

# Feminist New Testament Scholarship in South Africa<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Feminist biblical scholarship in South Africa that focuses on the New Testament cannot be separated from the larger context of feminist scholarship in South Africa or even Africa. Its emergence and development was tied to the emerging consciousness of women and men who began to question the roles of women in family, society, politics and religion, especially Christianity. This happened during the 1980s, thus lagging behind the North-American and European feminist movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Rather later than never! New Testament scholarship in South Africa has contributed to feminist knowledge production. The objective of this article is to provide an understanding of the contributions by feminist and female scholarship in the New Testament Society of Southern Africa by focusing on completed doctoral theses at South African universities and theological seminaries, and feminist research produced by females and males published in *Neotestamentica*, the official journal of the New Testament Society of Southern Africa. The purpose is to determine the New Testament feminist themes and knowledge that have been produced; to identify obstacles that might have influenced or might influence feminist New Testament scholarship; to determine possible research areas; and to discuss the future of feminist scholarship in the New Testament Society of Southern Africa.

## Key Terms

Women; feminist; gender; New Testament Society of Southern Africa; research; doctoral theses; publications; *Neotestamentica*

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<sup>1</sup> This is mainly a survey of the contributions accomplished by the South African members of the official New Testament Society of Southern Africa (NTSSA).

## 1 Introduction

Researching the topic of this article was not without its complications. First, the availability of data is problematic. The records of the National Research Foundation (NRF) are incomplete; for instance, I could not find my own Master of Arts dissertation on their records! I narrowed the search down to women candidates who had finished their doctoral studies on the New Testament. But the NRF records inconsistently reflect either candidates' initials or names or even in some cases add maiden names. It was not a problem to recognise the women I know, but recently there are many women from different institutions that I do not know personally. Therefore, I could not recognise whether someone is a woman or a man. The second problem in collecting data is the criterion "New Testament." Some women were registered for a degree in Practical Theology or Church History or any other theological discipline, but did their research on a New Testament topic. Eventually I had to ask individuals at tertiary institutions for the records of their women candidates who had finished their doctoral degrees. Although many colleagues were very helpful, it is not clear whether the lists are complete. A further point is that there are also males who have researched gender topics: Gerald West and his team, Jeremy Punt, Johannes Vorster and Wilhelm Meyer, to name a few. They should also be included. Therefore, I cannot claim comprehensiveness but at least this is a starting point for collecting data of the contributions women scholars have made in the field of the New Testament and especially with the focus on feminist biblical studies.

The objective of this article is to provide an understanding of the contributions by feminist and women New Testament (NT) scholarship in South Africa by focusing on completed doctoral theses at South African universities and theological seminaries and feminist research produced by women and men published in *Neotestamentica*, the official journal of the New Testament Society of Southern Africa (NTSSA). The contributions in all the other South African theological journals are also important and the data will be included at a later stage. The purpose is to determine the feminist themes and knowledge that have been produced; to identify obstacles that might have influenced or might influence feminist NT scholarship; to determine possible research areas; and to discuss the future of feminist NT scholarship in South Africa. Unfortunately, I have to essentialise women and men authors as analytical category to be able to reflect the historical situation of women participating in NT feminist and

gender research and publications reflected in *Neotestamentica*. Hopefully, this will not be necessary in future.

## 2 Important Contributors<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1 *The South African context*

Feminist biblical scholarship that focuses on the New Testament in South Africa cannot be separated from the larger context of feminist scholarship in South Africa or even Africa. Its emergence and development was tied to the emerging consciousness of women and men who began to question the roles of women in family, society, politics and religion, especially Christianity. This happened during the 1980s, thus lagging behind the US and European feminist movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The forerunners in the wider field of theology for the liberation of women in South Africa are *inter alia* Denise Ackermann (Practical Theology), Marie-Henry Keane (Practical Theology) and Christina Landman (Church History). In 1978 they were all students in an honours class of Prof. Simon Maimela from the Department of Systematic Theology at the University of South Africa (UNISA). In 1982 he introduced feminist theology as part of an honours course in liberation theology. He called male theology a falsification of the experience of God. As a result feminist theology was born by the means of the midwifery of a black man who was also the founder of black theology in South Africa (Landman 2013, 200-210). Marie-Henry Keane, one of the students in his class, was an Irish nun who was eventually the first woman to finish a doctorate in Systematic Theology in 1986. In 1990 she was the first woman to be appointed as professor in Systematic Theology at UNISA; later the same year Christina Landman was the first South African-born woman to be appointed as professor in Church History. Their contributions as women cannot be underestimated, but the focus of their studies was still not on feminist issues *per se*. For example, Keane, an ecclesiologist, developed a servanthood model for the church; and Christina Landman, as an ecclesial medievalist, wrote on the investiture struggle of the High Middle Ages (Landman 2013, 204).

However, it was Denise Ackermann from the same honours class who wrote the first true feminist thesis in South Africa. As one of the

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<sup>2</sup> I want to state that in my opinion every contribution is important and should be valued.

mothers of feminist theology in South Africa, Denise read a paper in 1984 at a theological conference at UNISA on women's ministries, which was probably one of the first papers on women's liberation theology in South Africa. The paper was based on a reading of 1 Cor 12. She finished her Ph.D. in 1990 on the topic "Liberating Praxis in the Black Sash: A Feminist Theological Perspective." She was also the founder of the Cape Town branch of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. The Circle celebrated Denise's 80th birthday in April 2015. She was appointed as professor at the University of the Western Cape (1990-2000) and after retiring from teaching for many years at UWC, Denise taught part time at Stellenbosch University's Faculty of Theology in Practical Theology—becoming the first woman to do so (Marais 2014, 701–722).

Daphne Madiba, also from this honours class, was ordained in the Lutheran Church, which has its base at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). She did not enter academia, but played a decisive role in the Church. She contributed to the question of women's ordination, which was high on the agendas of feminist discussions (Landman 2013, 204).

Other important contributors to women's studies and feminist theology include Celia Kourie, previously in the Department of New Testament at UNISA. She writes extensively in the fields of mysticism and spirituality, and is currently retired in the Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology at UNISA. Susan Rakoczy is professor of Spirituality and Systematic Theology at St Joseph's Theological Institute Cedara, Pietermaritzburg. She started teaching feminist theology courses in the early 1990s, and currently she is an honorary professor at UKZN's School of Religion and Theology. In 2004 she wrote the highly acknowledged book on women's theology: *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology*.

## 2.2 *The larger African context*

Since the 1980s women of Africa took the lead in introducing African Womanist theology and hermeneutics. The groundbreaker was Mercy Amba Oduyoye, followed by Teresa Okure (1993, 76–85), Musa Dube (2001, 26–49) and others. Dora Rudo Mbuwayesango (2014, 71–85) gives an overview of the most important contributors to African women's interest in feminist biblical studies.

Locally, Madipoane Masenya (UNISA), Isabella Phiri and Sarojini Nadar (UKZN) play a leading role in African Women hermeneutics. Madipoane chaired the Department of Old Testament and Ancient Near

Eastern Studies at UNISA (currently Dept of Biblical and Ancient Studies) until 2012; she did her doctoral studies in Biblical Studies, specialising in the OT. She wrote extensively on Basadi (womanhood) as a hermeneutical approach (Masenya 1997, 439–448).

### 3 Feminist Biblical Scholarship: New Testament<sup>3</sup>

At the same time women started to finish their doctoral studies in the field of the New Testament. In the mid-1980s I finished my Ph.D. on the theme “John the Baptist in the Fourth Gospel” (1989; RAU) and was soon followed by Maretha Jacobs with a thesis titled “Tendense in die navorsingsgeskiedenis oor Markus se Christologie sedert William Wrede” (UNISA). Neither of these studies was feminist or gender-focused. It was only in the 1990s that studies focusing on feminist/women started to emerge with the contribution of Elna Mouton’s research “Reading a New Testament Document Ethically: Toward an Accountable Use of Scripture in Christian Ethics, through Analysing the Transformative Potential of the Ephesians Epistle.” Simultaneously, studies with an African feminist perspective by African women appeared, led by I. M. L. Matsoso’s MA dissertation (1992) with “Luke and the Marginalized: An African Feminist Perspective on Three Lukan Parables (Luke 10:25–37; 15:8–10; 18:1–8).” In the years to follow it was African women or rather the women of colour in South Africa who led the way in doctoral studies with an African Womanist perspective. Most of these women were students of Jonathan Draper, Wilhelm Meyer and Gerald West from UKZN.

I could locate nineteen completed doctoral studies from the NRF database and from information colleagues sent me. Ten have non-feminist themes and nine have topics with a feminist/liberation/gender focus. True to biblical scholarship, the research focused on the NT texts. Below follows a brief indication of the NT texts that featured in these studies: Matthew: 0; Mark: 2; Luke/Acts: 1; John: 4; Romans: 1; Corinthians: 1; Galatians: 0; Ephesians: 1; Philippians 1; Colossians: 0; Thessalonians: 1; Timothy: 0; Titus: 0; Hebrews: 0; James: 0; Peter: 0; Jude: 0; Revelations: 2.<sup>4</sup> Hopefully this can encourage feminist research on the NT texts that are not considered yet.

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<sup>3</sup> NTSSA members who completed their Ph.D. in NT abroad have not been taken into consideration.

<sup>4</sup> Nortjé, S. J. 1989a. Johannes die Doper in die Vierde Evangelie. Johannesburg: RAU; Jacobs, M. M. 1991. Tendense in die navorsingsgeskiedenis oor Markus se

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Christologie sedert William Wrede. Pretoria: UNISA; Mouton, A. E. J. 1995. Reading a New Testament Document Ethically: Toward an Accountable Use of Scripture in Christian Ethics, through Analysing the Transformative Potential of the Ephesians Epistle. Bellville: UWC; Van Moerkerken, E. G. 1996. Die bevatlikheid van die Ou en Nuwe-Testamentiese Godsbegrip. Johannesburg: RAU; Cornelius, E. M. 1998. The Effectiveness of 1 Thessalonians: A Rhetorical-Critical Reading. Stellenbosch: US; Rotz, C. J. 1998. The One Who Sits on the Throne: Interdividual Perspective of the Characterization of God in the Book of Revelation. Johannesburg: RAU; Dreyer, Yolanda. 2000. Institutionalization of Authority and Titles Used by Jesus. Pretoria: UP; Groenewald, Jonanda. 2006. Baptism, Eucharist, and the Earliest Jesus-Groups—from the Perspective of Alternate States of Consciousness. Pretoria: UP; Dannhauser, E. H. 2006. Jesus the Prophet: Maps and Memories. Pretoria: UP; Maleya Mautsa, L. E. 2007. Female Leadership in the New Testament: A Socio-Historical Study. Potchefstroom: NWU; Pillay, Miranda. 2008. Re-visioning Stigma: A Socio-Rhetorical Reading of Luke 10:25–37 in the Context of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Bellville: UWC; Snodderly, M. E. 2009. A Socio-Rhetorical Investigation of the Johannine Understanding of the Works of the Devil in 1 John 3:8. Pretoria: UNISA; Mollett, Margaret. 2010. Creeping Crusade: Interpretation, Discourse and Ideology in the Left behind Corpus: Rhetoric and Society in the Light of Revelation 7. Pretoria: UNISA; Mwaniki, Lydia. 2011. God's Image or Man's Glory? A Kenyan Postcolonial Feminist Reading of 1 Corinthians 11:1–16. Pietermaritzburg: UKZN; Mbamalu, Abiola. 2011. Abundant Life in John 10 in the Context of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria. Pietermaritzburg: UKZN; Mukansengimana, Rose. 2013. Women and Peace Building: A Contextual Approach to the Fourth Gospel and Its Challenge to Women in Post Genocide Rwanda. Pietermaritzburg UKZN; Nyengengye, Rebecca. 2013. Discipleship in Mark as a Liberatory Pedagogy. Pietermaritzburg: UKZN; Gabaitse, Rosinah. 2013. Towards an African Pentecostal Feminist Biblical Hermeneutic of Liberation: Interpreting Luke-Acts with Batswana Women. Pietermaritzburg: UKZN; Dreyer-Kruger, Anet. 2013. Film Hermeneutics: Marriage, Intimacy, Sexuality and the Christ Narrative. Pretoria: UP; Karyakina, Maria. 2014. Social Values of the Heavenly Society: The Concepts of Honor and Identity in Paul's Letter to the Philippians. Pretoria: UP.

Doctoral studies in process: Hillebrand, Jennifer. In process. Bringing Paul and Desmond Tutu into Dialogue on Liberation, Reconciliation and Identity: An Intertextual Reading of Paul's letter to the Romans. Pietermaritzburg: UKZN; Thekiso, Mantima. In process. Greening John's Gospel: Creation, Land, Fertility and Abundance in John's Gospel—an African Contextual Ecological Reading. Pietermaritzburg UKZN; Chamburuka, S. In process. The Impact of Jesus' Ethics as a Basis of Peace and Reconciliation in Zimbabwe (2008-date). Pretoria: UP; De Beer, S. In process. Die evangelie van Maria Magdalena. Pretoria: UP; Geldenhuys, A. E. D. In process. The Institution of Marriage as a Cultural Construct. Pretoria: UP; Bosch, Karin. In process. Identity Formation in 1 John. Pretoria: UP; Vrey, Aletta. In process. 'n Gender-Kritiese Ontleding van die Groepsidentiteite in die Brief aan die Efesiërs. Johannesburg: UJ; Momberg, Celete. In process. As (the Christian) Society Sees God, So It Sees Itself. Pretoria: UP. Dijkhuizen, Petra. In process. "Not Discerning the Body": Investigating the Christian Ritual Meal in terms of Risk, Failure, and Efficacy—A Comparative

First, it seems that the students follow their supervisors' research focus. Therefore, the themes/topics of the theses can be directly connected to the research and ideological interests of the institutions as well as that of the supervisors. Second, the initial doctoral research by female scholars was not feminist or gender-focused. It was only in the 1990s that women started to introduce feminist/womanist topics into their NT doctoral research. Many more feminist/womanist-focused Master's dissertations were produced, but it seems that these students either furthered their studies abroad or went into ministry. This is definitely an issue that needs to be attended to.

The problem could be, first, the overall availability of tertiary or university academic positions for women who have finished their doctoral studies. If the available positions are already filled, they might become vacant only when the person retires or passes away, and by then the setup of the department might have changed and this specific position might then not be available anymore—as has happened so often recently. Second, the patriarchal ideologies of the theological faculties and seminaries of the various denominations play a role. If these denominations do not allow women to be ordained, then there will be very little motivation for women to invest in a doctoral degree in New Testament, which is mainly an academic qualification. Patriarchal ideologies might also influence the topics of the research undertaken by doctoral candidates, especially if they are bursary-holders. Third, South African universities have recently been following the international movement in changing departments of Biblical Studies to the more inclusive Religion Studies, which makes the availability of specific NT positions in these departments even more difficult, if not impossible.

There are very few women who have been appointed in NT positions in South Africa. Lilly Nortjé-Meyer was appointed in 1984 as junior lecturer in New Testament in the Department of Biblical Studies (RAU) (currently Dept of Religion Studies UJ). She had to climb the promotional ladder from junior lecturer to lecturer to senior lecturer to associate professor, her current position. Maretha Jacobs was appointed in the Department of New Testament (currently Dept of Biblical and Ancient

Studies) at UNISA as a temporary lecturer for 10 years between 1985–1994 before she was finally appointed as senior lecturer in 1995. She held the position of associate professor from 2004 till her retirement in 2013. Celia Kourie was appointed associate professor in 1998 in the Department of New Testament at UNISA before she moved to the Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology at UNISA, till her retirement in 2011. Susan van Schalkwyk-Botha (Oosthuizen) was also, for a number of years, a permanent lecturer in the then Department of New Testament UNISA. Petra Dijkhuizen occupied a temporary position in the Department of New Testament and Early Christian Studies (currently Dept of Biblical and Ancient Studies) at UNISA from mid-2007 to 2012.

The flagship position in New Testament in South Africa was held by Elna Mouton. In 1990 Elna started her academic career by lecturing Biblical Studies at the University of Port Elizabeth (UPE). In 2000 she became professor in Biblical Studies at UPE. In 2000 she was appointed associate professor in New Testament Studies in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch. Elna was elected dean of faculty and became the first woman dean of any Faculty of Theology in South Africa; she held the position from 1 April 2005 until 31 March 2010. Elna opened the door for more women to be appointed in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch. The female faculty members include, in order of appointment, Elna Mouton (New Testament; first female dean of a theological seminary in Africa), Elmé Bosman (Homiletics & Liturgy), Anita Cloete (Youth Work), Mary-Ann Plaatjies-Van Huffel (Church Polity), Juliana Claassens (Old Testament), and Shantelle Weber (Youth Work).

Miranda Pillay is the forerunner at the University of the Western Cape. She is senior lecturer in New Testament in the Department of Religion and Theology.

Unfortunately, these are the only women who held or are currently holding specific NT positions at Theological Faculties or Departments of Biblical Studies. There are other women who are not specifically appointed in NT positions but who have contributed to the study of the New Testament. Examples include: Yolanda Dreyer, Department of Practical Theology at the University of Pretoria (UP); Patricia Bruce, lecturer in Greek in the School of Religion and Theology, UKZN; and Elma Cornelius, who previously lectured Greek at the Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christlike Hoër Onderwys (PUCHO; currently North-West University, NWU). There are no specific positions or chairs at any



Theological Faculty or Department of Biblical Studies for feminist studies in South Africa.

#### 4 Publications in *Neotestamentica*

The first woman who published an article in *Neotestamentica* was Betty Emslie in 1985 (1985, 87–91). A year later Lilly Nortjé (1986, 21–28) followed with the first woman-focused article “The Role of Women in the Fourth Gospel.” But it was only eight years later that Phyllis Bird (1994, 323–337) from Illinois USA with her epic paper “Authority and Context in the Interpretation of Biblical Texts” opened the way for a true feminist approach to biblical texts. In the same volume, Elna Mouton (1994, 359–377) published “Reading Ephesians Ethically: Criteria towards a Renewed Identity Awareness?”<sup>5</sup> Seven years later (from 2001) female scholars started to publish feminist and gender-focused articles regularly in *Neotestamentica*. These include the following: Maretha Jacobs (2001, 81–94), “Feminist Scholarship, Biblical Scholarship and the Bible”; Elna Mouton (2001, 111–127), “A Rhetoric of Theological Vision? On Scripture’s Reorienting Power in the Liturgy of (Social) Life”; Elna Mouton (2011, 275–292), “Human Dignity as Expressions of God Images? Perspectives from/on 1 Corinthians 14 and Ephesians 5”; Patricia Bruce (2004, 7–27), “Virginité: Some Master Myths. A Study of Biblical and Other Ancient References to Virginité in the Context of HIV/AIDS in South Africa,”; Patricia Bruce (2005, 39–56), “John 5:1–18 The Healing at the Pool: Some Narrative, Socio-Historical and Ethical Issues”; Patricia Bruce (2010, 253–281) “Constructions of Disability (Ancient and Modern): The Impact of Religious Beliefs on the Experience of Disability,” and Lilly Nortjé-Meyer (2009, 123–143), “The ‘Mother of Jesus’ as Analytical Category in John’s Gospel.”

There were more contributions from a gender-critical perspective, but these did not necessarily involve feminist discussion and interpretation. The following valued gender contributions came from male scholars:

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<sup>5</sup> There were more articles published by woman authors during 1986–2000, but these were not feminist or gender focused research: Nortjé (1989b, 349–358); (1994, 41–53); (1996, 141–150); Jacobs (1994, 53–86); (1996, 103–120); (1998, 405–424); Cornelius (1994, 457–468); Kourie (1998, 433–458); Rotz and Du Rand (1999, 91–112); Personen (2000, 87–102); Dreyer (2000, 273–286); and after 2000: Fischer (2003, 199–220; 2006, 35–60); Dijkhuizen (2011, 115–129; 2013, 247–262).

Holger Szesnat (1998, 191–201), “‘Mostly Aged Virgins’: Philo and the Presence of the Therapeutrides at Lake Mareotis”; Pieter J. J. Botha (2000, 1–38), “Submission and Violence: Exploring Gender Relations in the First-Century World”; and Johannes N. Vorster (2000, 103–124), “(E)mpersonating the Bodies of Early Christianity.” Jeremy Punt made frequent contributions: (2005, 359–388), “Paul, Body Theology, and Morality: Parameters for Discussion”; (2006, 101–118), “Revealing Rereading. Part 2: Paul and the Wives of the Father of Faith in Galatians 4:21–5:1”; (2007, 382–398), “Sex and Gender, and Liminality in Biblical Texts: Venturing into Postcolonial, Queer Biblical Interpretation”; (2008, 73–92), “Sin as Sex or Sex as Sin? Rom 1:18–32 as First-Century CE Theological Argument”; (2010, 140–166), “Power and Liminality, Sex and Gender, and Gal 3:28: A Postcolonial, Queer Reading of an Influential Text”; (2011, 311–330): “Paul, Body, and Resurrection in an Imperial Setting: Considering Hermeneutics and Power”; and (2013, 373–398), “Politics of Genealogies in the New Testament.” Jeremy’s research focuses mainly on sexuality and/or postcolonial reading of biblical texts.

Other male contributors to the gender discussion are: Gerald O. West (2006, 157–183), “Reading Shembe ‘Re-membling’ the Bible: Isaiah Shembe’s Instructions on Adultery”; In-Cheol Shin (2007, 399–415), “Matthew’s Designation of the Role of Women as Indirectly Adherent Disciples”; Christoph Stenschke (2009, 145–194), “Married Women and the Spread of Early Christianity”; Sebastian Fuhrmann (2010, 31–46), “Saved by Childbirth: Struggling Ideologies, the Female Body and a Placing of 1 Tim 2:15a”;

The entire *Neotestamentica* volume 48(1), 2014 was dedicated to papers read with the focus on gender issues at the annual NTSSA conference held at UNISA, September 2013. A benefit of such an issue is that the articles have a common theme, namely “Interconnecting Discourses—Gender, Bible, Publics.” Three South African scholars contributed to the edition, namely Johannes Vorster (2014, 1–31), Elna Mouton (2014, 163–185) and Chris de Wet (2014, 187–218). The others were international contributors. The quality of the articles is outstanding and has set the standard for future gender research.

Incredibly, Rose Mukansengimana-Nyirimana with Jonathan Draper (2012, 299–318) is the first and only black woman who has published in *Neotestamentica*: “The Peacemaking Role of the Samaritan Woman in John 4:1–42: A Mirror and Challenge to Rwandan Women.” It might be that the women who finished their Ph.D.’s published in other

journals. Nevertheless, this is concerning, because we need to encourage NTSSA members to publish the papers they read at NTSSA conferences, in *Neotestamentica*.

In 2008 the NTSSA sub-group Gender Studies published an Afrikaans gender-critical commentary: *KykWeer! Gender-kritiese kommentaar op geselekteerde bybelse tekste*. Their aim was to empower Afrikaans women with knowledge and a critical approach towards androcentric language of the Bible and the way women characters in the Bible are stereotyped according to the cultural values of the time. The contributors are in alphabetical order: Patricia Bruce (2008, 66–83); Petra Dijkhuizen (2008, 40–64); Yolanda Dreyer (2008, 155–172); Hans van Deventer and Helen Efthimiadis-Keith (2008, 25–39); Maretha Jacobs (2008, 138–154); Elna Mouton (2008, 128–137); Lilly Nortjé-Meyer (ed.) (2008, 84–94; 113–127; 226–134; 235–255); Jeremy Punt (2008, 210–225); Eben Scheffler (2008, 173–197); Hans van Deventer (2008, 9–24); Susan van Schalkwyk-Botha (2008, 95–112); and Hansie Wolmarans (2008, 198–209).

## 5 Collaboration and Partnership

I am convinced that the future of feminist biblical studies focusing on the New Testament in South Africa lies in collaboration or partnership with other gender movements in South Africa.

A very important and welcomed contribution to gender studies is the Institute for Gender Studies at UNISA, which was founded in 1984 as the Institute for Women's Studies. In 1996 it was transformed to become the Institute for Gender Studies, embracing Women's Studies, Men's Studies, and Gay and Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Studies. The Institute offers Gender Studies as an interdisciplinary field of study that focuses on the social and cultural constructions of gender identities. The head of the institute and only academic member of staff is Prof Deidre Byrne. Deidre has recently founded the South African Association for Gender Studies (SAAGS), and launched *Gender Questions*, a peer-reviewed journal aimed at promoting diverse research on gender issues in South Africa. In June 1997 the University of Pretoria established the Institute for Women's and Gender Studies. The institute is located in the Faculty of Humanities and works in collaboration with gender researchers

to promote inter-disciplinarity. Unfortunately, it seems that this institution is dormant at the moment.<sup>6</sup>

Another important movement is the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. There are two branches in South Africa – the Cape Town branch and recently the Johannesburg branch. Mercy Oduyoye, supported by 70 African women, was the initiator and co-founder of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in 1989 in Accra, Ghana. They engage with 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 advanced and women from grassroots levels are involved in feminist and gender issues. This also gives academics the opportunity to present their research results to a broader audience than just academics.

There are also other gender programmes at institutions, for example, Gender, Religion and Health (UKZN); Gender, Health and Theology (US); African Gender Institute (UCT).

## 6 Conclusion

Although the first Ph.D. on the New Testament by a woman was completed in 1989,<sup>7</sup> it was only in 2007<sup>8</sup> that a real feminist-focused thesis was produced. This tendency is reflected in the publications in *Neotestamentica*. I am of the opinion that the male-centred ideology of the seminaries of the church denominations influences the research that is performed at that seminary. The historical Biblical Studies departments at universities have converted into more inclusive Religion Studies departments that focus on Christianity as a whole and not on the New Testament as such anymore. It seems that women are more active in other gender institutions and that women also publish more feminist/womanist/gender research in journals other than *Neotestamentica*.

We need to interact with and become partners of other gender movements in South Africa and in Africa. We also need more awareness

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<sup>6</sup> <http://archivedpublicwebsite.up.ac.za/default.asp?ipkCategoryID=1707>; cited 30 July 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Nortjé, S. J. 1989a. *Johannes die Doper in die Vierde Evangelie*. Johannesburg: RAU.

<sup>8</sup> Maleya Mautsa, L. E. 2007. *Female Leadership in the New Testament: A Socio-Historical Study*. Potchefstroom: NWU.

among students and the general public of the violence against women and children.

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. Students tend to distance themselves from feminism as if feminism is advocating man-hate *per se*.<sup>9</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 and 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 et al. 2004, 122–144; Winston et al. 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) 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. (p. 198)

These results are also relevant for South Africa, because the appointments of women in strategic positions is required, and carefully monitored, by the South African constitution. However, we notice that

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<sup>9</sup> Feminism is further undermined by movements such as 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 reinforcing Christian values to family life and encourage families to live according to morals and values grounded in biblical principles. This 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).

gender equality does not necessarily mean gender justice. Violence against women is escalating.

An inspirational initiative to be taken notice of is an international project undertaken by the Feminist Groups of the Society of Biblical Literature. It is a huge twenty-one volume project called *The Bible and Women*, to be published simultaneously in German, English, Italian, and Spanish.<sup>10</sup> Its aim is to present a reception history and cultural history of the Bible, focusing on gender-relevant biblical themes, women in the text, and the women who throughout history have read, appropriated, and interpreted the Bible in text and image. Although the discussion is continuing if feminist studies have not become old-fashioned (or the F-word) in the meanwhile and that gender studies have turned more and more into queer studies, this project shows that the gender agenda with feminist option still matters (Fischer 2015, vii).

The South African academic marketplace might be too small to undertake such a big project, but I think we can still involve Africa as a continent. The Circle has already set the scenario and the NTSSA can follow in their footsteps.

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<sup>10</sup> The *Bible and Women* project is led by a highly respected, international editorial team: Irmtraud Fischer, Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz, Austria; Mercedes Navarro Puerto, Universidad de Sevilla, Spain; Jorunn Økland, University of Oslo, Norway; Adriana Valerio, Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, Italy.

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