AN ABIGAIL OPTIC: READING THE OLD TESTAMENT AT THE INTERSECTIONS

Prof Juliana Claassens
March 2015

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Inaugural lecture delivered on 10 March 2015
Prof J Claassens
Department of Old and New Testament
Faculty of Theology
Stellenbosch University

Editor: SU Language Centre
Drukwerk: SUN MeDIA
ISBN: 978-0-7972-1539-9

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Professor Juliana Claassens started her theological studies at Stellenbosch University in 1991 as part of the first class of female theological students who were officially allowed to become pastors in the Dutch Reformed Church. After obtaining four degrees cum laude (BA, BAHons, MA and BD), she continued her studies at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey in the United States, where she was awarded a PhD in Old Testament in 2001. An intended four-year sojourn in the United States turned into thirteen years as she taught at various academic institutions (St Norbert College, Green Bay, WI; Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, VA; and Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.). In 2010 she moved back to South Africa to teach at her alma mater in a position that was made possible by Stellenbosch University's Hope Project and that focuses on the Faculty of Theology's central concern regarding the promotion of human dignity. She is the author of two books (*Mourner, Mother, Midwife: Reimagining God's Liberating Presence*, Westminster John Knox, 2012; and *The God who Provides: Biblical Images of Divine Nourishment,* Abingdon, 2004), the co-editor of four books and the author of numerous articles and essays.

Julie is the recipient of an Alexander Von Humboldt Fellowship and spent eight months in Münster, Germany during 2012-2013. There she worked on a project entitled "Resisting Dehumanization: Gender and Human Dignity in the Biblical Traditions", which she hopes to conclude during her final four months in Münster in April to July of this year.

Her research and teaching interests include Gender and the Bible, Theological Approaches to the Bible, Postcolonial Interpretation of the Bible. She has written across the canon, but particularly enjoys teaching and writing on the Prophets and the Pentateuch.

Julie is married to her colleague in Systematic Theology, Robert Vosloo, and has two stepchildren (Jana a second-year student at Stellenbosch University, and Roux, a matric learner at Paul Roos Gymnasium) as well as Suzanne, who was born in 2012 and regularly can be seen running around the Faculty.

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1. MY FEMINIST FRAMEWORK

An inaugural is a good opportunity to look backward and forward. It is a moment in time when one is asked to take a step back and reflect on what one has been doing up till this point in one's scholarly career, but more importantly, where one will go next. For a feminist biblical interpreter such as myself, this inaugural thus provides a useful opportunity to contemplate what the feminist framework is that shapes my reading of the Old Testament.[1]

The moment of inspiration for this lecture is found in the introductory essay to a collection of essays on recent approaches to the Book of Jeremiah edited by Christl Maier and Carolyn Sharp, entitled *Prophecy and Power: Jeremiah in Feminist and Postcolonial Perspective*. New Zealand scholar Judith McKinlay argues that, as a feminist biblical interpreter who lives and works in a country plagued by its postcolonial past, it is necessary for her to approach the Old Testament in more than one tenor. Drawing on both gender as well as postcolonial perspectives, she calls her approach to reading the Old Testament a "Rahab prism," so taking her cue from Rahab, the Canaanite woman whose story in the Book of Joshua has been quite significant for both feminist and postcolonial scholars.[2]

This idea of multiple, intersecting reading lenses resonates with my own work as also evident in my contribution to this particular volume in which I explored gender, postcolonial, queer and trauma perspectives on the metaphor of a Woman in Labor that is used throughout the Book of Jeremiah.[3] Actually, taking stock of my work of these past 15 years or so, I have always considered it important to read the Old Testament at the intersections, i.e., a multidimensional approach that helps one to uncover new levels of meaning in the text as well as allow one to be attentive to the hermeneutical issues underlying shifting interpretative contexts.

In addition to these multiple intersecting reading lenses that have shaped my engagement with the text over the years, I can identify three further intersections that have been quite formative in my own feminist framework. First, I find myself reading the Old Testament at the unique intersection of the United States, Europe and (South) Africa. Having obtained my PhD from Princeton Theological Seminary, I spent the first eight years of my teaching career at various institutions in the United States[4] before moving back to South Africa, where I am currently teaching at my alma mater at Stellenbosch University. Since then, I increasingly have been exposed to the European conversation due to my connections with our Dutch colleagues at the Protestant Theological University[5] and the time I spent in Germany thanks to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.[6]

In terms of the helpful notion of hybridity offered to us by postcolonialism,[7] I continue to be shaped, changed and transformed by these divergent contexts. For instance, in the course of my physical and intellectual travels between countries, I have come to understand the distinct effect of teaching in the African context on the way in which I read the Old Testament.

In terms of my interest in gender, the constant awareness of the challenges facing especially the women of this continent in terms of poverty, education, health care and violence, as have compellingly been raised in the growing body of work done by the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians,[8] changes the way one comes to the text; what one notices in the text, and what one ends up doing with the text. At the same time, moving between contexts also has instilled in me the awareness that despite some of the marked differences, women from these widely different contexts have in common that they quite often have succeeded against great odds, "making a way out of no way" to quote my professor Katharine Sakenfeld's interpretation of the Book of Ruth.[9]

Second, a particularly significant intersection that has shaped my feminist framework ever since my doctoral work is that I love to engage with scholars from beyond the field of biblical studies. From the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, whom I have employed as theorist for my doctoral dissertation,[10] to trauma theorists[11] and, most recently, the feminist philosophers Judith Butler and Martha Nussbaum have all contributed to shaping the way in which I look at texts. Granted, the interdisciplinary enterprise is full of risks, as one never can be an expert in all fields. And yet, it is exactly this vulnerability of moving outside

our safe disciplinary categories that may open up new and exciting interpretative possibilities that prevent the field from stagnating. Hence I have found that the study of the Old Testament is greatly enriched by these interdisciplinary perspectives; the unique voices of theorists from other fields kindling the creative spark to see something new in the text that one would not necessarily have seen on one's own. For instance, I have found Martha Nussbaum's work on emotions particularly helpful as she contemplates the question of what it will take for individuals and societies to become compassionate in nature, moving beyond disgust to truly seeing the face of the other.[12] And Judith Butler asks questions that are most important for a conversation on human dignity, such as: Who counts as a human being? What constitutes "a livable and grievable life?"[13] And particularly crucial for the violent world in which we live: By what means can "the frames by which war is wrought time and again" be broken?[14]

Third, I typically describe myself as a feminist biblical *theologian* with the emphasis on the theological nature of the interpretative endeavor. Methodologically, I thus find myself at the intersection of focusing on the literary and theological dimensions of the text while also maintaining a sense of the historical embeddedness of the ancient texts.[15] With regard to this intersection, I consider it important to contemplate the link between texts from ages past and contemporary reading communities. In this regard, Martha Nussbaum has been helpful with her explanation of using ancient narratives in thinking through the issues that haunt us in the present. For instance, with reference to the ancient Greek tragedies, she argues that tragedy offers a bridge between the particularity of ancient narratives and the universality of human experience.[16] As she writes about the act of reading tragic narratives: "Tragic spectatorship cultivates emotional awareness of shared human possibilities, rooted in bodily vulnerability."[17] An important part of my feminist framework hence relates to the approach of using Old Testament texts as a means for the reader to engage his/her own context more deeply.

In the rest of this lecture, I will use the intriguing story of Abigail as it is narrated in 1 Samuel 25 to illustrate something of what I mean by "reading the Old Testament at the intersections." In what I call an "Abigail Optic," I hope to illustrate my feminist framework that has been shaped by some of the intersections outlined above.

2. SEEING ABIGAIL

In 1 Samuel 25, one encounters the fascinating story of Abigail whose act of providing a lavish feast to David and his band of hungry men prevents a terrible tragedy from happening. Abigail is the wife of Nabal, whose name in Hebrew literally means "fool." Her act of hospitality is set in the context of David fleeing for his life from King Saul who in the preceding chapters has been doing his utmost best to remove this threat to his power. At this stage in the narrative David thus is a fugitive and, as noted in 1 Sam 22:2, surrounded by a group of landless, disenfranchised cohorts who are finding themselves on the fringes of society ["Everyone who was in distress and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him and he became captain over them" (1 Sam 22:2 NRSV)]. The narrative starts with David sending some men to the wealthy landowner Nabal, asking for something to eat, saying three times that they seek peace and have done no harm while dwelling in Nabal's land (vv 5-8), an assertion that is later corroborated by the testimony of Nabal's servant to Abigail (vv 15-16). However, Nabal – who in verse 36 is depicted as eating and drinking the feast of a king – refuses, treating David with absolute disdain by asking, "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse?" (v 10) and hurling slurs at David according to the later testimony from Nabal's servant (v 14). An angry David vows to wipe out Nabal's whole household by morning, which most likely would have happened were it not for one of Nabal's servants who turned to Abigail for help. Abigail's initiative that includes her providing David and his men with generous provisions and delivering an extensive speech in which she convinces David to refrain from violence, ends up saving not only all the members of her household but also preventing the future king from having blood on his hands. Indeed, her actions live up to the designation bestowed upon her by the narrator in v 3 that she was both clever and beautiful.

Now a feminist framework for this narrative implies that one focuses one's attention on Abigail. As feminist biblical interpreter, I am interested in what we can glean from the text regarding Abigail's own story, thus bringing her narrative portrayal into conversation with women's realities then and now. However, such an objective is not self-evident. Abigail could quite easily disappear amid the battles among men, her story relegated to a mere footnote in the rise of David or the decline of Saul, depending on one's point of view. Actually, some literary interpretations of 1 Samuel 25 end up making her story about something else. So it has been argued that the story of Abigail and Nabal really is symbolic of David's

conflicted relationship with Saul.[18] Or that 1 Samuel 25 contains allusions to the Ancestral narratives with Nabal/David/Abigail being associated with respectively Laban/Jacob/Rebekah or Esau/Jacob.[19] While such interpretations are compelling, the problem is that Abigail disappears back into the shadows of oblivion.[20] Even feminist interpretations that read Abigail in conjunction with David's other wives (Michal, Bathsheba and Abishag) tend to turn her into a mere stock character who serves the patriarchal agenda of the text.[21]

However, an alternative (feminist) framework may yield a different reading. In light of the objective of this lecture to identify the feminist framework that I typically use to read Old Testament narratives such as the one told of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25, I will now introduce three perspectives that have been generated from my reading this text at the intersections, as outlined in the first part of this presentation. These perspectives will not only highlight different aspects of my own feminist framework but also may reveal different hues of this fascinating story.

First, one should not overlook the fact that this narrative is set in a context of trauma that actually includes multiple levels of trauma. So this story begins in 1 Sam 25:1 with the reference to the death of Samuel, the Prophet of God who was instrumental in instituting the institution of kingship. The narrative is thus set in the context of the traumatic loss of a revered leader, which suggests a sense of great insecurity. This leadership vacuum is further exacerbated in terms of the weakened position of the current King Saul whose increasingly erratic behavior is causing him to hunt down his rival David, who, as the reader knows from 1 Sam 16:1-13, actually has been anointed king by Samuel.[22]

Moreover, as mentioned before, the story is set against the backdrop of a near tragedy in which Abigail's whole family could have been wiped out by morning. In verse 13 the threat of violence is graphically depicted when David tells 400 of his men to strap on their swords – the reference to "sword" repeated three times to heighten the sense of imminent violence. What is more, even as Abigail is hurrying to intervene, a slighted David is fuming in verses 21-22 that he has done only good to Nabal, who has only "returned [him] evil for good," hence vowing that by morning there will be not one male (literally in Hebrew no "wall-pisser") left in Nabal's house. The narrative thus assumes a fearfully traumatic time when violence and vengeance threaten to destroy the community.

In terms of reading this narrative at the intersection of history and theology, one can imagine how the Book of Samuel, which most likely saw its final form in the context of the aftermath of the Babylonian exile, seeks to come to terms with far too much violence.[23] In terms of trauma theory, (tragic) narratives serve as a means of making sense of trauma. Kathleen Sands is right in asserting that the stories one tells in times of trauma are significant: "… tragedies mark off trauma and in so doing wrench back from trauma the rest of life, during which time does not stand still and from which swaths of meaning can be made."[24] As will be evident later on in this paper, it may be that a story such as the one of Abigail that is told in a context of real trauma seeks to imagine a different way, perhaps as it considers measures that actually could offer a way out of violence.

Second, reading the story of Abigail in terms of a feminist framework helps one to identify a remarkable portrait of female agency. In verse 18 a series of active verbs are used in quick succession when Abigail is said to hurry, taking 200 loaves, 2 wineskins, 5 prepared sheep, 5 measures of parched grain, 100 clusters of raisins and 200 cakes of dried figs and loading it all on presumably more than one donkey! She immediately sends these provisions to David and his men, saying that she will follow soon after. The sense of urgency surrounding her actions is further communicated by the threefold repetition of the term "to hurry" (vv 18, 23 and 34). However, in all her hurried activity, the narrator informs us that Abigail did not tell her husband anything (v 19). Abigail is portrayed in this narrative as a woman in control; a woman who acts independently, so resisting the patriarchal strongholds of her society.

Also Abigail's speech to David contributes to this portrayal of female agency. Abigail's speech which is quite lengthy (the longest single prose speech by a woman in all of the Old Testament),[25] speaks of David as the future king and thus can rightly be described as prophetic. In this regard Ellen von Wolde argues that, in the absence of the prophet Samuel, Abigail acts as the spokesperson of God who shows in her speech remarkable insight, emerging as a model of wisdom and discernment. At this point in the narrative, David is running for his life; a homeless, landless fugitive who is easily dismissed by Nabal. And yet Abigail recognizes him as the future king, thus showing keen insight and understanding. Indeed it is a sign of wisdom to recognize greatness in the most unlikely places or persons.[26] Moreover, Abigail's words and actions have a pronounced effect. Ellen von Wolde outlines how Abigail's speech, which she calls a "rhetorical tour de force," has a transformative effect on the future king, causing David's eyes to be opened.[27] As David himself admits in verses 32-34, it is Abigail's swift

actions in addition to her persuasive words that saved her household from a violent massacre.

I find the notion of a woman acting in distinctive ways in order to resist the violence that threatens her household compelling indeed. This theme is particularly interesting when one takes into consideration what Judith Butler writes about the possibility of individuals stepping outside of their predetermined roles and resisting the frameworks within which war is waged. She argues that "the singular 'one' who struggles with non-violence is in the process of avowing its own social ontology."[28] According to Butler, individuals are profoundly shaped by violence as behavioral and societal norms are inscribed and reinscribed upon people. Thus, for an individual to step out of a mold and – as in the case of Abigail – to resist the reality of violence that permeates her world, this individual has to be compelled by some kind of understanding of human beings and the world at large that makes nonviolence possible. For Butler, this alternative frame of reference that serves the purpose of breaking the "frames of war" is in the first instance the conviction that the individual is "less as an 'ego' than … a being bound up with others in inextricable and irreversible ways, existing in a generalized condition of precariousness and interdependency"[29] and, secondly, the realization that potential victims of violence are human beings, which Butler characterizes as "lives that count as livable and grievable."[30]

What is interesting, though, about Abigail's story is that this act of transcending the violence that marks her community comes through acts of hospitality, by offering a feast of food to the hungry, to the landless, to the marginalized. The story of Abigail's provision of food actually offers an interesting point of connection to my first book that grew out of the work I did for my doctoral dissertation, namely an exposition of the metaphor of the God who provides food in the Old Testament, which extends in significant ways into the New Testament.[31] In the introduction to this book, I describe the special link that has existed throughout the ages between women and food, using this following marvelous quote by Kim Chernin:

> For food, in fact, preserves the silenced history of women's power. From infancy and through all the stages of our later development, women have exhibited in their relation to food capacities and qualities they have surrendered in many other aspects of their lives. Adept at the mysteries of creating bread from a cup of water, a handful of flour, a pinch of salt, a woman serves up the loaf that is the bread of life – exhibiting in the bowls and retorts of her domestic alchemy the awesome power of transforming matter into nurturance. Skilled in the preparation of those healing infusions of chamomile tea to relieve a belly ache, soft gelatine for a flu, cranberries without sugar to help with nausea, she all along was the mother-magician, adept at the healing arts.[32]

In the case of Abigail, this "mother-magician" in her own right uses her abundant gifts of food to powerful effect. Alice Bach calls her the "mother provider of transformation," noting that she turns "raw material" into "salvific nourishment." Indeed, she offers prepared food such as "dressed sheep" and loaves of bread.[33] What is more, this life-giving sustenance not only saves David and his men from hunger but by providing food, Abigail also saves her family. As Judith McKinlay rightly notes, Abigail's act of providing food brings life in a context where the denial of food is deadly.[34] In this regard, one could perhaps pause a moment to ask just whom it is that Abigail is seeking to save. Her husband, Nabal? But he is a fool and is called one by Abigail when in verse 25 she tells David to disregard Nabal, "an ill-natured fellow … for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him." So why save Nabal if she knows that his foolishness – in terms of the theological understanding of the day – will bring an end to him?[35]

In this regard, it is important to note that the threat of violence in this context is directed to multiple male members of Nabal's house. But who is the mother of these presumably multiple sons of Nabal's house whom David vows to eradicate by morning? The text does not say. Despite calling Abigail the "mother provider," Alice Bach presumes that Abigail has no children, that she is childless – like David's other wife, Michal, of whom it is said explicitly that she had no child to the day of her death (2 Sam 6:23).[36] However, one later reads about Abigail having a son, Chileab, with David (2 Sam 3:3; cf. 1 Chron 3:1), so she is obviously not barren, as so many other significant female characters in the biblical text. So, is Abigail perhaps speaking up for the lives of her sons? Particularly in a cultural context in which children form a natural part of marriage, one might assume that this woman is acting on behalf of her children. If so, Abigail's story offers a sharp contrast to that of another mother in 2 Samuel 21, whose life also has been marred by violence: Saul's wife Rizpah, who could do little to save her sons from being brutal executed by the Gibeonites. The only thing left for Rizpah to do is to mourn the deaths of her sons publically – an act of mourning that continues until David grants them a proper burial.[37] This contrast makes the case of Abigail all the more remarkable; this mother, whether biological or performing the role of a mother, saves her household by offering gifts of food and drink in order to avert violence.

The idea of Abigail acting as a mother, yet at the same time resisting the patriarchal norms of her society, is worth considering. In an article that explores the performativity of motherhood, Irene Oh engages with both Judith Butler and Martha Nussbaum to consider female agency in terms of motherhood.[38] Oh argues that motherhood should be understood as performative; that is to say, "women who willingly become mothers and assume the care of children … need not necessarily be seen as succumbing to patriarchal stereotypes of domestic femininity."[39] Drawing on the work of Butler, Oh argues that "motherhood emerges as a social institution that both reinforces and potentially subverts dominant gendered paradigms of family and society."[40] She points out that, for Butler, "possibilities for agency lie not outside of but within existing power structures."[41]

Therefore one can say that Abigail performs as a mother and simultaneously transcends the sociocultural norms of her day, which would have relegated her to a position of submissive domesticity. Actually, the idea of employing skills and values of mothering within a broader sphere that involves peacemaking relates to the work of Sarah Ruddick, who contemplates the ethical implications embedded in the act of mothering in the broad sense of the word (she calls her husband her 'co-mother'), which she defines as "a sustained response to the promise embedded" in the creation of a new life.[42] This commitment to 'mothering' includes, among other things, a desire to preserve life and to foster growth, which may naturally be extended, according to Ruddick, into "a commitment to protect the lives of 'other' children, to resist on behalf of children assaults on body or spirit that violate the promise of birth."[43] In light of such an understanding, Abigail's peacemaking efforts, which center on her actions and words that are intent on resisting violence, are a natural extension of her commitment as mother to preserve life – whether her own or that of another mother – embodied in the act of providing food.

Third, reading the Old Testament at the intersections prevents one from reading in only one key. Even though I love a feminist framework that focuses on Abigail's agency; the model of peacemaking and resisting violence that her wise example offers; nonetheless, a gendered and a postcolonial interpretation of the text compel one to dig deeper, to look at the text from more than one angle.

For instance, several elements in this text worry me from a gendered interpretation of this text. For example, Abigail's use of subservient language causes the feminist in me to cringe, when she repeatedly uses the term "my lord" (eight times in vv 25-31) and calls herself "your servant girl" (v 28 and 31), a designation suggesting a lower-class woman who holds no power,[44] despite the fact that she is the wife of a landowner who probably was quite affluent judged by her access to abundant food supplies that include luxury goods such as meat. Moreover, Abigail literally throws herself at king David's feet: in verses 23-24 she falls on her face and at his feet (cf. also the reference to "prostrating herself" in v 23). And in verses 30-31 Abigail asks David to remember her when he becomes king (cf. the reference "when the Lord has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you prince over Israel" in v 31), which David honors at the end of the narrative when he woos her in verses 39-40 and takes her to be his wife.

What is more, this is most certainly not some kind of Hollywood romance as the story ends with the reference in verse 43 that David took another wife, Ahinoam of Jezreel, at the same time as Abigail. But probably most disturbingly from a feminist point of view is that, after this striking portrayal of female agency that relates Abigail's redemptive actions and poignant speech, she all but disappears from the story. Alice Bach rightly notes, "We do not hear her wise voice again."[45] After all her take-charge activity throughout the narrative that had such a profound effect on the lives of her family and community and the life of the future king, Abigail's story ends in silence. She features only one more time – when she and her "sister-wife" Ahinoam are caught in a violent hostage drama with the Amalekites that most certainly left them threatened if not violated sexually (1 Samuel 30).[46]

In light of Judith Butler's proposition that in terms of gender we are "bound up with the continuing actions of norms, the continuing action of the past in the present, and so the impossibility of marking the origin and end of gender formation as such,"[47] it no surprise that the text reinscribes traditional gender perspectives toward the end of the narrative. But what does one do with these elements in the ancient text that may be troubling to contemporary (Western) feminists? On the one hand, such concerns may help readers of today to recognize that, in different sociocultural contexts, different gender realities are at work. In this regard, Judith Butler has been quite sensitive to the fact there is no one-size-fits-all feminism that applies to all communities everywhere. One is reminded of the complex conversation among women of different cultural and religious contexts today, for instance whether the burka is a symbol of oppression or exemplifies a woman's right to choose

within her particular cultural and religious context.[48] Or with regard to the controversy whether the best way to characterize the controversial cultural practice, which still is quite widespread in Africa today, is "female genital *circumcision*," "female genital *mutilation*" or "female genital *surgery*" – the latter term communicating that this practice is an elective procedure similar to the West's fascination with plastic surgery.[49] Such divergent viewpoints thus offer an important conversation starter where women from different contexts may voice their respective understandings of female agency and female wellbeing.[50]

Conversely, gender perspectives on this narrative in 1 Samuel 25 highlight certain gender realities that still haunt us today. For instance, the threat of sexual violence experienced by Abigail and Ahionam calls to mind the vulnerability of the female condition, according to which women around the world continue to be susceptible to violence.[51] With regard to Abigail's disappearance from the text one could well ask what this unfortunate situation tells us about women's gifts? It may challenge us to reflect on the numerous ways in which women's gifts are not recognized today. It draws our attention to those instances where women in the professional realm make a strong entrance and show incredible creativity and resolve, only to disappear through what has come to be known as the "leaky pipeline" phenomenon.[52]

And yet this narrative about a woman who even amidst a very patriarchal culture transcends the script her culture has written for her helps us to appreciate modern-day instances where women step outside of the molds created for them in the many patriarchal societies around the world, which also make up the realities of many communities on the African continent, where I live and work.[53] This resistance is quite often complex and imperfect, but it is true to life. It is also a reminder that women's ways in the world are seldom straightforward or easygoing.

Looking at the text from a postcolonial point of view, one finds several intriguing elements that would warrant a postcolonial reading. For instance, the image of Abigail meeting the future King David and his band of brothers with the best of the land's produce, which amounts to a feast fit for a king and probably could feed a small village, calls to mind the intercultural encounters that have marked much of the Western entry into colonial Africa whereby the foreign visitors/invaders (missionaries/explorers/mercenaries) robbed countries of their resources (or, in the form of ever-new manifestations of the colonial enterprise, continue to rob them).[54] Abigail's lavish feast may be read in terms of the indigenous population "voluntarily" extending their gifts of hospitality to newcomers. However, one does not need to look too far to find that, more often than not, local resources were obtained by force or coercion.

Moreover, the image posed by Abigail saving her people from a sure death, only to disappear at the end of the narrative, shows similarities to Rahab the Canaanite (Joshua 2 and 6) who according to Laura Donaldson may be understood in terms of what she calls the "Pocahontas complex," i.e., an indigenous woman portrayed as the "good native" who "saves" the colonizers, allows them to colonize her native land, and then is assimilated into the colonizing group.[55] Lori Rowlett, who continues along the same line of thinking, argues that both Pocahontas and Rahab are co-opted by the colonizing powers when words that praise the colonizers as conquering heroes are put into their mouths: "She [Rahab, but also Pocahontas] becomes the medium for transmitting the colonizing power's arrogance in its representation of itself to itself."[56]

It may be worthwhile to subject Abigail's story to a similar analysis, developing the postcolonial aspects of reading this text in a contemporary context such as Africa, which has been marked by its colonial heritage forever. Even though constraints of space prevent me from developing these aspects of the text further at this time, one does get a sense of how reading the Old Testament at the intersection of Africa/the United States/Germany as well as at the intersection of gender and postcolonial criticism may impact what one sees in the text.

3. SEEING AS ABIGAIL

I mentioned earlier that the narratives that are told in times of trauma are significant. Such narratives contain important values that may play a powerful role in shaping the moral imagination. For instance, Kathleen Sands argues that tragedies – or near tragedies, as in the case of Abigail – may constitute "the birth trauma of moral consciousness." Tragedies impart to the reader the understanding that "life is not as it should be; we are not as we should be." In this regard, Abigail's actions that prevent a near tragedy offer the current community – as well as later generations who find themselves in situations of violence themselves, hovering on the brink of annihilation – the opportunity to reflect on questions such as, How does one survive in a hostile world? How may one go about transcending violence?

In this regard, an interesting angle to Abigail's story is the close association with Wisdom when the Wise Abigail and the Foolish Nabal are contrasted throughout

the narrative. Abigail's act of generosity stands in a sharp contrast to that of her husband, Nabal, who treats David and his men with contempt, refusing them food while this fool of a man is depicted as feasting on his own (cf. v 36, "like the feast of a king"). The contrasting perspectives of Wisdom and Folly in this text are highlighted by Judith McKinlay, who sees in Abigail's act of providing food allusions to the figure of Woman Wisdom who in Proverbs 9:1-6 holds a banquet of meat and wine, inviting all to participate. This portrayal relates to the broader theme in the Book of Proverbs, according to which the Way of Wisdom is sharply contrasted with the Way of Folly – the latter leading to certain death.[59]

In the immediate literary context, it has been argued that Abigail's story serves as an object lesson, teaching David restraint in violence or bloodguilt. Considering the later court history, it may be debatable whether David did learn, but at least in the immediate context David is twice in a position of killing his nemesis, Saul, but refrains from doing so (1 Samuel 24 and 26). Indeed, Woman Wisdom professes in Proverbs 8:15, "By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just." Wise kings reign in Wisdom, which – as Abigail's story illustrates – implies refraining from violence and sharing goods; the act of hoarding resources portrayed in this context as leading to death – in Nabal's case, literally.[61]

It is a question though whether the example of this Wise Woman in 1 Samuel 25 continues to speak across the chasm of space and time. In terms of an Abigail Optic, is it possible to see as Abigail sees? And what does such a way of seeing mean for feminist biblical interpretation that is committed to reading the Old Testament at the intersections? In conclusion, I would like to identify three characteristics of an Abigail Optic that reveal something of the feminist framework that shapes the way in which I look at the text as well as at the world:

First, an Abigail Optic implies that female agency is recognized both in the patriarchal context of the Old Testament world as well as in the contemporary interpretative contexts that make up our respective realities. Tonight, representatives from five different countries (South Africa, Botswana, Nigeria, the United States and Germany) and from four different universities in South Africa (Stellenbosch University, the University of South Africa, the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the University of the Western Cape) are here to participate in the Feminist Frameworks Conference that starts tomorrow. Over the years each of these women has presented us with rich examples of feminist and postcolonial biblical interpretation, attending to the voices on the margins, confusing categories such as "margin" and "center," making issues of race, sexual orientation and class central to the act of reading the Old Testament. In addition, I can tell you that each of these women has rich stories to share about her own journey of becoming a voice, of taking a stand, of showing resolve – often in very trying circumstances. As I contemplate my own journey to this moment in time where I am only the second woman to give an inaugural address in the Faculty of Theology's 156 years of existence, it has been good for me to reflect some more on Abigail, whose agency, as the preceding portrayal illustrates, is complex, but whose speech and actions had a life-giving and transformative effect indeed.

Second, an Abigail Optic is deeply committed to resisting all conditions that hamper the human ability to flourish. Abigail's act of resisting violence by offering gifts of food fits in well with my current project, which explores narratives in the Old Testament that depict instances of female resistance. This project as also my life and work in general, is deeply rooted in the belief that an integral part of being human is to resist dehumanizing circumstances. My hope is that, in my teaching and scholarship and community interaction, I may continue to find ways to challenge dignity-defying situations and also to encourage women, men and children whose human dignity is jeopardized to find ways to reclaim their dignity.[62]

Third, a key aspect of an Abigail Optic is the important theme of discernment, i.e., the wisdom to understand that survival is rooted in the ability to share goods rather than to hoard them for oneself, to show solidarity with other individuals and groups who find themselves in a situation of precarity, to create a space where others may flourish, and finally, to recognize royalty clothed in a pauper's clothes. Values such as these, which we have seen emerge from the act of reading Abigail's story at the intersections, ultimately may also mean for us today the difference between life and death. Particularly in a context in which violence, greed, power struggles and selfishness threaten the wellbeing of our individual and corporate lives, the ability to embrace wisdom and grow in discernment may be what makes it possible for us not only to survive but also to thrive.

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[1]Feminist biblical interpretation has proven to be multifaceted and a greatly diverse phenomenon, feminist interpretation having been redefined in significant ways in the past 30 years. Feminist biblical interpreters in the United States and Europe have been joined by Womanist, Mujerista, Asian Feminists and interpreters from Latin America and Africa, who all reflect on their feminist identities with reference to their unique experiences. Indeed one has to speak of 'feminisms' in the plural. More recently, feminist biblical interpretation has occurred increasingly at the intersection of methods such as Postcolonial and Queer biblical interpretation, broadening the original definition of Feminist biblical interpretation.

[2]Judith E McKinlay,"Challenges and Opportunities for Feminist and Postcolonial Biblical Criticism," in *Prophecy and Power: Jeremiah in Feminist and Postcolonial Perspective* (eds. Christl Maier & Carolyn Sharp; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 19-37. Cf. also her introduction to a recent collection of her essays in which McKinlay argues, drawing on the work of Fernando Segovia, that in terms of a "postcolonial framework" multiple angles of vision stand next to one another, explaining her resolve to hold together multiple (opposing) voices in a singular reading, *Troubling Women and Land: Reading Biblical Texts in Aoteara New Zealand* (The Bible in the Modern World 59; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), xv.

[3]L Juliana Claassens, "Like a Woman in Labor: Gender, Queer, Postcolonial and Trauma Perspectives on Jeremiah," in Prophecy and Power: *Jeremiah in Feminist and Postcolonial Perspective* (eds. Christl Maier & Carolyn Sharp; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 117-132. Cf. also L Juliana Claassens, "Give us a Portion among our Father's Brothers: The Daughters of Zelophehad, Land, and the Quest for Human Dignity," JSOT, 37/3 (2013): 319-337.

[4]After graduating in 2001 from Princeton Theological Seminary under direction of Katharine Sakenfeld, Dennis Olson and Don Juel, I spent a year working as a pastor in a Presbyterian congregation half an hour outside New York City before teaching for the next eight years at St. Norbert College, Green Bay, Wisconsin; Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Virginia; and Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C. before returning to South Africa in 2010.

[5]For the past nine years, the Protestant Theological University of the Netherlands (first in Kampen, now in Amsterdam and Groningen) and the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University, South Africa have collaborated in yearly conferences alternating between the two institutions and focusing on various aspects pertaining to the theme of human dignity. In 2013, some of the fruits of this rich collaboration were published in the collection of essays *Fragile Dignity: Intercontextual Conversations on Scriptures, Family, and Violence* (eds. Juliana Claassens & Klaas Spronk; Semeia; Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2013).

[6]Courtesy of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, I spent eight months in 2012-2013 in Münster, Germany with my host Marie-Theres Wacker of the Katholisch-Theologische Fakultät, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster. I will complete this fellowship this year with a final four months in Münster (April-July 2015).

[7]Drawing on Homi Bhabba's definition of hybridity as the "'in-between space' in which the colonialized translate or undo the binaries imposed by the colonial project," R S Sugirtharajah continues to describe postcolonial criticism as a product of hybridity: "It is an inevitable growth of an interaction between colonizing countries and the colonized. It owes its origin neither to the First or the Third World, but is a product of the contentious reciprocation between the two," "Charting the Aftermath: A Review of Postcolonial Criticism," in *Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (ed. R S Sugirtharajah; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 15-16.

[8]Isabel Phiri outlines the Circle's objectives well: "The Circle is a community of African women theologians who come together to reflect on what it means to them to be women of faith within their experiences of religion, culture, politics and social-economic structures in Africa." Phiri continues to cite the Circle's 2007 draft constitution: "The Circle seeks to build the capacity of African women to contribute their critical thinking and analysis to advance current knowledge using a theoretical framework based on theology, religion and culture. It empowers African women to actively work for social justice in their communities and reflect on their actions in their publications." "Major Challenges for African Women Theologians in Theological Education (1989-2008)," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 34/2 (2008): 67. Various publications have appeared under the auspices of the Circle, including *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa* (ed. Mercy Amba Oduyoye; Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992); *Talita Cumi! Theologies of African Women* (eds. Nyambura J Njoroge & Musa W Dube; Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001); and *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Ewudiziwa Oduyoye* (eds. Isabel Phiri & Sarojini Nadar; Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2000).

[9]Katharine Sakenfeld, *Ruth* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1999), 87.

[10]Cf. the methodological chapter in my dissertation (L Juliana Claassens, "The God Who Feeds: A Feminist Theological Analysis of Key Pentateuchal and Intertestamental Texts," PhD dissertation; Princeton Theological Seminary, 2001); later published in L Juliana Claassens, "Biblical Theology as Dialogue: Continuing the Conversation on Bakhtin and Biblical Theology," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 122/1 (2003): 127-144.

[11]Cf. e.g. my article L Juliana Claassens, "Calling the Keeners: The Image of the Wailing Woman as Symbol of Survival in a Traumatized World," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 26/1 (Spring 2010): 63-78 and my recent article "Mourning and Resistance: Trauma Perspectives on the Rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13)," which will be included in a collection of essays coming forth from the newly constituted Biblical Literature and the Hermeneutics of Trauma section of the Society of Biblical Literature. In my work I have been influenced by the work of, among others, Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997) and Kai Erickson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (ed. Cathy Caruth; Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 183-199. In biblical studies, Daniel L Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001) and Kathleen O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011) were instrumental in sparking the growing interest in a hermeneutics of trauma.

[12]Martha C Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Cf. her most recent book, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[13]Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 180-181. Cf. also Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004).

[14]Butler, *Frames of War*, 184. These scholars do not always agree. Actually, Nussbaum and Butler have been embroiled in a fierce verbal battle with Nussbaum accusing Butler that her language games are not helping real women (cf. Martha Nussbaum, "The Professor of Parody: The Hip Defeatism of Judith Butler," *New Republic*, February 1999). Nevertheless, to my mind these scholars share a profound commitment to justice that I have found particularly helpful in contemplating issues of human dignity, especially what it would take for individuals and communities to create the conditions that would allow women and others who find themselves in situations of precarity to flourish. Cf. the chapter by Elena Loizidou that outlines this confrontation between Nussbaum and Butler and that seeks to understand the differences between these scholars as well as the reasons for Nussbaum's sharp critique of Butler in *Judith Butler: Ethics, Law, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 157-167.

[15]Cf. e.g. my contribution to the *Theological Commentary of the Bible*, L Juliana Claassens, "Isaiah," in *Theological Commentary of the Bible* (eds. David Peterson & Gail O'Day; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 209-222. Cf. also my books *The God who Provides: Biblical Images of Divine Nourishment* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2004) and *Mourner, Mother, Midwife: Reimagining God's Liberating Presence* (Westminster John Knox, 2012) as examples of reading the Old Testament at this particular intersection between theology and history.

[16]Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*, 265.

[17]Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*, 258, 201-202. She explains as follows: "All societies, then, need something like the spirit of tragedy and the spirit of comedy – the former shaping compassion and the sense of loss, the latter indicating ways to rise above bodily disgust in a spirit of delighted reciprocity. The ancient Greek tragic and comic festivals embody much insight about how this can be done."

[18]Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History. Part Two: 1 Samuel* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 205-215. Cf. Barbara Green, "Enacting Imaginatively the Unthinkable: 1 Samuel 25 and the Story of Saul," *Biblical Interpretation* 11/1 (2003): 1-23.

[19]Mark E Biddle, "Ancestral Motifs in 1 Samuel 25: Intertextuality and Characterization," *JBL* 121/4 (2002): 617-638.

[20]Much of the feminist enterprise has been dedicated to bringing female characters out from the shadows; Johanna van Wijk-Bos's article is classic in this regard: "Out of the Shadows: Genesis 38; Judges 4:17-22; Ruth 3," in *Reasoning with the Foxes: Female Wit in a World of Male Power* (eds. Cheryl Exum & Johanna van Wijk-Bos; Semeia 42; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1988), 37-67. Judith McKinlay rightly states that we are in great debt to these early feminist foremothers' work. Feminists since then have sought to take the conversation further, reading the stories through more than one lens. Cf. an excellent exposition of this in McKinlay's introduction to her collected essays on women and land read through a postcolonial lens, *Troubling Women and Land*, xiii-xv.

[21]Adele Berlin calls Abigail "much more a type than an individual; she represents the perfect wife." David's other wives, Bathsheba and Abishag, she calls "agents," arguing that "they are not important for themselves, and nothing of themselves, their feelings etc. is not revealed to the reader. The reader cannot relate to them as people. They are there for the effect they have on the plot or its characters," *Poetics and the Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 32. Cf. also the work of Melissa A Jackson, who reads David's women through a comedic framework, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible: A Subversive Collaboration* (Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 142-170.

[22]1 Samuel 25 is set in the context of David fleeing for his life; it is sandwiched between chapters 24 and 26, in which David twice has the opportunity to kill King Saul, before whom he is fleeing. This particular framework offers some intriguing interpretative possibilities that will be explored in my forthcoming lecture "Cultivating Compassion?: Abigail's Story (1 Samuel 25) as Space for Teaching Concern for Others" at the Protestant Theological University–Stellenbosch University Consultation of 6-7 May 2015 on the theme "Compassion? Global Ethics, Human Dignity and the Compassionate God."

[23]See David Jobling's chapter, "The Dead Father: A Tragic Reading of 1 Samuel," which seeks to relate the tragic elements in the text with "the tragedy in the circumstances of its creation," in *Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry: 1 Samuel* (Minnesota, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 250-281.

[24]Kathleen M. Sands, "Tragedy, Theology, and Feminism in the Time after Time," *New Literary History* 34 (2004): 42.

[25]Mary Shields notes that Abigail's speech is 131 words long; only Deborah's song in Judges 5 contains more words: "A Feast Fit for a King," in *The Fate of King David: The Past and Present of a Biblical Icon* (eds. Tod Linafelt et al.: London: T&T Clark, 2010), 44.

[26]Cf. Judith McKinlay, "To Eat or Not to Eat: Where Is Wisdom in This Choice?" *Semeia* 86 (1999): 80-81. Cf. also Alice Bach, "The Pleasure of Her Text," in *The Pleasures of Her Text: Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts* (ed. Alice Bach; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 45.

[27]Ellen Von Wolde, "A Leader Led by a Lady: David and Abigail in 1 Samuel 25," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 114 (2002): 374.

[28]Butler, *Frames of War*, 166.

[29]Butler, *Frames of War*, 181. Butler continues as follows: "The desire to commit violence is thus always attended by the anxiety of having violence returned, since all the potential actors in the scene are equally vulnerable … A certain apprehension of equality thus follows from this invariable shared condition, one that is most difficult to hold fast in thought: non-violence is derived from the apprehension of equality in the midst of precariousness."

[30]Butler, *Frames of War*, 180.

[31]L Juliana Claassens, *The God who Provides*: Biblical Images of Divine Nourishment (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2004). God's provision of food that first occurs in the manna that offers life-giving sustenance to Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 16 and Numbers 11) can be traced throughout the Old Testament, in intertestamental literature such as Ben Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon, and into the New Testament, where God's provision of food is embodied in Jesus feeding the multitudes and offering his body and blood in what would become the Lord's Supper.

[32]Kim Chernin, *The Hungry Self: Women, Eating and Identity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 200.

[33]Bach, "*The Pleasure of Her Text*," 49.

[34]McKinlay, "To Eat or Not to Eat," 79-80. Cf. also Shields, "A Feast Fit for a King," 54.

[35]Cf. also Abigail's prediction that God will eliminate David's enemies, which turns out to be true when Nabal is struck down by God in v 38. In terms of the larger literary context, this prediction may also refer to the demise of Saul. Cf. also the reference to the lives of David's enemies being like a pebble being flung out of a sling that calls to mind David's earlier encounter with Goliath (1 Samuel 17).

[36]Bach, "The Pleasure of Her Text," 49.

[37]Cf. L Juliana Claassens, "Violence, Mourning, Politics: Rizpah's Lament in Conversation with Judith Butler," in *Restorative Readings: The Old Testament, Ethics and Human Dignity* (eds. L Juliana Claassens & Bruce Birch; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, In Press).

[38]Irene Oh, "The Performativity of Motherhood: Embodying Theology and Political Agency," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 29.2 (2009): 3-17.

[39]Oh, "The Performativity of Motherhood," 4.

[40]Oh, "The Performativity of Motherhood," 5.

[41]Oh, "The Performativity of Motherhood," 6.

[42]Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1989), 49.

[43]Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, 57, 81. For Ruddick, "the effort of world protec¬tion may come to seem a 'natural' extension of maternal work," which explains the subtitle of her book: Toward a Politics of Peace. Cf. the origins of Mother's Day in the United States; in 1873 Julia Howe became the driving force behind the Mother's Day of Peace that was to be celebrated annually and that became a precursor to the current celebration of Mother's Day. In her poem "Appeal to Womanhood throughout the World" she calls upon "'Christian women' to marshal their collective maternal instincts to promote peace." Cited in John Stauffer and Benjamin Soskis, *The Battle Hymn of the Republic: A Biography of the Song that Marches On* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 159.

[44]Bach, "The Pleasure of Her Text," 42.

[45]Bach, "The Pleasure of Her Text," 55. Bach links Abigail's voicelessness to her status as widow: "In spite of her marriage to David, Abigail remains a widow, that is, she survives without speech in the text," p 55.

[46]David Jobling points out that Abigail and Ahinoam were in enemy hands for quite a few days (1 Sam 30:13), which included a drunken orgy (v 16). He suggests evocatively that presumably they were raped, 1 *Samuel*, 184.

[47]Butler, *Frames of War*, 168.

[48]Butler refers to the work of Chandra Mohanty in her essay "Under Western Eyes" in which she argues that a First World feminist framework that focuses on the "ostensible lack of agency signified by the veil or the burka, not only misunderstands the various cultural meanings that the burka might carry for women who wear it, but also denies the very idioms of agency that are relevant for such women," *Precarious Life*, 47. Cf. also Martha Nussbaum's insightful analysis that challenges five arguments that are typically employed for banning the burka, *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 105ff.

[49]Hilary Charlesworth, "Martha Nussbaum's Feminist Internationalism," *Ethics* 111 (2000): 73. Charlesworth rightly points out that, for Nussbaum, a key concept within a feminist internationalism is a woman's right to choose, which is an essential element in liberal philosophy that underlies Nussbaum's thought. However, as Charlesworth poignantly asks, "Can a woman authentically choose to accept discriminatory practices that reduce her human capabilities?" Or is there the underlying "implication that the choice of inequality would be irrational in some way?" p 72.

[50]To avoid that the "views of well-educated Western white women" be projected "onto women of diverse backgrounds and cultures," Martha Nussbaum seeks to create a space "which lets the voices of many women speak and which seeks collaboration with women and men from many different regions in the process of forming a view," *Sex and Social Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8-9. Cf. Butler, who hopes for an "international feminist coalition" in which, she argues, "we could have several engaged debates going on at the same time and find ourselves joined in the fight against violence, without having to agree on many epistemological issues," *Precarious Life*, 48-49.

[51]Louise du Toit points out that South African rape statistics are equal to and even exceed those of countries that are at war. For instance, in 2012/2013 there were approximately 65 000 reported instances of rape per year (according to statistics from the South African Police Service –http://www.saps.gov.za/resource_centre/publications/statistics/crimestats/2014/crime_stats.php). This number typically is multiplied by 20 to account for a global low reporting rate, translating into an estimated 1.6 million rapes per year, "Rumours of Rape: A Critical Consideration of Interpretations of Sexual Violence in South Africa," Stellenbosch Forum Lecture, 25 February 2013. Such figures translate into the shocking reality that a woman is raped every 17 seconds somewhere in South Africa compared to every 2 minutes in the United States (https://www.rainn.org/statistics). Even though the 2013/2014 number for South Africa were slightly lower (62 649 reported cases), it nevertheless represents far too many women (and men) whose lives have been destroyed by sexual violence.

[52]The "leaky pipeline" phenomenon refers to the notion that, even though many women start out a career in academia, they somehow disappear; only a small percentage of women end up becoming full professors. This is a global phenomenon outlined e.g. by Judith S White in her article "Pipeline to Pathways: New Directions for Improving the Status of Women on Campus," *Liberal Education*, 91/1(2005): 22-27. At Stellenbosch University the figures are equally grim. Statistics compiled by the Women's Forum show that women make up 73% of professors among the ranks of junior lecturers, but only 18.6% of women reach the rank of full professor.

[53]Cf. the wonderful examples of African women sharing their respective journeys of surviving, often amidst very difficult circumstances, in the numerous publications that have appeared from the various chapters of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. For instance, in her contribution to one of the Circle publications, *Talitha Cum: Theologies of African Women* (eds. Nyambura J Njoroge and Musa W Dube; Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2001), Nyambura J Njoroge writes how the story of Rizpah as told in 2 Samuel 21 has helped her to notice the "African's woman inner strength and spirit that, despite of death or because of it, continues to fight for life." Cf. the volume outlining the most important features and themes of an African Women's Theology by Mercy Amba Oduyuye, who has rightly been called the "Mother of African Women's Theology," *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Sheffied: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

[54]Cf. Musa W Dube's description of a postcolonial approach to interpreting both ancient and modern imperializing texts that contain helpful examples of the types of issues that one can look for in a postcolonial (feminist) reading of the text, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000). Cf. also the wonderful collection of essays that displays the rich variety of scholars engaging in postcolonial biblical interpretation, *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations* (eds. Musa W Dube et al.; Atlanta: SBL, 2012).

[55]Laura Donaldson, "The Sign of Orpah: Reading Ruth through Native Eyes," in *Ruth and Esther: A Feminist Companion to the Bible. Second Series* (ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 130-144. Lori Rowlett expands on Donaldson's argument arguing that Rahab, like Pocahontas, fits the "pattern of the way that female characters are used in accounts of conquest: she represents the 'good native' who acquiesces almost immediately to the conquerors, as though she from the start recognizes an innate superiority in them and in the colonizing culture," "Disney's Pocahontas and Joshua's Rahab in Postcolonial Perspective," in *Culture, Entertainment and the Bible* (ed. George Aichele; JSOT Sup 309; Sheffield, 2000), 66.

[56]Rowlett, "Disney's Pocahontas and Joshua's Rahab," 75.

[57]Sands, "Tragedy, Theology, and Feminism in Time after Time," 43.

[58]McKinlay, "To Eat or Not to Eat," 73-84. Cf. Mary Shields, who identifies extensive further parallels between Abigail and Woman Wisdom in an intriguing article called "A Feast Fit for a King," 38-54. For instance, she argues: as follow: "Nabal, the fool, ate the feast that led to death while David accepted the feast leading to life," (p 51).

[59]Cf. e.g. Christl Maier, "Conflicting Attractions: Parent Wisdom and the 'Strange Woman' in Proverbs 1-9," in *Wisdom and Psalms. Feminist Companion to the Bible* (eds. Athalya Brenner & Carole Fontaine; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 92-108.

[60]Cf. Barbara Green's intriguing argument that 1 Samuel 25 features as a kind of dream sequence in which David contemplates the road not taken relating to his encounters with Saul in 1 Samuel 24 and 26, "Enacting Imaginatively the Unthinkable," 6ff. Cf. also Shields, "A Feast Fit for a King," 40.

[61]Cf. Shields' comment that "David almost followed the way of folly, and it could have been the death of his ambitions." Thanks to Abigail's help he ends up choosing the way of life, leaving a clear path to the throne, "A Feast Fit for a King," 54.

[62]Cf. my current project, L Juliana Claassens, *Claiming Her Dignity: Female Resistance in the Old Testament*, which I hope to complete in the coming months.

[63]Cf. Judith Butler's description of this term and her account of how she "moved from a focus on gender performativity to a more general concern with precarity" in "Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics," *AIBR. Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana* 4/3(2009): i-xiii. Available at http://www.aibr.org/antropologia/04v03/criticos/040301b.pdf. Accessed 27 January, 2015.