

# Gender studies and biblical interpretation: (How) Does theory matter?<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract*

Investigations of gender in biblical texts have increased over the last decade or two, also on the African continent. However, the deployment of theoretical and methodological approaches among biblical scholars often still betray conventional alignments, invoking identity-political stances and popularised notions of gender. Biblical studies can benefit much from cross-disciplinary theoretical work on gender, especially from the ancient Hellenistic and Roman contexts, as well as gender critical appropriation informed by modern sociological and anthropological work. Accountable gender theory and related responsible methodologies engender responsible engagements with the complexities involved in gender-critical biblical studies. The argument that gender theory matter in biblical interpretation is briefly demonstrated with reference to 1 Timothy 2:8-15.

**Keywords:** gender theory; feminism; Greek and Roman world; masculinity; patriarchy; 1 Timothy 2:8-15

## 1. Introduction

Gender is neither the same as, nor a cypher for woman, or for that matter, femininity or feminism. The tendency to portray gender in biblical studies as primarily and (eventually) only about women is a truncation of gender and detrimental to biblical gender studies. Gender studies is inevitably about women and includes feminist criticism and women's studies, but it also covers masculinity studies and makes theoretical space for lesbian and gay studies, and its recent disruptive development, queer theory.<sup>3</sup> As much as gender means more than woman, then, gender studies goes beyond women's studies.<sup>4</sup> Bible and gender studies are about making

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<sup>1</sup> Edited version of a paper read at a Religion, Gender and Sexuality in Africa Conference, UKZN, Pietermaritzburg, 21-25 May 2018.

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<sup>3</sup> Take as example, SD. Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor and Other Queer Spaces in and Around the Bible* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2001), 12-3.

<sup>4</sup> On queer theory, see e.g. J. Punt, "Queer theory, Postcolonial theory, and biblical interpretation. A preliminary exploration of some intersections," in *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship*, edited by T.J. Hornsby and K. Stone, *Semeia Studies*, vol 67 (Atlanta: SBL, 2011): 321-41. Graybill, in *Are We Not Men? Unstable*

sense of the diverse facets of the landscape of gender(ed) discourse and biblical texts,<sup>5</sup> and investigates the construction of gender as social category, including also sexuality and the full spectrum of gendered and sexual(ised) human life. All too aware of the male preferential stance in ancient materials as much as in modern scholarship, this work is done without giving preferential perspectivity to any assumed or constructed sex and gender. It acknowledges the intricate, complex, and messy gendered and sexualised interconnectivities among people.<sup>6</sup> Gender studies of the Bible focus on these discourses through which people and human life are described to make sense of sex and gender in their complex intersections with biblical texts and contexts, and their interpretive histories.<sup>7</sup>

Among biblical scholars, however, conventional alignments, identity-political stances, and popularised gender notions negatively impact theoretical rigour.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, much can be gained from cross-disciplinary theoretical work on gender, the ancient Hellenistic and Roman contexts, and from critical, theoretical, often intersectional appropriations

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*Masculinity in the Hebrew Prophets* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 13, explains the tension that often exists between especially queer and feminist approaches: “Feminist scholarship is sometimes suspicious of the emphasis on masculinity and male sexuality that tends to dominate queer reading; lesbian-informed approaches offer a possible alternative. A queer approach, meanwhile, may find the feminist methods insufficiently attuned to sexuality, or overly bound up in heterosexual relations between men and women.”

<sup>5</sup> Women studies, feminist work and womanist inquiry have come to stay, and deserve more attention *and* mainstreaming (not male-streaming, see Fiorenza E. Schüssler “Critical Feminist Studies in Religion,” in *Critical Research on Religion* 1 no. 1 [2013]: 43-50), without which scholarly inquiry will be poorer. However, the under-theorisation of gender studies can lead to its uncritical reduction to change agents’ cultivation projects, an urge for political action widespread among feminist theorists (see also below) – as sorely as change agents are needed in various areas of gender work, and regardless of whether they can be “cultivated” or not!

<sup>6</sup> Gender studies increasingly also includes sexuality – an element which has in biblical studies often stayed out, with little attention to LGBTQIA\*-inquiry and queer theory, to name some growing theoretical interfaces. The transition from feminist studies to gender studies, which has already occurred in literary studies, is only slowly taking place in biblical studies – see SD. Moore and JC. Anderson, eds. *New Testament Masculinities*. Semeia Studies vol. 45 (Atlanta: SBL, 2003): 5.

<sup>7</sup> Feminist biblical studies have earned its place in postmodern academia in the hard way, but its narrow concern with almost exclusively women’s issues, women in the text and in history, and as readers, and its often constrained attention to masculinities, lesbian and gay studies, and queer theory, contributed to the development of gender studies.

<sup>8</sup> See the excellent introduction in BB. Archer and J. Lloyd, *Sex and Gender*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-5, for some prevailing and persistent common-sense beliefs or conventional perceptions and notions regarding gender, widespread in the modern world. See also MS. Kimmel *The Gendered Society*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1-138, for a wide-ranging overview of explanations of gender, including a few common-sense notions.

informed by modern sociological and anthropological work. Using gender studies as umbrella term<sup>9</sup> and not gender criticism as singular approach, my argument is that accountable gender theory and related work will engender more responsible and accountable engagements with texts and the complexities involved in gender-critical biblical studies.

## 2. Theory, beyond (not without) feminist biblical criticism

The developmental trajectory<sup>10</sup> of gender studies shows the change from an initial focus on women in the sixties, to the realisation of the need for theory since the 1970s, and which, also to avoid ghettoization, probed further both in theory and focus of study. When gender studies emerged from these precursors in the 1980s, women recovery projects made room for differences between women and greater theoretical finesse.<sup>11</sup> Gender studies now came to include work on the history of sexuality and on masculinities.<sup>12</sup> Criticism that these shifts led to a loss of political thrust fails to convince.<sup>13</sup> The late twentieth century's moves in feminist theory and gender studies beyond social history and "recovery of woman" projects showed the need and appropriateness for a different approach to gender.<sup>14</sup> The focus has therefore shifted to the rhetorical construction of

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<sup>9</sup> See D. Guest, *Beyond feminist biblical studies* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), 41.

<sup>10</sup> AR. Sharrock, Re(ge)ndering gender(ed) studies. *Gender & History* 9, no. 3 (1997): 604.

<sup>11</sup> In women's studies in religion, ancient literature served as social history resources on the lives of real women as lived history. In gender studies in religion ancient literature, literary texts serve as resources for cultural and intellectual history and the emerging ideologies. No wedge should be driven in between the two, though, since discourses about women originate in concrete social, economic, and political contexts in (or similar to those in) which women lived and lives. Not only does the realisation that gender is "a means of representing ideas about social order and social organisation" dismantle a monolithic essence, "to study the meaning of the rhetoric pertaining to women – in addition to raising up women as agents and victims – but it also enlarges our historical perspective" (Priscilla Pope-Levison, and John R. Levison, eds. *Sex, Gender, and Christianity* [Eugene: Cascade, 2012]: 23).

<sup>12</sup> "While studies of sexualities are nothing new to feminists, it is the amount of space given for analysing the constructions of a diverse range of sexualities in varying contexts, often through the analytical lens provided by queer theory that gives Gender Studies a quite different atmosphere" (Guest, "Beyond feminist biblical studies," 9).

<sup>13</sup> In fact, as some scholars argue, with gender studies the scope of political sentiment has simply widened beyond a restrictive focus, so as to also include others and other issues (e.g. Caroline Vander Stichele, "Is Doña Quixote Fighting Windmills? Gendering New Testament Studies in the Netherlands: In Memory of Esther de Boer [1959-2010]". *Lectio difficilior* 1 [2013]: 6).

<sup>14</sup> This is not quite the same as "womanufacture" (Sharrock, "Re(ge)ndering gender(ed) studies"), a metaphor for the construction of femininity in literary texts. "Women are 'perceived'. We speak often not just of 'women,' but of 'images,' 'representations,' 'reflections of women' (AR. Sharrock "Womanufacture," *Journal of Roman Studies* 81 [1991]: 36).

men and women, femininity and masculinity, gender in texts and discourse, and the social forces at work in this regard; and while work on gender still dominates, sexuality increasingly receives attention.

The urge to explain human behaviour is seen in social, behavioural, natural, and biological scientists' attempts to come to terms with gender, resulting in an abundance of theories of gender.<sup>15</sup> Theoretical tension between gender and sex is palpable and sustains untenable binaries,<sup>16</sup> such as seeing sex as physiological, only secondarily impacted socially in the social construction of gender.<sup>17</sup> However, contemporary thinking about bodies in the sense of physical selves and their representation increasingly emphasise the link between bodies, sex and gender, and social power. Foucault, Scarry, and others have exposed the embeddedness of bodies in politics and power, hidden away by moral pretentiousness.<sup>18</sup> Sex and gender as social constructs and the performativity of gender<sup>19</sup> have reconceptualised human agency "in a manner that deeply challenged long-held and often intensely defended convictions about the source of 'autonomous' human actions."<sup>20</sup> A

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<sup>15</sup> See Kimmel, "The Gendered Society".

<sup>16</sup> "The discussion of gender difference often assumes that differences are based on some biological realities that sort physical creatures into their appropriate categories. Thus, we assume that because there are two biological sexes (male and female), there must only be two genders (men and women)" (Kimmel, "The Gendered Society," 74).

<sup>17</sup> See for example the following explanation, which not only separates gender from sex, but also the meaning of sex from sex (as if the latter exists without the former): "A person's sex is indeed determined by biology, genetics and neurology. However, the meaning of sexuality and sexual role functions is embedded in engendered constructions as socially and culturally created systems of meaning" (DJ. Louw, "From Phenomenology to Ontology in the Gender Debate. "Feminine" without "Femininity" beyond "Feminism", in *Ragbag Theologies. Essays in Honour of Denise M Ackermann, a Feminist Theologian of Praxis*, edited by M. Pillay, S. Nadar, and C. le Bruyns, 95-111 [Stellenbosch: SUNPress, 2009], 98). The binary is confirmed later, "The core of the gender debate is about the meaning of our being human as either male or female" (Louw, "From Phenomenology to Ontology in the Gender Debate," 101).

<sup>18</sup> WR. LaFleur, "Body," *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, edited by MC. Taylor, 36-54. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 45.

<sup>19</sup> "Hence, as a strategy of survival within compulsory systems, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences" and "Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Thinking Gender, vol. 2. New York: Routledge, 1990), 139-40.

<sup>20</sup> E. Barvosa-Carter, "Strange Tempest: Agency, Poststructuralism, and the Shape of Feminist Politics to Come." In *Butler Matters. Judith Butler's Impact on Feminist and Queer Studies*, edited by S. Breen and WJ. Blumenfeld, 175-89 (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005), 175; S. Jeffreys, "Return to Gender: Post-Modernism and Lesbian and gay Theory." In *Radically*

materialist understanding of gender privileges its discursive nature as socially constructed and thus fluid and given to different understandings, temporally and spatially, across cultures.<sup>21</sup> Contrary to essentialist understandings, gender as discursive construct is not primarily identity or role but rather process, continuously and contextually produced amidst multiple, intersecting social discourses – in short, gender is performativity.<sup>22</sup> Gender is informed by discourses, which also normalise gender as they “carry with them the norms of behaviour, standards of what count as desirable, undesirable, proper and improper.”<sup>23</sup>

The view that feminist studies is the mother of gender studies is fitting, but mother-daughter relationships can be complex, contentious, and antagonistic.<sup>24</sup> While the historical accuracy that feminist work only addressed women’s experience, is contested, and the theoretical validity that masculinity studies “will complete the portrait of gender, only half drawn” in feminist work,<sup>25</sup> disputed,<sup>26</sup> it has not always been inclusive of

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*Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed*, edited by D. Bell and R. Klein, 359-74 (London: Zed Books, 1996); Punt, “Queer theory.”

<sup>21</sup> Materialist or structuralist theories reference the structural makeup of the social world (including concrete social relations in the work place, the home, and sexuality) for their influence on the construction of gender identities, and for resulting power dynamics. Discursive or post-structuralist theories relate gender to discourse, and the construction of women and men with the respective spectrums of meaning and power, highlighting the attention given to language and discourse more generally. See R. Alsop, A. Fitzsimons and K. Lennon *Theorizing gender: An introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 65.

<sup>22</sup> “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (J. Butler, *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* [New York: Routledge, 2007], 34).

<sup>23</sup> Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon, “*Theorizing gender*,” 82. Language is the means by which human beings think, reason, create meaning, and communicate, as people know and cognitive psychologists and cognitive linguists have emphasised (Charles A. Wanamaker. “Metaphor and morality: Examples of Paul’s moral thinking in 1 Corinthians 1-5.” *Neotestamentica* 39 [2005], 409-33 [504]). Language plays a double role, in the sense that it reflects worldview while simultaneously also generating it.

<sup>24</sup> Guest, “*Beyond feminist biblical studies*,” 9. For addressing the three concerns that often arise when feminist and gender critical work are juxtaposed, “The potential dilution/taming of feminism; the erasure of women; and the loss of autonomy for Women’s Studies”, see Guest, “*Beyond feminist biblical studies*,” 31-41.

<sup>25</sup> V. Robinson, “Heterosexuality and Masculinity: Theorising Male Power or the Male Wounded Psyche?” in *Theorising Heterosexuality: Telling it Straight*, edited by D. Richardson, 109-24 (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996), 111.

<sup>26</sup> Some feminist biblical scholarship has indeed gone beyond gynocentric concerns. For Mary Rose D’Angelo, “(Re)presentations of Women in the Gospels: John and Mark,” in *Women & Christian Origins*, edited by R.S. Kraemer and MR. D’Angelo, 129-49 (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 129 feminist investigation of the Gospels engaged a variety of concerns about “whether the gospel writers view women positively or negatively, whether their messages are inclusive or exclusive, whether they challenge or accommodate

masculinities and sexual identities.<sup>27</sup> Aligning itself with much of feminist inquiry, gender studies intentionally broaden the scope of investigation, critiquing the norms that elicit, maintain, and oversee notions of sex and gender across the spectrum and heteronormativity's imposition. It investigates sex and gender as constructions (not natural attributes) and their intersectionalities, also with race and class and other aspects of human life – not necessarily with a feminist stance.<sup>28</sup> Alongside feminist work's political enterprise,<sup>29</sup> gender critics consider the implications of hermeneutical strategies, and embrace political visions in the critique of scriptural texts and also regarding intersex and transgender persons.<sup>30</sup> Gender studies neither assume nor align with identity politics; in fact, it "problematizes and destabilises identity-based politics based on a concept such as 'women.'"<sup>31</sup>

Identity politics are socio-politically attractive,<sup>32</sup> but tend to propose simplistic answers to complex problems, and to reinvent social and

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established gender roles, which gospel is the most or least inclusive, the most or least patriarchal, and even (since these works are all actually anonymous) whether a woman could have been the author of one or more of them." See M. Deem, "The Scandalous Fall of Feminism and the First Black President," in *A Companion to Cultural Studies*, edited by T. Miller, 407-29. (Malden: Blackwell, 2001), 407-29, on the defence of feminism from cultural studies stance, and its representational power.

<sup>27</sup> Guest, "Beyond feminist biblical studies," 11.

<sup>28</sup> A. Cranny-Francis, A.W. Waring, P. Stavropoulos and J. Kirkby. *Gender Studies: Terms and Debates* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 82. "[T]he more profound question – whether the shift to gender criticism is camouflaging the abandonment of a stigmatized and overtly political 'F-word,' in favour of more neutral, 'respectable' and sweeter-sounding 'G-spot' – deserves detailed examination" (Guest, "Beyond feminist biblical studies," 4).

<sup>29</sup> "Critical feminist studies in religion seek to articulate theoretical analytics not in terms of gender and feminine identity but in socio-political terms. They understand wo/men as socio-political subject-citizens who are producing cultural knowledges and religious discourses in situations of domination and alienation" (Fiorenza Schüssler, "Critical Feminist Studies in Religion," 43).

<sup>30</sup> Guest, "Beyond feminist biblical studies," 25-9. "Gender criticism can certainly highlight how gendered and sexed categories are produced and reinforced, how sexualities are produced and regularized, but the contemporary effects of such work need to made clear" (Guest, "Beyond feminist biblical studies," 29). See also E. Chitando and S. Chirongoma, eds. *Redemptive Masculinities. Men, HIV and Religion*. Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa (Geneva: WCC, 2012), on redemptive masculinities.

<sup>31</sup> Vander Stichele, "Is Doña Quixote Fighting Windmills?" 5.

<sup>32</sup> "The laden phrase 'identity politics' has come to signify a wide range of political activity and theorizing founded in the shared experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups. Rather than organizing solely around belief systems, programmatic manifestos, or party affiliation, identity political formations typically aim to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalized within its larger context. Members of that constituency assert or reclaim ways of understanding their distinctiveness that challenge dominant oppressive characterizations, with the goal of greater self-determination" (Anon. Identity

intellectual power by assuming underdog-positions to the extent of celebrating victimhood. Identity politics' undiscerning use of "any old personal details" grants "automatic validity" to some-one's perspective, or for our argument here, a reader's interpretation.<sup>33</sup> As Nancy Fraser<sup>34</sup> pointed out, identity politics were used at times as a derogatory term for feminism, anti-racism, and anti-heterosexism.<sup>35</sup> While I want to both affirm feminism and resist racism and heterosexism, identity politics in gender work remain unhelpful and dangerous for a number of reasons.<sup>36</sup> It is *epistemologically* suspect, since gender, like race, is socially constructed, defined, and determined. It is *heuristically* restrictive, since seeing gender as biologically or otherwise set in stone, does not allow for its investigation as a category in itself. It is *methodologically* predetermined, since essentialised gender sets up predefined results, invoking categories of oppressor and victim among others. It is *ethically* dismantling in its ambiguous claiming and disclaiming of agency and legitimacy in intention, process, and outcome. In the end, identity politics is a habituating and therefore regulating discourse,<sup>37</sup> which can become introspectively

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Politics. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2012. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-politics/1>.

<sup>33</sup> Sharrock, "Re(ge)ndering gender(ed) studies," 610.

<sup>34</sup> N. Fraser, "Heterosexism, Misrecognition, and Capitalism. A response to Judith Butler," *Social Text* 52/53, 15 (3 and 4) (1997): 279-89.

<sup>35</sup> The advantages of being white and male, how infracted and complexly constituted these may be at times and variously constructed in different geospatial locations, remains palpable and real, and should not be ignored or forgotten. J. Clifford, "Taking Identity Politics Seriously: The Contradictory, Stony Ground..." in *Without Guarantees: Essays in Honour of Stuart Hall*, edited by P. Gilroy, L. Grossberg and A. McRobbie, 94-112. (London: Verso, 2000), points out that "opposition to the special claims of racial or ethnic minorities often masks another, unmarked 'identity politics,' an actively sustained historical positioning and possessive investment in Whiteness," 97; see J. Punt, "(Southern) African Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation: A White African Perspective," *Journal of Early Christian History* 8, no. 1 (2018).

<sup>36</sup> The feminist turn to identity politics slotted in with a rapidly expanding neoliberalism intend on repressing recollections of social equality (N. Fraser, "How feminism became capitalism's handmaiden – and how to reclaim it," *The Guardian.com*, October 14, 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/14/feminism-capitalist-handmaiden-neoliberal>). Unwilling to give up on people's struggles for recognition or their struggles for economic justice, N. Fraser, "Rethinking Recognition," *New Left Review* 3 (2000): 119 proposes to do away with identity politics in favour of a status model of class: "By understanding recognition as a question of status, and by examining its relation to economic class, one can take steps to mitigate, if not fully solve, the displacement of struggles for redistribution; and by avoiding the identity model, one can begin to diminish, if not fully dispel, the dangerous tendency to reify collective identities."

<sup>37</sup> C. Suthrell, "*Unzipping Gender. Sex, Cross-Dressing and Culture*," *Dress, Body, Culture* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004), 2 states: "The knot of cultural notions which constitute and inform any one culture's concepts of sex, gender and sexuality are unusually difficult to unravel, partly because they are so seldom questioned, so integrated into societal structures,

restricted, narcissist,<sup>38</sup> and given to moral absolutism.<sup>39</sup> Resisting identity politics does not mean to ignore the interpreter's social location or the situatedness of reading; as Stendahl reminds us, "Our vision is often more obstructed by what we think we know than by our lack of knowledge".<sup>40</sup>

Eschewing identity politics does not mean the disavowal of social location, but the latter amounts to more than occupying space, as it acknowledges the geo-political and the body political nature of knowledge. Invoking social location is no panacea for responsible, accountable, and engaged hermeneutics. As much as "being socially located in Africa does not necessarily imply that one is epistemically producing knowledge from the subaltern side of the colonial matrix of power,"<sup>41</sup> holding or claiming gender or sexual disempowerment does not amount to the cultivation of change, or necessarily questioning configurations of power, which remains the challenge also in biblical hermeneutics. Resisting the consuming and regulating lure of identity politics does not imply shutting out social location in academic inquiry, but rather its reactivation along other lines.<sup>42</sup> The gendered social location of interpretation in South Africa requires room also for subjectivities and, what others would call, their body

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so taken for granted that it is almost impossible to uncover them without recourse to another means."

<sup>38</sup> As Michaels contend, maybe the essentialism of identity politics lies not so much in claiming a certain identity, but rather in the activism that follows the claim. "The pluralist gesture toward tolerance (not 'better' but 'better for us') requires an essentialist assertion of identity; instead of who we are being constituted by what we do, what we do is justified by who we are. In cultural pluralism, culture does not make up identity, it reflects it" (WB. Michaels, "Race into Culture: A Critical Genealogy of Cultural Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 4 [1992]: 683).

<sup>39</sup> Caution about the exclusionary tendencies of identity politics is sounded by Guest, "*Beyond feminist biblical studies*," 152: "In existing biblical and theological studies there is, arguably, an assumption that one has to 'be,' in some way gay or lesbian in order to write from that vantage point."

<sup>40</sup> K. Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 7. The urge to escape identity politics at times is perceived by insiders as betraying race, gender, or culture; however, identity politics may constitute the ultimate betrayal, with its radicalising of a segment of identity, its privileged(-ing) hermeneutics and exclusionary politics, all of which presupposes and maintains essentialism. See T. Penner and DC. Lopez. *De-Introducing the New Testament. Texts, Worlds, Methods, Stories*. (Chicester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 226.

<sup>41</sup> H. Ramantswana, "Decolonizing Biblical Hermeneutics in the (South) African Context," *Acta Theologica* Supplement 24: 178-203 (197).

<sup>42</sup> The plea of EH. Oleksy, ed. *Intimate Citizenships. Gender, Sexualities, Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 5-6, for "the revision of identity and subjectivity theories in order to liberate them from the normative constraints of traditional and humanistic thought" is timely and helpful.

politics.<sup>43</sup> The move away from identity to subjectivity, implies detachment from biological, national, cultural, or other essentialisms, that marks “a critical theoretical departure from previous definitions of identity” and refocuses attention on “the complex, intersecting ways in which people are embedded within multiple, conflicted discourses, practices, and institutions,”<sup>44</sup> and this is where gender studies comes into the picture in biblical hermeneutics.

### 3. Gendered biblical studies’ engaging complexities: 1 Timothy 2:8-15

When romanticised musings about women pose as gender studies, the critical theoretical edge is lost and gender parochialised.<sup>45</sup> Even the long-standing feminist focus on women’s roles as both victims and liberation agents in texts, can create the impression that texts with no reference to women are irrelevant to the feminist search for justice, *and* neglect gender constructions’ permeating social presence.<sup>46</sup> Key to gender studies is its undertaking of and commitment to an inclusive, broader, and critical

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<sup>43</sup> For WD. Mignolo, “Delinking. The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 449-514, “the body-politics of knowledge includes the re-inscription per Fanon for example, of the history inscribed in the black body in a cosmology dominated by the white body beneath the theo- and ego-politics of knowledge”. See also H. Ramantswana, “Decolonizing Biblical Hermeneutics,” warning that presence or even awareness of social location provides no guarantee regarding the nature of scholarship produced. S. Tamale, “Researching and Theorizing Sexualities in Africa,” in *African Sexualities. A Reader*, edited by S. Tamale, 11-26 (Cape Town: Fahamu, 2011), 11-20, calls for theorisation of sex and gender within the African context.

<sup>44</sup> Oleksy, “*Intimate Citizenships*,” 1. Cultural studies, however, may offer an alternative to bland detachment or partisan activism when it, in concert with gender studies, holds that gender is neither a natural nor fixed identification category, deriving from biology. Gender, rather, is a script, role, or set of regulatory practices crafted socio-culturally for maintaining hegemonic patterns among material bodies. The investigation of gender often reveals the hidden histories of those who fall outside society’s norms and practices. A focus on gender concerns informed by cultural studies is wary of identity politics, so that while appreciative of the gains and importance of feminist work, a broader and non-binary optic may fit better with the constructed nature or performativity of gender. See J. Punt, “A cultural turn in New Testament studies?” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72 no. 4 (2016): 7 pages.

<sup>45</sup> For some criticism levelled in the past against gender studies, see Guest, “*Beyond feminist biblical studies*,” 3-4. Some scholars caution against spreading the gender net too wide, to include too much under the gender studies umbrella, in which case gendered or gender-sensitive studies may be a better terms (see Sharrock, “Re[ge]ndering gender[ed] studies,” 605).

<sup>46</sup> M. Dube, “Rahab Says Hello to Judith: A Decolonizing Feminist Reading,” in *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*, edited by Fernando F. Segovia, 54-72 (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003), 60.

approach,<sup>47</sup> which stresses intersectionality and warns against the anachronistic imposition of modern values and concerns.<sup>48</sup> A gender studies approach to 1 Timothy 2:8-15, deemed offensive by modern readers and by women in particular, begins by recognising how the text prescribes personal and public behaviour to Jesus followers and concludes that women, conditionally (depending on their or their children's behaviour),<sup>49</sup> will earn salvation through childbirth.<sup>50</sup> Feminist criticism would point out various concerns, noticing the portrayal of women in the text and its possible malevolent impact on contemporary women.<sup>51</sup> Men who simply need to pray everywhere (2:8), seemingly without specific prescriptions regarding dress, conduct, or hierarchical considerations, stand in stark contrast to women whose personal demeanour and public behaviour are prescribed (2:9-15). Women are defined primarily through attachment to men and reproductive capacity, and derivatively (Adam created before Eve, 2:13), except for negative descriptions (Eve was deceived, not Adam, 2:14). The final verse apparently makes women's biological-reproductive role determinative for their socio-religious status (2:15). The passage is framed by patriarchal power and entrenched female submissiveness in line with reigning cultural norms.<sup>52</sup> Gender studies largely affirm such feminist readings, but also enquires about the construction of gender roles of women and men, and related aims and

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<sup>47</sup> Guest, "Beyond feminist biblical studies," 3. Setting out on gender studies in biblical texts, K. Stone, "Gender Criticism. The Un-Manning of Abimelech," in *Judges & Method. New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, edited by GE. Yee, 183-210. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 192 (see also Vander Stichele, "Is Doña Quixote Fighting Windmills?" 5-6) offers a range of helpful agenda-setting questions. For gender critical approach to a Pauline letter, see J. Punt, "Power and liminality, sex and gender, and Gal 3:28. A postcolonial, queer reading of an influential text," *Neotestamentica* 44, no. 1 (2010): 140-66, on Gal 3:28 read from a queer theory perspective.

<sup>48</sup> Gender studies "is theoretically rich; organically related to feminism but strongly informed also by queer theory, postcolonial theory and critical theory pertaining to 'race' and class. It is also shaped by its interest in themes such as knowledge, power, body, gender, sexuality" (Guest, "Beyond feminist biblical studies," 8). These "studies in sexuality split off from a feminism whose primary focus was on gender" (Guest, "Beyond feminist biblical studies," 4).

<sup>49</sup> The verb μένωσιν (they remain) is plural and could refer either to γυναίκες (used in 2:9, 10) even though the verb in the first part of 2:15 is singular (σωθήσεται, she shall be saved), or to the children born. See e.g. W. Lock, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1978), 33.

<sup>50</sup> If what is today known as 1 Tim 3:1, πιστός ὁ λόγος (this word or claim is true), is part of the same passage, it will amount to an apostolic appeal, adding urgency and authority to the offensive claims.

<sup>51</sup> Guest, "Beyond feminist biblical studies," 26.

<sup>52</sup> J. Dewey, "1 Timothy," in *Women's Bible commentary*, edited by CA. Newsom and S. Ringe, 444-49. Expanded ed. (Louisville: Westminster, 1998), 446-7.

purposes, looking at the bigger, complex gender picture and norms sustaining and policing sex, gender, and heteronormativity in texts.<sup>53</sup>

### 3.1 Ancient contexts and texts, and their challenges

Both literary and socio-historical investigations of ancient understandings of sex and gender are key to interpreting biblical texts. Identity politics-driven valorisations of women in the ancient Mediterranean are anachronistic, one-sided, irresponsible readings which do not sit well with the prevailing New Testament context, and do not engage the links between ancient gender-related perceptions of the social order and stability of communities and society at large. Since the most important organising principle for the ancient Mediterranean context, in everyday life and metaphorically, was gender,<sup>54</sup> recognising its role and functioning is vital for making sense of gender patterns and contingent social beliefs, systems and processes in the Bible.<sup>55</sup> Such a social organisational role for gender is immediately evident in 1 Timothy, and in 2:8-15 in particular. The letter's author, or Pastor, issues instructions to ἄνδρες (men, 2:8) and γυναῖκες (women [wives], 2:9), while the conjunction ὡσαύτως (likewise, 2:9) demonstrates not only the links between the instructions but also the conceptual space defined by gender.<sup>56</sup> Other parts of this pastoral letter are equally determined by gender(ed) considerations, at times explicit such as the instructions given to the widows (5:1-16) or cautioning against the propagation of asceticism promoted through old wives' tales (4:1-7a); and when read with the silencing of women (2:11-12), the gendered nature

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<sup>53</sup> See Guest, "Beyond feminist biblical studies," 26.

<sup>54</sup> Lin Foxhall, "Pandora Unbound: A Feminist Critique of Foucault's History of Sexuality," in *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies*, edited by A. Cornwall and N. Lindisfarne, 133-145 (London: Routledge, 1994), 144.

<sup>55</sup> Even in this regard, intersections have to be honoured; with regard to age which is often neglected, R. Laurence, "Children and the Urban Environment. Agency in Pompeii," in *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*, edited by C. Laes and V. Vuolanto, 27-42 (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 28, reminds, "Age rather than gender was the dominant structure for the medicalisation of children prior to puberty."

<sup>56</sup> For the Pastor, the community he addresses is heteronormatively and patriarchally defined, even if his awareness of men having sex with each other is evident (1 Tim 1:10). The stereotypical slander so common in ancient times is probably best illustrated in the so-called vice list of 1 Tim 1:9-10; on the one hand its stereotypical nature illuminates social patterns, but its slanderous purpose, on the other hand, mitigates against its use for gaining clarity on the gendered nature of the categories invoked. Like the NT and Bible generally, the male voice that operated within a regime of truth is privileged in 1 Tim 2, in public oratorical and teaching performance as well as in public prayer, unconstrained by any predisposition towards deception. See also MB. Kartzow, "Gossip and Gender. Othering of Speech in the Pastoral Epistles," BZNW vol. 164 (New York: De Gruyter, 2009), for how the Pastor stereotypes gossip as feminine speech, and then uses this stereotype to depict his opponents.

of instructions regarding a quiet life (2:1-5) and the qualifications for bishops and deacons (3:1-16) becomes clear.

Gender's social importance is indisputable even if its deployment and social function is more complex and less formulaic than often portrayed. Τεκνογονία (childbirth, 2:15) points to the importance of households for social stability and marriage for securing the legitimacy of men's offspring, more than to heterosexuality. Ancient society did not distinguish human sexuality according to a homosexual-heterosexual dividing line, but social status and gendered activity and passivity were key.<sup>57</sup> Sexually, free-born males commonly asserted masculinity through (sexual) activity, by penetration. This was in contrast to others being soft and therefore susceptible to penetration, those lower down the social ladder regardless of their sex: women and slaves, as well as so-called effeminate males, eunuchs, barbarians, captives, and so forth.<sup>58</sup> In a recent study serving as an alternative to the binary conception of gender in classical Athens, Gilhuly explains the relationships between the three roles of prostitute, wife, and ritual performer in Athenian literature. This feminine matrix of sex and gender formed a symbolic continuum that served as and provided a framework for assessing both masculine and feminine civic behaviour.<sup>59</sup> Complex ancient sex and gender configurations require understanding for how various and even opposing strategies cooperated to articulate different facets of the human subject. Classical sex and gender systems cannot be reduced to the recital of some important socio-cultural markers

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<sup>57</sup> Instructions regarding women's silence (ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ, 2:11), submission (ἐν πάσῃ ὑποταγῇ, 2:11, repeated in 2:12), and the role of childbirth (διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας, 2:15) in 1 Tim 2, but elsewhere in the letter on controlling widows especially when it comes to their sexuality (5:6, 11-2, 14), and treatment of slaves (6:1-2) secured the active, dominant role of men in the community receiving the letter.

<sup>58</sup> "The reduction of sexual relations to the act of penetration enables sex to become a simple yet effective instrument for expressing hierarchical relations" (SD. Moore, "Que(e)rying Paul: Preliminary questions," in *Auguries: The Jubilee volume of the Sheffield Department of Biblical Studies*, edited by DJA. Clines and SD. Moore, 250-274. JSOTSS 269 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998], 271).

<sup>59</sup> K. Gilhuly, *The Feminine Matrix of Sex and Gender in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), challenges the binary imposed on women and men in the ancient context, and shows how many classical texts from Athens rather than using women to prop up men, in fact destabilises both. She notes that instead of "woman serv[ing] as the irrational, unstable, multiple Other that renders the masculine self whole, my analysis demands that we understand the incongruities in representations of the feminine as a sign of the incoherence of the masculine self" (Gilhuly, "The Feminine Matrix," 6). Still longer ago, DD. Gilmore, "Introduction: The Shame of Dishonor," in *Honor and shame and the unity of the Mediterranean*, edited by DD. Gilmore, 1-21. A special publication of the American Anthropological Association, vol. 22 (Washington: American Anthropological Association, 1987), 11, has noted, "Sexual shame is not only the arbiter of chaste femininity, but also, when lost, the negation of masculine identity."

such as antiquity's preference for a one-sex model of humanity, or the impact of an elaborate honour and shame worldview,<sup>60</sup> or the like. The link between gender and social status in the first-century world rendered "class-infused views of masculinity," and relegated femininity and women along with other non-dominant groups as subsidiaries to free men.

### 3.2 Confronting entrenched patriarchy

Regarding the instructions issued to women, the Pastor is adamant (οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω, I do not permit, 2:12) if respectful. He recalls the (second) Genesis creation account to establish Adam's sequential priority and Eve's compromised integrity, to justify preferred gendered social arrangements. Levels of attention to the narrative and dispensational allocations aside, the Pastor's concern is with women *and* men. His adroit hermeneutical skills, however, do not tell the full story, such as how in the story of betrayal Adam blamed Eve, and God (who gave Eve to him, Gen 3:12) for his own disobedience. In Genesis the woman gets the blame for her pain during childbirth, dependency upon man and male domination, and humankind's toil, suffering and dying (Gen 3:16-19). Such sentiments linger in 1 Timothy 2, where women's blame moralise misogyny and secure patriarchy<sup>61</sup> as natural and not disordered points of view.<sup>62</sup>

Patriarchy was the social map for charting family and social relationships, but impacted also upon the broader social context.<sup>63</sup> Daily social realities impinged upon ideological frameworks, subverting the image of stark

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<sup>60</sup> Caution is advised, since the "classic honor/shame model has been reified and that this has led to circularity and reductionism in some literature" (Gilmore, "*The Shame of Dishonor*," 6).

<sup>61</sup> Meyers questions the appropriateness of patriarchy as description for ancient Israel, claiming that the validity and appropriateness of this concept to designate both families and society have been challenged in several disciplines including classical scholarship, by using sources other than legal texts; in research on the Hebrew Bible and ancient Israel, also by using multiple sources; and in the work of third-wave feminists, both social theorists and feminist archaeologists. See CL. Meyers, "Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?" *JBL* 133, no. 1 (2014): 8-27.

<sup>62</sup> The woman-man gender system applied in the NT is embedded in the ideology of hierarchy and dualism. See Cynthia B Kittredge, "Scriptural Criticism and Feminist Interpretation of Romans," in *Gender, Tradition and Romans: Shared Ground, Uncertain Borders*, edited by C. Grenholm and D. Patte, 259-70 (Romans through History and Cultures Series; London: T&T Clark, 2005), 266. A woman, according to Thomas Aquinas, is a *vir occasionatus*, a defective or mutilated man. The sentiment expressed by Aristotle is used to explain why Eve was created second and from a crooked bone: she was made to fall.

<sup>63</sup> "The ideal of the patriarchal household is crucial to these letters' understanding of salvation" (AR. Solevåg, "*Birthing Salvation. Gender and Class in Early Christian Childbearing Discourse*," *Biblical Interpretation Series*, vol. 121 [Leiden: Brill, 2013], 134).

patriarchy as full portrayal of family life in New Testament times.<sup>64</sup> The New Testament's multi-faceted patriarchy gets obscured, due to the reluctance to admit the texts' (commendation of) hegemonic constructions, and due also their compromised nature; but patriarchal family structures did not necessarily exclude familial affection or intimacy.

“Excluding intimacy and tenderness from the construction of the patriarchal family not only misrepresents the evidence from Roman, Jewish, and Greek antiquity, but also disguises the realities of patriarchal relations in the present: it is precisely from the bonds of intimacy, affection, and tenderness that patriarchal and even abusive family relations get their power.”<sup>65</sup>

Only in its most perverse forms and isolated instances, patriarchy entailed distance, lack of affection, and unkindness – making it easy to denounce. The trouble with patriarchy was (and is), rather, its benevolent public face and the sincerity with which it conducts itself.<sup>66</sup> The reach of gendered systems added to their complexity, informing also the organisation of households and economic activity, then as much as now.<sup>67</sup> The ancient gendered context was not only uneven but also complex.

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<sup>64</sup> P. Garnsey and R. Saller, *The Roman Empire. Economy, Society and Culture* (London: Duckworth, 1987), 126.

<sup>65</sup> MR. D'Angelo, “Early Christian Sexual Politics and Roman Imperial Family Values: Rereading Christ and Culture,” in *The Papers of the Henry Luce III Fellows in Theology*, vol. 6, edited by Cl. Wilkins, 23-48 (Pittsburgh: Association of Theological Schools, 2003), 28.

<sup>66</sup> Elsewhere, the creation of a legal environment promoting the groundwork for domesticity, namely marital life, was explained as part of the Empire's patriarchal concern to regulate domestic life. See J. Punt, “Engaging Empire with the body: Rethinking Pauline celibacy,” *JECH* 6, no. 3 (2016b): 43-66.

<sup>67</sup> Amidst current neoliberalism, cultural or identity-based claims and economic claims have become disconnected and academic branding entrenched, with the result that feminism has been “resignified,” enabling “a critique of patriarchy and androcentrism *without* a critique of the capitalist social order in which patriarchy and androcentrism are embedded” (Penner and Lopez, “*De-Introducing the New Testament*,” 180). See also above, Fraser's warning many years ago not to separate injustices of distribution and injustices of recognition, and not to derogate either of the two: “The point is to conceptualize two equally primary, serious, and real kinds of harm that any morally defensible social order must eradicate” (Fraser, “Heterosexism, Misrecognition, and Capitalism,” 280. As S. Jackson, “Heterosexuality and Feminist Theory,” in *Theorising Heterosexuality: Telling it Straight*, edited by D. Richardson, 21-38 (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996), 36, argues, “Heterosexuality itself is not merely a sexual institution: it is founded as much on men's access to women's unpaid work as on their sexual access to our bodies”).

### 3.3 Ambivalent presence of women

If, as Sharrock<sup>68</sup> holds, “A ‘women’s voice’ is a constantly shifting process of renegotiation,” the identity-political urge to essentialise “woman” is unhelpful. The ambivalence of women is often a valorised ambivalence rendering even their presence tainted by a discriminatory socio-hierarchical ethos. In 1 Timothy, the Pastor spent more time constructing the woman’s than the man’s role. Regardless of historical veracity, literal accuracy, the interpretation of the creation sequence, and Eve’s deception or ostensible seduction (ἐξαπατηθεῖσα)<sup>69</sup> in Genesis, the interpretations construe a patriarchal context (2:13-14). Women, however, are not written out of history or the community altogether, with the Pastor insisting that women may be taught albeit in quietness and “every submission” (2:11), and as long as they do not teach or have authority over men (2:12). In all of this, the presence of women remains tangible and precarious.<sup>70</sup> And where did salvation through birth leave women who opted out of the patriarchal context through celibacy and disavowing marriage?<sup>71</sup> Among Jesus followers, celibacy provided a kind of freedom, especially for women, and its devaluation in modern times does not mean that the puzzle of arousal has been solved.<sup>72</sup> Although the Pastor devalues Eve’s role in the creation narrative to blame for the Fall, she maintains presence and agency. Yet, childbirth as women’s route to salvation is deeply ambivalent. The function of ancient marriage was to produce legitimate children,<sup>73</sup> to ensure the continuation of the family or group. However, in the reigning patriarchal culture, the failure to produce offspring was

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<sup>68</sup> Sharrock, “Re(ge)ndering gender(ed) studies,” 610.

<sup>69</sup> In Jewish tradition, much has been spent on whether Eve was deceived or seduced by the serpent, and the gendered and even sexual implications involved.

<sup>70</sup> With its interest in how textual components relate to gender and sex and how these feature in the interconnecting roles of ideology and rhetoric, gender studies foregrounds women as both subjects and objects even if not exclusively focussing on them (Vander Stichele, “Is Doña Quixote Fighting Windmills?” 5-6).

<sup>71</sup> The meaning of σωθήσεται...διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας (she will be saved through childbirth, 2:15) is disputed, and suggestions range from salvation in a theological sense to reinforcing household norms on wayward widows to surviving childbirth.

<sup>72</sup> The emphasis on bearing children in 1 Tim 2 and the later promotion of marriage and sexual activity, if this is an appropriate understanding of the virulent opposition in 1 Tim 4:1-5 to celibacy and general asceticism, stands in direct opposition to Paul’s personal preference for and promotion of celibacy in 1 Cor 7.

<sup>73</sup> While Paul with his eschatological expectation (cf. 1 Cor 7:26) shows little interest for fertility or procreation in the sense of the continuation of the race, in 1 Cor 7 he clearly gave no evidence that he thought the goal of sex to be procreation; marriage was not so much for regulating as for eschewing desire altogether (DB. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995], 214).

necessarily seen as due to the infertility of the woman. The failure to bear children even constituted grounds for divorce.<sup>74</sup>

The ambivalence of gendered social arrangements and their evaluation are also apparent in modern discourses. In orthodox Judaism, young women describe their participation in gendered rules and requirements not as an imposition, but as allowing them to “be in touch with their own bodies, in control of their own sexuality, and in a position to value the so-called feminine virtues of nurturance, mutuality, family and motherhood.”<sup>75</sup> Ambivalence is heightened through misrecognition of intersectionalities and insistence on the assumed naturalness of autonomous selves, spontaneously desiring liberal freedom. Using Butler’s gender critical work, Saba Mahmood argues that “analytical explorations should not be reduced to the requirements of political judgment.”<sup>76</sup> Both constitute modalities of engagement, and while there is an analytical and political need to take note of each other, they should not be collapsed into one another. So, women’s presence, roles, and values are not lessened by ambivalence, even if their analysis prove more complex.

### **3.4 Ignoring the construction of masculinity: Reverse exnomination**

Gender studies’ move beyond women recovery projects is not simply a matter of adding men to the mix.<sup>77</sup> Exploring sociocultural contexts and sex and gender’s political use, masculinity studies have become a crucial

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<sup>74</sup> Whereas in the Greek and Roman society of the first century CE both husband and wife could terminate the marriage, in Jewish law this was the husband’s prerogative.

<sup>75</sup> Kaufman in Kimmel, “*The Gendered Society*,” 232.

<sup>76</sup> S. Mahmood, “Agency, Performativity, and the Feminist Subject,” in *Pieties and Gender*, edited by L. Sjørup and HR. Christensen, 13-45. International Studies in Religion and Society. Vol. 9 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), 41. Mahmood supports Butler’s criticism of an emancipatory model of agency (agency “not simply as a synonym for resistance to social norms but as a modality of action,” Mahmood, “Agency, Performativity, and the Feminist Subject,” 34), and in her work on Islamic Renewal in Cairo, Egypt attempt to understand (rather than condone) norms such as humility, submissiveness, passivity, and docility, as characteristic for the Egyptian movement.

<sup>77</sup> Guest, “*Beyond feminist biblical studies*,” 19. When gender studies become the aggregate of women’s and men’s studies, it “reduces both women’s studies and the supposedly symmetrical men’s studies to static denominations of subject matter and reduces any understanding of relations between gender to something equally static and additive” (EK. Sedgwick, “Gender Criticism: What Isn’t Gender,” in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, edited by S. Greenblatt and G. Gunn, 271-302 [New York: Modern Language Association, 1992], 272).

aspect of gender-critical analysis.<sup>78</sup> Its two greatest achievements of recent years are probably the removal of the marker of “gender” from women (alone), and the critical scrutiny it directs at men and masculinities as socially constructed and scripted categories.<sup>79</sup> Such work exposes the illusion and consequences of gender neutrality brought about by the invisibility of masculinity, and shows that the gender standards portrayed as the norm are anything but gender-neutral.<sup>80</sup> As Sharrock<sup>81</sup> notes, as long as women says gender, men remains the prototype. Critical attention to masculinity avoids re-establishing manhood as norm, a return to androcentrism or re-inscription of patriarchy.<sup>82</sup> Cranny-Francis<sup>83</sup> holds that “[t]he contribution of men’s studies to contemporary gender studies encompasses both the deconstruction of specific kinds of gendering (for example men in contemporary heterosexual societies) as well as a reconsideration of gender itself as locus of power.” Masculinity can be a system of domination, enacted by and on diverse, male and female persons in society.<sup>84</sup> Like femininities, “masculinities are ever-changing cultural projects that fluctuate in response to variables...influenced by

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<sup>78</sup> Caroline Vander Stichele and T. Penner. *Contextualizing gender in early Christian discourse: thinking beyond Thecla* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 25. The study of men was not excluded previously, but “the analysis of masculinities within feminist biblical scholarship has been undertaken in the service of a prioritized focus upon women, and this is *not* on a par with the critical study of masculinities that is such an important element within gender criticism” (Guest, “*Beyond feminist biblical studies*,” 26).

<sup>79</sup> Guest, “*Beyond feminist biblical studies*,” 125. As Peter-Ben Smit, *Masculinity Studies and Biblical Studies: Intersectional and Intercultural*. Brill Research Perspectives in Biblical Interpretation (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 4, argues, “Studies that explore this field seek to redress a situation in which, on the one hand, masculinity, men, and their role and construction are taken for granted, while, on the other hand, women are treated as ‘special cases’ that need to be approached through the lens of gender studies and gender-sensitive exegesis.”

<sup>80</sup> Kimmel, “*The Gendered Society*,” 8.

<sup>81</sup> Sharrock, “Re(ge)ndering gender(ed) studies,” 604.

<sup>82</sup> Graybill, “*Are We Not Men?*,” 12, holds, “The very act of turning the scrutinizing gaze onto the bodies of men is a feminist act, insofar as it challenges the neutrality of the masculine.”

<sup>83</sup> Cranny-Francis, “*Gender Studies*,” 82.

<sup>84</sup> Vander Stichele and Penner, “*Contextualizing gender in early Christian discourse*,” 25. “Objections that this new field of studies [gender studies] puts men and men’s interests predictably back into centre focus risk missing the point that it does so in a way that presents men and masculinity as problematized categories” (Guest, “*Beyond feminist biblical studies*,” 10), a “self-conscious problematization of masculinity” (Guest, “*Beyond feminist biblical studies*,” 11). I. Zsolnay, “Introduction,” in *Being a Man. Negotiating Ancient Constructs of Masculinity*, edited by I. Zsolnay, 1-11. Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), 2, says, “in the patriarchal system, analogous to the monarchical one (to which the system gives rise), masculinities are constantly in a state of flux, negotiation, and outright war”.

class distinctions, sexual orientations, religious precepts, racial views, and/or economics.”<sup>85</sup>

The Pastor’s instructions are predominantly directed at women but with implications for men, serving masculinity construction. The absence of social instructions regulating men’s lives, given only instructions about prayer and a brief caution to avoid anger and arguing (χωρίς ὀργῆς καὶ διαλογισμοῦ, 2:8), emphasises patriarchally secured positions *and* the Pastor’s tacit acknowledgement thereof. However, in at least two ways, men are implicated in the instructions issued to women. Women instructed to maintain proper decorum in dress and conduct impacted on male lives, too, since male honour depended on “their” women.<sup>86</sup> The Pastor’s take on female salvation gave renewed value not only to birthing but further significance and power to the male agency of impregnation. At a time when a man most often was accorded full responsibility for conception, male power over reproduction remained as vulnerable as ever, with securing male control over women’s productive rights becoming more pronounced. The Pastor’s instructions to women, then, served vital masculinity construction purposes that would impact men’s lives in many ways.<sup>87</sup>

### 3.5 Engaging corporeality or bodiliness in ancient texts

Antiquity’s widespread “one-sex” model determined its understanding of gender and sex.<sup>88</sup> The human body existed as a hierarchy of characteristics – male and female – shared by men and women to different

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<sup>85</sup> Zsolnay, “Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East,” 3.

<sup>86</sup> “Sexual shame is not only the arbiter of chaste femininity, but also, when lost, the negation of masculine identity. When a man is shamed through an erotic defeat or an equivalent social submission he is symbolically emasculated: his physical integrity is dissolved and he succumbs to the ever-present danger of sexual reversal, of feminization” (Gilmore, “*The Shame of Dishonor*,” 11).

<sup>87</sup> As Guest, “*Beyond feminist biblical studies*,” 20, insists, dealing with masculinity in gender studies starts by unhinging the connection between the terms “masculinity” and “men,” and attending as integral to such work also to transgender, intersex and other voices, and investigating also women, femininity, and female masculinity.

<sup>88</sup> Helen King, *The One-Sex Body on Trial: The Classical and Early Modern Evidence. The History of Medicine in Context* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), criticises the (popularity of the) one-sex model, whose use can be reductive and override the complex understanding of the reproductive system and gender identity in the classical and early modern periods. She holds that the one-sex model did not dominate any specific historical era, that a two-sex model was present even when a one-sex model prevailed, and that the one-sex body was not replaced by a two-sex one at a specific moment in the eighteenth century. King based her conclusions on medical and non-medical sources from the fifth century BCE to the nineteenth century.

degrees. While the two genders were often understood as one sex, with comparable but reversed anatomy, female bodies were deemed inferior to male bodies as symbolised by their internal, inverted form of the male genitals.<sup>89</sup> In the later two-sex model, the material body as primary location for the men-women distinction, usurped the position previously occupied by gender.<sup>90</sup> A corporeal epistemology moving away from and *beyond* essentialist notions, shifts the focus to recognise the body as construction that exists linguistically, along with other bodies: the body “is not a ‘being,’ but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated.”<sup>91</sup> The body, then, is in a reciprocal relationship with society. On the one hand, the body exists in terms of the discursive practices of society with its “context of situation”<sup>92</sup> as the non-negotiable networks of meaning, and so assuming the status of being “factual” or “objective.” The discursive practices represent but also inform such perception, with their power associated with generated impression of objectivity. On the other hand, the body assimilates society’s discursive practices in an ongoing, dynamic way, embedding these in the body’s development. The culture of society is gradually inscribed on and into the body, to the degree that such culture and associated practices are considered both natural and objective.<sup>93</sup>

A notion such as “strategic essentialism” may be deemed useful for rendering tangible political categories, but fails to break with the baggage typical of essentialism, where “women” is believed to be not only a substantial, categorical entity or materialist reality, but is also accorded primacy in contrast to men, to the LBGTQI community, and to all those unwilling to even participate in such groupings. In this regard, Povinelli’s distinction between corporeality and carnality may be more useful and less fraught with danger.<sup>94</sup> Corporeality refers to how socially dominant forms

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<sup>89</sup> Avoiding simplistic equations, the ancient gendered, corporeal perceptions were translated into the spatialisation of gender as much as the construction of gendered space.

<sup>90</sup> In view of the contribution of modern linguistics, it is not only a new anthropology that is called for, but also a new understanding, a new epistemology of corporeality, of thinking about the body.

<sup>91</sup> Butler, J. “*Gender Trouble*,” 137.

<sup>92</sup> A term borrowed from social anthropology and used by P. Burke, *Philosophy of Literary Form*, 2nd ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 111.

<sup>93</sup> For the contemporary reassessment and renewed appreciation of bodiliness but also related fall-out (bodyism and healthism, phallic consumerism and the like), see Louw, “From Phenomenology to Ontology,” 106-8.

<sup>94</sup> E. Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment. Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 108, argued: “I have distinguished carnality and corporeality as an order of substance (carnality) that is excreted from the organization of substance (corporeality) but not equivalent to it.”

of power discursively format and reformat materiality, to the extent of creating distinct categories such as human, nonhuman, person, nonperson, body, and sex, while carnality is the discourse's material displays which are neither discursive nor pre-discursive.<sup>95</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion: Gender studies and / in the New Testament

Feminism is not the big bad wolf of gender fairy tales, and without it, gender studies in its various manifestations are inconceivable. However, gender as proxy for women both devalues the study of gender and distracts from women's studies.<sup>96</sup> Gender studies make space for feminism, masculinity, LBGTQIA\* and queer studies, interested in the construction of sexed categories as much as the "interstitial places where gender blending, reversals and transformations take place."<sup>97</sup> Theory-poor biblical gender studies in a field which as a rule resists deep-seated change paradoxically encourages conventional alignments, identity-political stances and popularised notions of gender. Theory, although no magic wand resolving the complexities of gender and sex in New Testament studies, helpfully points in the right direction, in at least four ways: *one*, that humans live gendered lives as gendered people in a gendered society, meaning that "we do actually live on the same planet"<sup>98</sup> with different sex and gender performativities. *Two*, it is difficult to overrate the impact of gender and sex on people and societies during New Testament times and the next two centuries. Harper<sup>99</sup> goes so far as arguing, "The gradual transformation of the Roman world from polytheistic to Christian marks one of the most sweeping ideological changes of premodern history. At the centre of it all was sex." *Three*, New Testament documents are wedged into first- and second-centuries' movements and

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<sup>95</sup> KT. DiFruscia, "Shapes of freedom: A conversation with Elizabeth A Povinelli," 2015. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/shapes-of-freedom-a-conversation-with-elizabeth-a-povinelli/>. Povinelli's work engages the materiality of late-liberal forms of power and corporeality in post-essentialist thought. She moves beyond the critique of metaphysics of substance, no longer striving to find and describe substances in their pre-discursive authenticity but rather trying to understand how and for what and whose purposes such substances are produced.

<sup>96</sup> The same applies to feminism when it is captured to exclusively serve women's concerns. Fortunately, more contemporary, third wave feminism is intensely concerned with both men and women, lesbian and gay people, and at times even with transgendered and intersexed persons, even if women are still privileged.

<sup>97</sup> Guest, "Beyond feminist biblical studies," 19.

<sup>98</sup> Kimmel, "The Gendered Society," 138.

<sup>99</sup> K. Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity*. Revealing Antiquity, vol. 20 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013).

changes related to sex and gender, reflecting historical moves and upsets. Gender-conventional (read, heteronormative) use of the Bible should not be allowed to snub its narratives which deconstruct and disrupt, challenge and contest such appeals in exciting, energising, and refreshing ways.<sup>100</sup> *Four*, the role of discourse in constructing gender identity and power relations becomes particularly acute when biblical texts and their use are considered. Biblical narratives are implicated in societal discourses – implicit or explicit, written or oral – as they not only inform individual and communal identities but are based on individual and communal performances – past and present.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Guest, "Beyond feminist biblical studies," 23.

<sup>101</sup> As Guest, "Beyond feminist biblical studies," 29, points out, when it comes to gender and sex (also), "the Bible is one of those regulating discourses, a cultural artefact of considerable significance and influence."

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