women’s studies remains, gender studies problematise and destabilise identity-based politics that is grounded on a concept such as “women”. Gender studies also widen the perspective to issues of sexual difference at large, including biological, cultural and socio-economical constructions of masculine and feminine identity, sexual orientation, and resist an essentialist and a-historical understanding of the correlating identities (Vander Stichele 2013: 5-6; ead. & Penner 2005). Furthermore, gender studies pay special attention to the interconnectedness of ideology and rhetoric.

However, feminist theory claims to have always incorporated a critical interest in the representation of sexed categories and masculinities. The difference in gender studies is the renewed examination of such matters by men themselves, who engage with feminist theory to inform their own work. Objections from feminists are that the new field of study will potentially weaken feminist biblical scholarship, rendering women invisible. They fear the loss of the autonomy for space to work on women and feminist theory and are concerned that this will also put men and men’s interests right back into centre focus. However, according to Guest, this will not happen if men, male sexuality and masculinities are presented as problematised categories (Guest 2012: 10, 31-39; Cornwall 2012: 236-241).

Furthermore, Guest prefers the term “gender studies” rather than “gender criticism”, because it does not indicate what kind of ideological perspectives or political theory informs its study of gender. It only indicates that gender is the object of criticism. In her opinion, gender studies make better sense, because gender studies are a home in which a range of theoretical positions might find residence (Guest 2012: 150). My question is whether or not this is also true of gender criticism. The kind of

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ideological perspectives or political theories that inform the criticism can as well be specified.

Brenner (2008) asks if these fine semantic distinctions between feminist criticism, women's studies, gender studies, gender criticism, and masculinities really matter. Are these new terminologies not a way to camouflage or abandon a stigmatised and overtly political "F-word" in favour of a more neutral and respectable "gender" approach? (Guest 2012: 4). The reason for the shift in terminology is that feminist criticism is accused of taking only certain kinds of feminist-informed theories and approaches while inevitably marginalising others (2012: 4). In the most recent issue of *The Bible and Women* series, Schüssler-Fiorenza (2014: 1-2) explains that feminism in this volume is used in a performative sense qualified differently in different social-cultural and theoretical-religious locations. Therefore, feminism is used as an "umbrella term for gender, womanist, liberationist, postcolonial, Asian, African or indigenous, Latina, queer, interreligious and transnational studies and many other kyriarchy-critical perspectives and approaches". This explanation helps to understand the term "feminism", but does not really solve the problem of feminism as the "F-word".

Another reason for a shift in terminology is that feminism and women studies could not successfully problematise and destabilise heteronormativity. As long as the two-sex, two-gender binary is enforced as essential, heteronormativity will determine the way we constitute femininity and masculinity. Therefore, the categories of sex, gender and sexualities need to be deconstructed, as does the character of the deity that is gendered.

Guest (2012: 150-164) is of the opinion that "genderqueer" will do what feminism and women's studies could not achieve. Feminists complained in the 1980s that "gender studies" sounded neutral and quite inoffensive and would not have the impact of feminism. But Guest thinks that if "queer" is tacked to "gender", this more subversive terminology will have the potential to "ruffle the feathers as did the F-word" (2012: 151).

But do we really need something to "ruffle the feathers"? Already in the 1980s, feminism was "declared dead" or "hopelessly outdated" and the more popular "postfeminism" was promoted by postfeminists like Naomi Wolf (1991, 1993), Katie Roiphe (1993); and Rene Denfeld (1995), who disassociate themselves from the feminist movement. Instead they advocate politics that reclaim the right to be sexual, fashionable, feminine and sensual. They distanced themselves from the man-hating stereotyped

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feminism for an agenda that embraces men as lovers, fathers, brothers, allies and friends (Guest 2012: 1-2 ftm 1; Houvouras & Carter 2008: 238). Those negative stereotyping of feminism is still the main problem among students and religious people and the reason why feminist studies at institutions are not viable. They distance themselves from feminism as if feminism *per se* is advocating man-hate.<sup>5</sup>

This approach is confirmed by research undertaken by Houvouras and Carter, which finds that students are more favourably disposed to women's movements than towards feminism (Houvouras & Carter 2008: 237). Scholars have also argued that some, particularly younger, individuals believe that gender equality has already been achieved, and therefore the need for the feminist movement has passed (Peltola 2004; Winston 2012: 262-270). Their research reveals that while university and college students support egalitarian gender roles for women both at home and in the workplace, they do not support feminism. Therefore, the results revealed high levels of social support for feminist goals and low levels of self-identification with feminism. Mega Clay (2012: 198) cautions that

The majority of young women live in a dangerous space of thinking that the battle for equality is already won and are distracted by the demand of the heteronormative value of their bodies. The generational gap widens and the struggle for equality of their feminist foremothers is lost in translation (Clay 2012: 198)

These results are also relevant for South Africa, because the appointments of women in strategic positions is carefully monitored and required by the South African constitution. However, we notice that gender equality does not necessarily mean gender justice. Violence against women is escalating. Therefore, the "genderqueer" terminology as Guest suggests, will be even less acceptable in Africa where leaders, including President Jacob Zuma, declared openly that "homosexuality" is not inherent to the people of Africa and was introduced by Europeans.<sup>6</sup>

But recently countries like Germany, Australia, New Zealand, India, Bangladesh and Nepal took the initiative to authorise a third gender, namely intersexuality.<sup>7</sup> In Germany parents are now allowed to leave the gender of their new-born babies blank on birth certificates, in effect creating a new category of "indeterminate sex". This came after a study by Germany's internal affairs that as many as one in 2,000 people have characteristics of both sexes. Be this as it may, it seems that the legal endorsement of a third sex is not without its problems.

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Although the legal authorisation of a third sex will not solve the feminist/gender/queer terminology dilemma, it can finally open a way to undermine heteronormativity. My own suggestion is that we should again introduce the “one sex model” used in antiquity (Laquer 1990), not as “one male sex”, but as “one human sex” constructed by different identities performed and qualified differently in different social-cultural locations. However, this notion has already been voiced by Judith Butler’s theory of gender and sex performativity published in the early 1990s.<sup>8</sup>

During the 2012 SBL/AAR annual meeting in Chicago, Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (2013: 1-5) led a panel of up-and-coming scholars to discuss the future of feminist theology and feminist biblical studies. The roundtable discussions were published in the 2012 edition of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*. Unfortunately, nothing really new was put on the table. All the issues had already been addressed in some or another way by feminist biblical studies: for example, the exclusion of life experiences of Latina (Hildalgo 2013: 120-131) and African American women in the US (Owens 2013: 138-146); how feminist biblical studies can remain a discipline (Kotrosits 2013: 131-138); commitment to interdisciplinarity in terms of contemporary social and cultural studies (Elkins 2013: 146-153); and the problem of Christian fundamentalism (Reid 2013: 154-161). However, the discussion group provided pivotal points that need further and continuous exploration and discussion.

The newest addition to the discussion of the past and future of feminist biblical studies was also edited by Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (2014) as part of the epic series *The Bible and Women*.<sup>9</sup> This issue is about *The Contemporary Period: Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century*. In concluding the discussion, a few areas of research that need further development have been suggested. Leony Renk (2014: 309-324) advocates “Bibliodrama”, and calls it an exegesis with the body (2014: 314). The aim with “Bibliodrama” is to liberate biblical traditions and biblical interpretation from paradigms enforced by traditional biblical interpretation. That implies the “development of new democratic methods and educational concepts that nurture experiences of freedom and positively reinforce awareness and action for change” (2014: 313). Regula Grünenfelder discusses the rediscovery of theology of wisdom or Sophia<sup>10</sup> by feminist theology and biblical interpretation as experience and longing for justice for all, but especially for women. It is about women creating wisdom liturgies as space where there is neither orthodoxy nor “right” formulas; it is a space of silence and no words (2014: 332). Claudia Janssen and Hanne Köhler discuss the continuing importance of Bible



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translation in language that is inclusive—not only of women, but also of race, class and disability. The use of inclusive metaphors for God seems to be problematic and marked by conflict. They point out the challenges and difficulties of Bible translation due to temporal and cultural differences; the long history of exegesis and its impact; and that people consider some translations as “original” and argue that any changes will distort the purity and originality of the text (2014: 354). Mega Clay identifies in feminist research an incomplete account of children and childhood, especially the female child: “Childhood is addressed mostly in asexual and aspiritual terms, innocence or evil, original sin and baptism and in the male gender” (Clay 2012: 196). We should be aware that the traditions that shape the body of the female and male child will have a determining impact on the body of the female and male adult.

### **Traditional and Newer Interpretations of the Letter of Jude**

Many interpreters of previous generations argued that there is a canon of authoritative New Testament documents within the canon. The Gospels, Pauline and Johannine literature were always perceived as more authoritative than the other New Testament literature, like the Letters of Jude, 2 Peter and James. They were considered to be of inferior quality and the products of the “later church”. No wonder that prior to the 1990s only one monograph exclusively devoted to the Letter of Jude had been published (1823). It was published posthumously by Thomas Tomkinson, who lived between 1631-1710, and was titled *A Practical Discourse upon the Epistle by Jude* (cf. Charles 2009: 83). Commentaries and especially series of commentaries on the texts of the New Testament, including Jude, were written often in combination with 1 and/or 2 Peter or as part of the so-called “General Letters”. A good example is the early work of J.N.D. Kelly (1969) and more recently the text-immanent commentary of Lewis Donelson (2010).

As discussed earlier, since the enlightenment of the middle 19<sup>th</sup> century, the dominant paradigm for academic biblical studies was the historical-critical method. Source, form and redaction criticism developed and was applied to studies on the Gospels, the Pauline letters and eventually to the General Letters. Most of the publications on the Letter of Jude are written from within the historical-critical paradigm.<sup>11</sup> However,

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one of the early Jude scholars who distanced herself from the historical-critical approach was Eta Linnemann, who wrote “*Biblical Criticism on Trial: How Scientific is ‘Scientific Theology?’*” In her commentary she also criticises the conclusion drawn by historical-criticism on Jude, for example the discussions on the identity of the author and the location of the first readers (2001: 137-138). Davids and Webb also noticed a growing discontent with the unitary historical-criticism paradigm because it was less fruitful and inadequate to describe the overall purpose and impact of the New Testament texts being studied (2009: 1). Therefore new methods have been developed. Davids and Webb are careful not to say that these new methodologies have displaced the older paradigm, but suggest that they are building on and going beyond the historical-criticism, because “much of the data from the older paradigm is used in the newer methodologies” (Davids & Webb 2009: 1).

Earle Ellis’s (1978) midrashic approach stimulated new interest in the Letter of Jude. He identifies the use of prophetic types as central to the author’s rhetorical strategy. It was followed in 1983 by Richard Bauckham’s monumental commentary on Jude and 2 Peter.<sup>12</sup> As a specialist in eschatology and apocalyptic traditions he emphasises the eschatological typology and apocalyptic prophecy in Jude. As a result of these developments, a flood of commentaries and several monographs on Jude were published from 1990 onwards (Charles 2009: 83). A good example is the publication of *Reading Jude with New Eyes: Methodological Reassessments of the Letter of Jude* in 2009 as the result of research done by a committee of scholars working since 2004 on the impact of recent methodological developments to the Letters of James, Peter and Jude. “Reading Jude with New Eyes” seeks to move the study of Jude beyond the methodological paradigm of form and redaction criticism.

These newer methodologies are cross-disciplinary in nature. Several publications applied the classical rhetoric and focused on the rhetorical nature of Jude. The leading scholars are Duane Watson with his groundbreaking work in 1988; he was soon followed by Wolthuis (1989), Steven Kraftchick (2002), and more recently William Brosend (2004; 2006), Robert Webb (2009) and Daryl Charles (2009). At the same time insights from the social sciences resulted in the development of the social-scientific criticism, which uses a variety of ethnographic, anthropological and sociological theories. Some focused on the cultural and historical contexts of the ancient Mediterranean world (Green 2008), while others focused on the understanding of human social behaviour, like the highly commended work of Jerome Neyrey (1993).<sup>13</sup> Jeremy Hultin applies Bourdieu’s

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sociological theory of practise to analyse Jude's use of language as social practise (2009). There were also applications of advances in linguistics and reflections on the reading process itself, resulting in various forms of linguistic-based criticism. An example of such an approach is David Turner, Ellis Deibler and Janet Turner (1996: i), who rooted their commentary on Jude in the "grammatical-historical hermeneutic method, which respects the historicity and grammatical linguistic meaning of the text". They did a semantic structural analysis as it relates to preparing biblical texts for cross-language translation projects. There were also other readings of the Jude text, reflecting canonical criticism like Ruth Anne Reese (2007), and those focusing on the theological world of Jude e.g. Darian Lockett (2009), or the theological interpretation of Rebecca Skaggs (2004), who explains Jude from a Pentecostal theological perspective.

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### Female Authors Interpreting Jude

Only a few female authors have contributed to the interpretation of Jude in the form of commentaries, monographs and/or journal articles. Most female authors have applied the historical-critical approach, e.g. Sara Winter (1994); Janet Turner, together with David Turner and Ellis Deibler (1996), did a semantic structural analysis of Jude; Lauri Thurén (1997) approached Jude from a literary perspective in order to lay bare its first setting so that its message and theology can be analysed more reliably; and Rebecca Skaggs (2004) emphasised from a Pentecostal theological perspective the acknowledgement of and faith in the authority and Lordship of God in the lives of the believers in the community of Jude as well as the believers today. Catherine Gunsalus González (2011) also focuses her commentary on Jude on its theological importance for contemporary churches and for Christian living. She raises basic issues of authority, on how the church knows the directions to follow, how Christians should live, and how diverse views should be considered.

Ruth Anne Reese is one of the more prominent female scholars working on the Letter of Jude. Her first monograph, *Writing Jude: The Reader, the Text, and the Author in Constructs of Power and Desire*, was published in 2000. Reese applies several methods of literary analysis to Jude (2000: 3). Her book is divided into three main sections: one on the reader (where she makes use of reader-response criticism and feminist theory), one on the text (using narrative criticism, post-structuralism,

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psychoanalysis, intertextuality and the study of literary tropes), and one on the author (using modern critical theory, especially the early Foucault).

The most prominent approach in Reese's work is reader-response criticism. She alternates between three reader identities. At times, she reads Jude as a biblical scholar. At other times, she is a modern Western woman with no exegetical training. At yet other times, she is the implied reader, a late first-century Christian. These identities finally meld into one—however, it is an identity that is revealed only at the end as the “resisting reader” (2000: 167).

It seems that critics appreciate more her description of the various methodologies, and the nature of writing, reading, and language, than her textual analysis of Jude. James Starr is of the opinion that her book would serve well as an introduction to modern interpretative methods, but is sceptical if these methods in fact enrich our understanding of the Letter of Jude (Starr 2004: 425).

Her second book *2 Peter and Jude: Two Horizons New Testament Commentary*, is published in 2007. Reese employs traditional exegetical methods but seeks to move beyond them to integrate exegesis and theology. It is a discussion of theological method and the importance of reading a text in multiple contexts. Reese discusses Jude's theology in the context of the canon and Jude's theology in contemporary context.

## **Readings of the Letter of Jude Using a Feminist Approach**

Very little research on Jude from a feminist or gender perspective has been done. Hopefully the few publications will stimulate further feminist readings and interpretations of Jude. Although briefly discussed within such a comprehensive volume of topics, Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt's feminist analysis of Jude in *Searching the Scriptures: Volume 2* (1994) identifies important feminist themes in the Letter of Jude. These themes are core issues in feminist exegesis, namely the invisibility of women in the Letter, the female body, allusions to women in biblical traditions, male power and authority exercised in the Christian community.

Ruth Anne Reese's contribution to the interpretation of Jude, in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature* (2012), is about the implications of feminist reading. Reese's reading of Jude in this volume encourages ethical and just actions from a reader-response perspective.

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She locates herself as a woman and as white. She wants to emphasise that her reading has much in common with feminist ethics. She identifies with the beloved to whom the Letter was written and the instruction given by Jude to the beloved that they should practise mercy and salvation. They are not allowed to dominate the ungodly, but should rather participate in spirituality and mercy towards the self and others. Reese discovers in Jude a movement against oppression and towards just action, a recognition that humanity must struggle together towards the common goal of staying within God's love. This is a form of feminist reading that acknowledges difference, the validity of our given location and our choices (2012: 902-903).

Leticia Guardiola-Sáenz's comments on Jude in the new edition of the *Women's Bible Commentary* (2012) are disappointing. Very little space has been allocated to the small Letter, and it gives the impression that feminist interpretation is just a little afterthought tacked on at the end, while the rest of the space is allocated to traditional commentary. Unfortunately this gives the impression that feminist commentary is not really important, and that real biblical explanation is still grounded in the historical-critical approach. The commentary or shall I say the few remarks by Sharyn Dowd on Jude in the 1992 edition of *Women's Bible Commentary* do not take women readers into consideration at all (1992: 468).

My own article "Effeminacy as Vilification in the Letter of Jude: Female Sexuality and the Constitution of Hierarchy and Authority" is in the process of being published. Its aim is to discuss effeminacy as a vilification technique in the Letter of Jude. It questions the power relations embedded in an institutionalised patriarchal mind-set central to sexual ethics and the female body. This power display is demonstrated by the author's presentation to the reader of himself as the embodiment of the authoritative traditions, and the way his opponents are feminised, in terms of female depravity, as a kind of cliché used in religious discourse (cf. Jer 3:1-10). This research explores a privileged heteropatriarchy and its binary understandings of gender and sexual ethics. It seems that binary opposites enforced and sanctioned sexual ethics in the Jude community, although gender-specific issues are absent from the Letter. Masculinity, represented by Jude as the default position, involves an exercising of power and dominance, which the opponents, signified as female depravity, should accept and submit to. The male's active function is defined by mental and physical control. The underlying ideology is that when a man is seduced by desire, he becomes weak and effeminate, namely the **passive object of**

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another's designs and pleasures, revealing a loss of control. In the end, it would seem that desire's most insidious quality lies in its potential to "unman", "humiliate" and "effeminate" (Wilson 2002: 155) (cf. Nortjé-Meyer 2013; 2014).

Betsy Bauman-Martin's contribution *Postcolonial Pollution in the Letter of Jude* (2009) is innovative and refreshing. She employs biblical postcolonial criticism that perceives the Bible as a colonial document. This approach indicates the ways the Bible has functioned as colonial literature in later historical contexts, but also the attitudes toward empire and imperialism in the text itself. Bauman-Martin examines the language of pollution, shame and perversion in Jude from the perspective of postcolonial theory, which offers an analytical apparatus that is especially effective in identifying the power relationships within the text. Using these categories, she examines Jude's use of apocalyptic imagery and ideology as power categories that inform its understanding of authority, gender, the opponents and pollution. She indicates that Jude employs references to the female body and pollution to equate the false teachers with sexual transgression, which is a "typical imperialist move to make women and their bodies the sites of transgression/pollution/mixing" (2009: 78). She concludes: "Like other texts produced in imperial contexts, by colonizers and colonized, women bear the responsibility of group destabilization" (2009: 80).

Gordon Campbell's review of *Reading Jude with New Eyes: Methodological Reassessments of the Letter of Jude* is problematic. Although he does not refer to Bauman-Martin's contribution in particular, his brief remarks on these essays describe them as a "disparagement of Jude, with suspicions about perceived real motives (e.g., domination) or manipulative clout (e.g., involving linguistic sleight of hand), while unsurprising, to be unpersuasive—but then, not everyone sees value in giving an ancient text the benefit of the doubt"<sup>14</sup>. This reflects the issues historical-criticism has with feminist biblical criticism.

The subtext in Campbell's review is that historical-criticism is "objective", "scientific" and therefore "perpetual" —embodying the politics of scientific knowledge production—while feminist interpretation (including women's and gender studies) is "subjective" and "temporal". It seems as if there are a number of approved ways to do exegesis of the Bible, and feminist interpretation is on the non-approved list (Redmond 2012: 2). This view concerning feminist biblical interpretation is echoed by Oeming (2006: 112). His opinion about the hermeneutics of suspicion is the following:

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What value can a creative, alternative, feminist re-writing of supposed biblical 'texts of terror' have for understanding the Bible? Can understanding be developed from this premise? This is hardly possible. This approach does not interpret the Bible; instead, war is declared on it. What refers to itself as a 'reading' of the Bible is in truth defamation and slander! The harsh judgements and attacks on the text can hardly be supported by historical argument.<sup>15</sup>

Feminist biblical exegesis is also described as a second-order form of biblical exegesis, and feminist exegetes have been accused of coming to the text with a pre-determined critique (Clines 1998: 38-41). The implication is that feminist exegetes have an explicit agenda even before they get started. We are accused of doing "eisegesis" instead of "exegesis".

Therefore, we are not "true to the text", as Campbell suggests, and we do not "allow the text to speak for itself", as the traditional exegetes state so often in their introductions to their commentaries of Jude. Redmond asks: "What I don't understand is what being 'true to the text' means in the postmodern and postcolonial era. Are we supposed to only look for the intent of the author in writing the text? Are we only supposed to read the texts as the original hearers would have understood them? Are we supposed to ignore reception history? Are we supposed to ignore how these texts might possibly be heard by women, by children, by the abused?" (Redmond 2012: 6-7).

No exegesis or research is completely neutral. Even word-for-word translations of the Bible are done from a specific ideological perspective. The default option for traditional forms of exegesis is heteropatriarchy and androcentrism. They come with as many built-in presuppositions as feminists are accused of bringing to the text (Redmond 2012: 7).

## Conclusion

"We have come a long way, Baby: From Adam's rib to Women's lib!" This slogan appeared on a poster carried by alumni to advocate women's liberation at Smith College, Massachusetts, in 1972. Feminist biblical criticism has already changed the discourse. It is often not given the credit that it deserves, but it is there nonetheless (Redmond 2012: 8).

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This brings me to the question I asked at the beginning: Has feminist exegesis really made a difference to the way scholars, students and Bible readers interpret and apply biblical texts? Is feminist biblical interpretation being taken seriously by traditional exegetes? It is not given the credit it deserves, but I think it has made a difference to the way at least some scholars perceive the contributions of feminists to the interpretation of biblical texts. Renate Jost also concludes that in spite of the obstacles women scholars faced in the past forty years, they have produced an unimaginable wealth of feminist research and doctoral work on numerous areas of biblical scholarship in many parts of the world (2014: 375).

In my opinion, a problem that needs special attention is the Bible readers that are informed by fundamentalism and traditional interpretations of biblical texts. Therefore, the *Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians* initiated in 1989 in Accra, Ghana, by 70 African women, is a good example of including and mobilising all women from all spheres of society in the Circle. They engage African reading practices of storytelling, divination and especially reading with grassroots or subaltern readers (Dube 2001: 2). In this way community interaction and social accountability are advantaged and women from grassroots levels are involved in feminist and gender issues. This gives also academics the opportunity to present their research results to a broader audience than just academics. At institutional level, we must ensure that feminist or gender studies are included in undergraduate as well as postgraduate programmes. We also have to continue to formulate new theories and to explore and apply new approaches and methodologies to biblical texts. Schüssler-Fiorenza (2014: 5) points out that we need research that focuses on the work of leading scholars in the field, on oral histories of women and clergy who shaped the movement. We also have to insist that gender-informed academics review our articles and books to avoid the negative, personal opinions of reviewers.

Feminism is a liberation movement in process. The future of feminism is assured but should not be prescribed. We have noticed that the gains made by the women's movement are fragile, and need to be defended. We cannot take those gains for granted or assume that changing circumstances will not have a negative effect on it (Clack 2012: 260).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The main exponents of the Alexandrian School were Clements of Alexandria (ca. 145-215 CE) and Origen (ca. 185-253).

<sup>2</sup> The term was coined in 1971 by the Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutiérrez, who wrote one of the movement's most famous books, *A Theology of Liberation*:

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*History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1973). Originally published as *Teología de la liberación: Perspectivas* (Lima: CEP, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> Feminist biblical studies in the Latin American and Caribbean countries began at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of 1980s. The term “Majerista” was coined to refer to Latina feminists. Feminism in this context was used as a concept that includes all women who fight against oppression against women and is concerned with resistance, struggle and the search for liberation. (Tamez 2014: 35).

<sup>4</sup> The word “womanist” was coined in the 1980s by Alice Walker, a black feminist writer, to reflect African-American women’s particular history and context of slavery, racism, dislocation and struggle for liberation (Keane 1998: 131-132). African women followed shortly by claiming that their life experiences are different and need to be reflected in their hermeneutical approach, namely African women’s hermeneutics. Therefore they initiated the “Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians” in 1989 in Accra, Ghana.

<sup>5</sup> Feminism is further undermined by movements e.g. the Mighty Men, Worthy Women in South Africa; and internationally the Promise Keeper, The Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family, Christian Family Movement and the 700 Club. Their vision is to restore order by re-enforcing Christian values to family life and encourage families to live according to morals and values grounded in biblical principles. This<sup>at</sup> implies that women should know their place as the subservient wife and that a man, as husband, father and master, should take *back* his rightful place as the head of the family and as the representative of Christ (cf. Buchan et al. 2006:167; Wiid 2009, DVD). They promulgate the view that men are biologically and essentially different from women and as such justify the natural leadership and headship of men over women (cf. Guest 2012: 115).

<sup>6</sup> “The notion that it is ‘un-African’ to be gay puts gay Africans in an impossible position,” said Kay. “First you have to argue that you are as African as the next African, then you’re flogged, sentenced to life imprisonment, ostracised and while all that’s happening to you, you’re stripped of your racial identity too. You’re told you are not African for choosing to love who you love.” *Nigerian authors condemn country’s new anti-gay law*: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Jackie Kay and Helon Habila among those criticising the Nigerian government for “Nazi” politics of hate. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/feb/27/nigeria-anti-gay-law-critic-adichie-kay-habila> Accessed 28 May 2014.

<sup>7</sup> The following countries have an option of selecting “x” as their gender—meaning indeterminate, unspecified or intersex: Australia: on passport applications since 2011; Bangladesh: on passport applications since 2011; Germany: on birth certificates from 1 Nov 2013; India: on electoral rolls since 2009; Nepal: on census forms since 2007; New Zealand: on passport applications since 2012 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-24767225> Accessed 28 May 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Judith Butler, especially in her books *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993).

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<sup>9</sup> General editors of the series: Irmtraud Fischer (Graz University, Austria); Mercedes Navarro Puerto (Madrid, Spain); Adriana Valerio (Napoli University, Italy); and Christiana de Groot (Calvin College, USA).

<sup>10</sup> The theology of wisdom is known as Sophialogy.

<sup>11</sup> Just a few publications as examples are listed: Cf. Hiebert (1985a, 1985b, 1985c); Osburn (1977; 1981; 1985; 1992); Wolthuis (1983).

<sup>12</sup> It seems that a revised version of this commentary will be published in 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Vernon Robbins' social-rhetorical interpretation (1996).

<sup>14</sup> In the same review Campbell finds Charles' work on midrashic typology and Webb's contribution on rhetography enlightening.

<sup>15</sup> Oeming refers to the book of Phyllis Trible (1984).