Of feminist criticism of the Hebrew Bible there is already a rich history; if Marxist criticism there is once again a fluorescence, but of Marxist feminist criticism there is less of a tradition than one might expect. This situation means that a survey of the historical trends in Marxist feminist biblical criticism must focus on the contributions of key individual scholars. Thus, in the first section of the following, I survey the work of Gale Yee, David Japhet, and Avamon Ippen. This critical survey forms the bulk of the presentation, raising a number of critical issues (second section) and then potential future directions in light of the current situation (third section).

Before proceeding, a couple of introductory matters need to be addressed. To begin with, ‘Marxist feminism’ relates to the feminist and Marxist traditions in slightly different ways. With respect to feminism, by Marxist feminism I mean all of the versions of radical feminism that owe some debt to the work of Marx and Engels. Thus, Marxist feminism is not another


deployed and continue to deploy the approaches of Western European feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Helene Cixous. The reason is not that these philosophers are not Marxist, but that the Marxism with which they struggled has almost invariably been quietly dropped as they were appropriated for English language biblical (and indeed literary) scholarship. To be sure, their relations with Marxism were critical and often ‘heretical’ (in the best traditions of Marxism), but their theories took root in an intellectual soil that was inscrutably socialist and communist. Yet as they have been taken up by biblical scholars, the distinctly Marxist tone of their deliberations has disappeared. It is not my task to restore that dimension of their work, for my agenda is more modest: to present the work of biblical scholars who explicitly deploy Marxist feminist approaches.

**Key Contributions**

The major contributions to Marxist feminist criticism may be relatively few, but they are nonetheless significant.

Gale A. Yee

In Hebrew Bible studies, the most sustained project is that of Gale A. Yee, to whom I devote considerable space due to the importance of her work. Later, I also outline the main contributions of David Jobling and Avaram Ipson. Tellingly, in an American context, Yee is usually celebrated as a feminist scholar rather than as a Marxist feminist. Yet she consistently points out that her work draws on historical materialist approaches, as well as on feminism and the social sciences—a combination she calls ‘ideological criticism.’ Yee combines a robust Marxist economic and political framework, a concern with reading texts from below, and a focus on women comprising the most marginalized and silenced voices of the text. Yee’s major work to date is *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Women as Evil in the Hebrew Bible.*

Here she offers studies of Eve in Genesis, Gomer in Hosca, Oholah and Oholibah in Ezekiel, and the ‘strange woman’ of Proverbs 1:9. Before doing so, she offers a clear explanation of the methodological basis of her approach to biblical texts.

Yee argues that gender cannot be separated from oppression in terms of class, ethnicity, or colonialism. Rather than fall back on ‘intersectionality’ and its inability to deal effectively with such matters, she draws upon the stronger materialist-feminist tradition for her method. Here material (economic and social) realities connect with ideologies (patterns of meaning-making that conceal their origins in situations of struggle). These two factors form an extrinsic and intrinsic analysis in her work: the former concerns the broader Marxist framework for situating the texts, specifically the economic categories of modes of production and forces of production, or the economic and social forms that produce any given situation; the latter deals with the text itself, especially the rhetorical strategies by which it engages with and reshapes the ideologies produced within social and economic forms, often producing imaginary resolutions of real social and economic contradictions.

In more detail, Yee’s extrinsic analysis draws heavily on the work of Norman Gottwald, who distinguished between two modes of production in ancient Israel. The tributary mode of production was characteristic of the city-based ruling class, led by the local despot or aspiring emperor, and extracted various forms of tribute (native and foreign) from the laboring peasantry and other lesser states. By contrast, the communitarian mode of production was peasant-based and relied on the clan-based allocation and reallocation of labor, land, and produce. For Gottwald, early Israel challenged the dominant tributary mode with its communitarian mode, which was based in the hillside towns. Later, with the arrival of the monarchy in ‘Israel,’ a tributary mode was reinstated, although it did not close down the

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5. I do not discuss liberation theology directly here, not only because of its wary dealings with Marx. Liberation theology made use of Marxist analysis for socio-economic conditions, but it was much more comfortable with the ambivalent tradition of Roman Catholic social teaching.


9. Yee offers a detailed exposition of her understanding of the contradictory complexity of ideology, drawing heavily on Terry Eagleton; see Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 9-28. The work of Michele Barrett is also useful outlining the two traditions within Marxism concerning critical and descriptive understandings of ideology; see Michele Barrett, *The Politics of Texts from Marx to Foucault* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 18-34.


constant challenges posed by the purveyors of the communitarian mode. Even Jesus drew on this communitarian tradition. In taking up and developing Gottwald’s proposal, Yee prefers to call the communitarian mode a familial mode of production, emphasizing its pattern of mutual support and its comparatively better situation for women. Like Gottwald, she designates the settlement of the highlands in Judea during the long economic crisis at the turn of the first millennium BCE as such a familial mode. The choice of ‘familial’ shifts the focus to the role of the clan as the key economic and social unit in the peasant agriculture of the Southern Levant.

Yee argues that this mode of production provided relatively more scope for women, given its mutually supportive nature, levelling of class differences, minimization of division of labor, and the necessity of a greater sharing of roles. I would add here the flexibility and malleability of uses of space and roles that show up in the archaeological record of village life. For instance, in the ‘cult corners’ it is difficult to distinguish between sacred and profane uses. The same space was constantly reproduced through its usage. What may have been used for cultic purposes was also used for everyday activities, bejoning a sharp separation between the two. Instead, while the corner was the location for a sheaf of grain, worked animal bone, amulet, figurine, incense, jug of beer, or a representation for the sake of a god of harvest, or perhaps for animal wellbeing, safe birth of a child, or for the rains at the right time, it was also the place to put a cooking pot, a loaf of bread before a meal, or some clothes needing repair. The flexible use—by both men and women—of these spaces indicates the way the sacred was interwoven with everyday life. Yet Yee is also fully aware that these activities took place under the direction of the clan head who was always a male. Thus, Yee wants to know how women both subverted such a situation, through ‘weapons of the weak’ and the exercise of informal power, and constituted a world of their own through a ‘conspiracy of silence’.

The question emerges how one should read the biblical texts in such a context, which is which is twice removed from the lives of peasant women. Not only are the lives of peasants largely absent from texts, but women’s lives are doubly absent, both through their own agency and through the studied neglect of the text’s producers. Luckily, biblical texts exhibit traces of their lives, albeit in the negative characterizations of women. Ideology, however, is always contradictory, so we cannot expect to find uniform patterns. For instance, in Hosca the ruling class of northern Israel becomes an adulterous wife who runs after her lovers (foreign states). Ezekiel 23 (and 16) gives voice through its violent and misogynist language to the trauma of a ruling class that had been colonized and disempowered. Proverbs 1–9, coming from a posttextic context, expresses the fears of a returning ruling class about its status in relation to those who had done rather well in their absence. The sons of the returning exiles express their economic concern about their sons marrying the ‘right’ wife, while the text also tries to produce ideological hegemony. By excluding economic matters, it offers a symbolic resolution of the real material conditions of class difference.

For Yee, the image of woman-as-evil functions as what may be called a national allegory. The deception, unfaithfulness, and fickleness of women represent a rival state (Israel in Hosea), the trauma of a dispossessed ruling class (Ezekiel); and an attempt at ideological hegemony by a ruling class (Proverbs). This ideological connection between woman and state provides the crucial link that enables Yee’s linking of extrinsic and intrinsic analysis. The socio-economic context provides the framework for and is informed by the ideological production of the texts. The same can be said of Genesis 2–3, again in terms of internal class dynamics. Yee argues that that the text exhibits significant ideological tensions. It is a product of a royal ideology.


15. See the excellent discussion in Yee, Poor Banished Children of Eve, pp. 48–56.
that seeks to overcome the ties of kinship (familial) in favor of the king (tributary). In other words, the story challenges the primary loyalty to the tribe and the father’s house, a loyalty that often leads to resistance and even rebellion in response to efforts to break down such social organization so that the ruling class could exploit the peasantry. The story does so by focusing on gender relations: instead of marriage patterns that strengthened the clan in terms of the extended family, the text of Genesis 2–3 presents the ideal as the conjugal bond of the nuclear family. These family structures weaken the bonds of kinship and redirect loyalties to the king, as nuclear families are far less likely to be sources of rebellion against centralized authority.

At this point a central feature of Yee’s analysis appears, as this shift to gender relations obscures the class nature of the struggle. ‘Adam’ is clearly a peasant, so the real target of the Genesis story is the class solidarity of the peasants which the new monarchy wants to break. Yee expresses her enthusiasm for this discovery because it connects Marxist and feminist analysis. Negative depictions of women become symptoms of class conflict. Indeed, gender conflict functions as a deflected form of class conflict, especially between the small ruling class (symbolized by the despot) and the vast majority of peasants. Thus in biblical texts, class conflicts often appear as clashes between men and women. The question is whether this depiction relegates gender to a secondary status, tying gender into a cover for a primary class conflict. Yee’s arguments occasionally show this tendency, but perhaps this preference is a necessary correction in the United States context in which class is often neglected in favor of other forms of oppression. At the same time, Yee’s close analysis of the biblical texts reveals that she is as much concerned with class as with gender. To her, the two are inseparably connected.

Since Yee’s study was published in 1993, she has modified her approach in some ways, particularly in the development of her current project, *Open Your Hand to the Poor: The Creation of Poverty in Ancient Israel*. Three important features of her new work include the use of Fernand Braudel’s distinction between *longue durée*, *histoire conjoncturelle*, and *histoire événementielle*; the use of James Scott’s notions of the public and hidden transcripts; and a model derived from *régulation theory* and called the ‘sacred economy’. Since I discuss the matter of mode of production in the following section, I focus on the first two items here.

Concerning Braudel, Yee deploys each of his three categories—*longue durée*, *histoire conjoncturelle*, and *histoire événementielle*—in turn. She begins by stressing the marginal status of early Israel and traces the way variations in soil and geography led to disparities of wealth (what may be called a narrative of differentiation common to many economic histories). From here, she moves to discuss the shorter rhythms of economic fluorescence and downturn, which led to political centralization, economic specialization, and statehood. In particular, the move to states accentuates the tendencies to economic disparites and stratification, with an emergent and non-laboring wealth ruling class increasingly exploiting the peasants. The former extracted ‘surpluses’—toll, tribute, and rent—for their own growing desires (food, armies, and building projects), leaving barely sufficient for those working in the village communities. For the third category—*histoire événementielle*—Yee discusses key early individuals: Omri, Ahab, Elijah, and Elisha. In this case, the building projects and costly wars of the first real kings exacerbated class differences and disparities of wealth, with the burden falling on the peasants who were called on to construct the edifices of power and fill the ranks of the armies. In this new situation, prophets arose, not only to provide services to the rulers in terms of divination, sorcery, and healing, but also as voices of resistance to the depredations of the monarchies. These stories are full of the indifference by rulers to the plight of common people, of the devastating effects of famine and war, and of systemic economic oppression (1 and 2 Kings).

As for the use of James Scott, Yee is concerned to recover as far as possible a ‘social history of agency’ for marginalized groups. The marginalized are, of course, the peasants, the ‘unclean and degraded’, and the ‘expendables’—who together form the majority of the population of the ancient world. Marginalization was therefore a strategy of the ruling class, through economic, androcentric, and ethnocentric strategies, as well as through social events—the focus of so much conventional history. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (London: Collins, 1972 [1949]).

17. *Longue durée* emphasizes the long-term interaction of human beings with the land and geography, *histoire conjoncturelle* concerns the rhythms of economies and societies over decades, *histoire événementielle* deals with the history of individuals and societies.
behavior. Women clearly suffered the most under such strategies. Yee's effort to identify the agency of the marginalized majority plays a double game. On the one hand, the biblical texts largely voice the ideological concerns of the ruling class (the 'public transcript'), so one must look outside and between the texts to find that agency (the 'hidden transcript'). On the other hand, some voices do seem to speak from the side of the marginalized, at the intersections between the public and hidden transcripts, where subversion by the marginalized appears in disguised form or in outbursts that condemn injustice. Yee is particularly interested in this in-between zone because it enables her to read biblical texts for such moments. This mode of interpretation is part of Yee's wider search for themes of social justice in biblical texts.

David Jobling

Social justice is also an under-riding dimension of the work of David Jobling. His methodological framework, which he also dubs ideologial criticism, is highly complex and sophisticated. It employs structuralist (especially Lévi-Strauss), poststructuralist, psychoanalytic, feminist, and Marxist dimensions. My focus is primarily on the Marxist and feminist elements of his work although the others are never far away. The prime text is his commentary (or perhaps anti-commentary) on 1 Samuel 23 but I begin with his key essay, 'Feminism and "Mode of Production" in Ancient Israel'. In it, Jobling proposes a very similar mode of production to that of Yee. Yet he calls it the domestic mode. He too finds the economic and social primacy of the household in early Israel, the dominance of domestic buildings and the absence of fortifications, and the division of labor according to gender: women grow and cook food, make textiles, socialize and educate children, whereas men clear forests, cut cisterns, and build terraces. How does such a domestic mode of production appear in the biblical texts? The tensions between two productions of domestic space are the key.

21. Here we find prophecy (and later apocalyptic), a new phenomenon in the context of states. A prophet is 'one who reads the present social situation, analyzes it, and courageously proclaims the dire future consequences of injustice, corruption, and exploitation, if this situation is not rectified'; see Yee, 'The Creation of Poverty in Ancient Israel', p. 16.

22. Jobling, 1 Samuel. I mention 'anti-commentary' since Jobling wrote the work in a way that seeks to undermine the conventions of biblical commentary and its attention to minutiae.

23. Jobling, 'Feminism and "Mode of Production" in Ancient Israel: Search for a Method', See also the summary in Jobling, 1 Samuel, pp. 144-45.

24. This is explicitly derived from Meyers, Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context. However, Meyers washes the proposal of its Marxist dimensions, drawing the idea from Sahlins, Stone Age Economics.


Jobling's work contains a wealth of insights, so much so that I can hardly do justice to them here. Yet two have always remained with me. The first concerns egalitarian Israel. For Jobling, this Israel is rather elusive, with the text uncertain as to whether it has been lost or if it is still to come. The catch with what is lost is that one forgets it, only to find traces appearing at odd moments. Or is it really still to come, an Israel that is yet to achieve justice, egalitarianism, harmony between the sexes and ethnicities, and the overcoming of class difference? This issue runs through Jobling's work, informing both his biblical commentary and Marxist politics. At times, he invokes Derrida's theme of the 'specter' of communism, the ghost that persists before, during, and after communist experiments have come and gone. Yet the specter will not rest, a perpetual presence that demands a world that is far better than the one we have. So also may we understand the trope of 'Jerusalem' in both the biblical text and in the current situation of the Middle East. At other times, this theme of the memory of revolution appears in terms of the 'interregnum', the period in between the petty despots that populate ancient Southwest Asian history. In one of his later pieces, Jobling deploys this theme in a complex and astute way in an analysis of Bertolt Brecht's The Caucasian Chalk Circle (not least because Brecht admitted that his main inspiration was the Bible). Not only does the Bible appear in a multilayered fashion, but it does so as Brecht explores participatory communism in a Georgist setting. Here the 'affirmative act' involves women, peasants, and workers as they work out the problem of who should inhabit a certain valley (herders or cultivators). But Jobling is interested in the way the play invokes the theme of an interregnum, a 'power vacuum' that enables ordinary people to exercise a greater degree of freedom and autonomy. The moment in the play is such an interregnum, as is the period between the Babylonian and Persian Empires in ancient Southwest Asia, as is the period of 'collapse' and economic 'crisis' at the end of the second millennium BCE during which the Judean Highlands were first settled. I argue elsewhere that these interregna were actually the stable and normative periods of ancient Southwest Asian socio-economic life, when the village communities, engaged in subsistence survival economies, were able to return to their tried and tested modes of life. In the commentary on 1 Samuel, Jobling invokes the theme of interregnum in an insightful reading of the slogo in Judg. 17:6. 'In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes'. The textual setting suggests that the overarching editorial framework is a negative one: a man called Micah requests a silversmith to construct an 'idol' (Pe'er) from a portion of the silver he had recovered for his mother. He puts the resultant image in a shrine he has made, adds an ephod and teraphim, and makes one of his sons a priest. Later, a passing Levite is invited to become priest, only to join a larger crowd of manumitted from the tribe of Dan who also take the image and associated shrines home. If we assume the ban on images in the second commandment, as well as the various instances of supposed 'lawlessness' that follow, this story seems to be a negative one, giving voice to ruling class concerns of chaos and crisis, expressed through the pens of the scribal sub-class. By contrast, Jobling suggests that it may also be read as a slogan of freedom. The statement that there was no king (see also Judg. 18:1; 19:1; 21:25; 1 Kgs 22:17; 2 Chron. 18:16) and that 'all the people did what was right in their own eyes' is an almost utopian image, a claim and a desire for a society without oppression from some petty potentate seeking to squeeze the peasants once again. Indeed, the text from Judges echoes a rallying-call from one of the Habiru leaders, 'Abdi Asirah:

Let us drive out the mayors from the country that the entire country be joined to the 'Asirah... to the entire country. Then will our sons and daughters be at peace forever. Should even the king come out, the entire country will be against him and what will he be to us?

Avaren Ipsen

The third major critic who has deployed Marxist feminist approaches is Avaren Ipsen, especially her effort at what may be called 'escort exegesis' in Sex Working and the Bible. Ipsen engages directly with sex-worker

27. I find a distinct echo in the wonderful work by Dick Hoer, Verlassing uit de Slavernij: Bijbelse Theologie in Dienst van Bevrijding (Amsterdam: Skandalon, 2009).
32. In the extraordinary final section of his commentary (drawing on psychanalysis), Jobling argues for a transference of Jude 17:6 to biblical criticism itself. As early Israel struggled between monarchy and judgeship, between tribal and popular normative modes of production, so also struggles biblical criticism today between an authorized method and a plethora of approaches that Jobling classifies as polytheistic, Philistine, and even anarchistic.
activists, seeking their insights in reading key biblical texts concerning
prostitutes: Rahab (Joshua 2 and 6:22-25). Solomon and the two prosti
tutes (1 Kgs 3:16-28), the anointing of Jesus (In 12:1-8; Lk. 7:36-50; Mk
14:3-9 and Mt. 26:6-13), and the whore Babylon (Rev. 17:1–19.10). Since
my study focuses on the Hebrew Bible, I restrict my observations to the
first two texts. Other texts might have been included, such as the matter of
sacred prostitutes, Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38), Samson and prostitutes
(Judg. 16:1.4), the psalmic against Israel and Judah in Ezekiel 16 and 23,
Hosea and Jezreel (Hosea 1–2), and the gospel accounts of Jesus and the
prostitutes. To include these additional texts would have made an already
involved book impossibly long, so one hopes for further studies.

Ipsen’s method is twofold. Her basic strategy is to interpret these four
texts with her collaborators in the Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP).
This interpretation was only part of the method, for Ipsen also engaged sex
worker activism in the Bay Area of San Francisco during the project. The
second feature of her method concerns feminist analysis, which is strength
ened through liberation theology, especially through the preferential option
for the poor (prostitutes) and feminist reworking of Marxist approaches
through standpoint theory. Let me say a little more about standpoint theory,
which Ipsen follows Sandra Harding in defining as: “(1) utilizing women’s
experiences as new empirical and theoretical sources, (2) committed to
during research for the explicit benefit of women, and (3) locating the
researcher on the same critical plane as the object subject matter of
research rather than keeping her hidden from view.”18 Standpoint theory is an adaptation of historical materialist analysis that recovers its earlier focus on the
experiences of women, particularly those who are multiply marginalized and
whose voices are rarely heard in scholarly work. In this light, Ipsen locates prostitutes within the realities of exploitive economic systems: the
military prostitute complex, the economies of gross misdistribution and
crisis, and exploitive extraction economies.19

The structure of each of the studies is similar: a translation of the text
drawn from the NRSV; detailed engagement with scholarly interpretation;
countering this interpretation with the hookers hermeneutics of the SWOP
activists; brief comparison between the SWOP and scholarly


readings; a conclusion that weaves together the various observations of the
SWOP readers and Ipsen herself. Here we encounter the borderlines of a
new genre of commentary, full of the colloquialisms of the SWOP readers
generated by those who live at the borderlines of conventional society.

As examples of such an approach, I provide a few observations on the
interpretations of Rahab and the two prostitutes in the story of Solomon.
As for Rahab, any negative reading of her identity as a prostitute is dis
missed. Rahab does not need to be excused. She is not a metaphor for erring
Israel, blemished Church or repentant sinner, and she is not (as in some
feminist readings) a ventriloquist for Deuteronomistic theology. By contrast
Rahab is an agent, a sexual positive figure who enables a definition of prostitu
tion as ‘sacrifice for one’s own survival and the survival of one’s family.’20
This positive identification of Rahab follows two paths: a majority opinion
among the SWOP readers in which Rahab acts in her own best interests
and opts for the ‘invaders’; a minority reading in which Rahab becomes
a counter-deity, a Goddess, in opposition to an oppressive Yahweh. Both
readings resist any hermeneutical desire to dismiss the prostitute and find
a more respectable position for her in the text or in interpretation.

The same sex-positive perspective is applied to the interpretation of
1 Kgs 3:16-28, where readers side with the two prostitutes. Indeed,
interpretations of the story tend to neglect the fact that they are, narratively
speaking, prostitutes. However, given the story’s focus on Solomon, the
result is somewhat different. Here Solomon enacts violence against
prostitutes, running a corrupt legal system prejudiced against sex workers.
In other words, when an interpreter identifies with the story’s prostitutes, the
experiences of these literary prostitutes are judged in this light: the Isra
elite spies and the men of the city in Joshua 2 are found to be devious;
Solomon’s wisdom dissipates and he becomes a cynical, prejudiced, and
corrupt wielder of judicial power, given to violence. The life experiences of
these activist sex workers clearly intersect with and illumine the texts
in question.

Ipsen’s studies are politically engaged, more obviously so than those of
Yee and Jobling. At one level she shares the political agenda of academic
approaches, such as feminism and Marxism. But she goes further: every
sentence is full of political passion. Three features may be identified. First,
Ipsen’s studies opt strongly for the sex-positive side of the debate over
prostitution and pornography. Ipsen points out that she began her analysis
from the abolitionist position in regards to prostitution policies—like
many feminists, conservative politicians, and the religious right. But after
engaging in sex-worker political campaigns, she came around to support
ning decriminalization, since prostitute activists take this position. Thus

27. Ipsen, Sex Working and the Bible, pp. 74, 108.
the strongest criticisms in Ipsen’s work are directed against abolitionists and sex-negative campaigners.

Second, this opposition between abolition and decriminalisation appears in the way Ipsen presents interpretations of the biblical prostitute texts. She notes how prostitutes have been erased, humiliated, and driven from the text, similar to the efforts of ‘law abiding’ citizens and the police to ‘rid the streets’ of hookers. As noted previously, in the story of Solomon readers often do not realize that the text depicts the two women as prostitutes.

Third, the issue of the mediator—Ipsen—is highlighted. One often finds that an intellectual mediator is quietly efficacious, especially in postcolonial readings, but in standpoint theory the researcher herself must be on the same critical plane as the subject matter of research. At times, this approach produces some quandaries for Ipsen. For instance, Ipsen’s hesitations over whether to include interpretations about the sacred prostitute run up against the wish of the SWOP readers to find those sacred prostitutes. Ipsen is then caught between the dictates of scholarship and the prostitute readings. At other times, she sides with the former and critiques the latter, but the problem of straddling both occasionally creates problems. Yet this difficulty is the nature of an organic intellectual’s struggle (Gramez). This struggle appears not merely in decisions on what to include or exclude in the analysis, but also in sentence structures and language issues. For instance, the language of sex workers is often at odds with the polite discourse of biblical criticism: ‘horsewhit’, ‘cuz’, ‘mutherfuckin’’, and ‘Vu know’ appear frequently; it is the language of everyday working people for whom polite language is a marker of class, corruption, and double standards. These and other expressions appear in the midst of one of the extraordinary colloquies as the end of each chapter, where Ipsen weaves observations, comments, and reactions to the text in a stunning series of commentaries. Perhaps the sharpest appears in the revolutionary statement concerning the whore of Babylon: ‘I am not going to find any of this liberating until she says “f**k you motherf**kers” and starts fighting’.41

Critical Issues

From this survey of the key contributions to Marxist feminist approaches to the Bible, I would like to identify a number of issues: the relations between class and gender, activism and political liberation, and mode of production. The first is a really non-issue, as those working with a Marxist-feminist framework assume the inseparability of gender and class

41. Thus, it should come as no surprise that the Radical Women Manifesto deals with law, economics, biology, children, health, education, ethnicity, indigeneity, sexuality, age, disability, poverty, prisons, prostitution, violence, environment, culture, the military, and self-defense. Radical Women, The Radical Women Manifesto: Socialist Feminism: Theory, Program and Organizational Structure (Seattle: Red Letter Press, 1996).


43. As Landry and MacLean put it, Marxist feminists wanted to distinguish themselves from radical and liberal feminists who “contended that women’s oppression was with and with the achievement of women’s power or women’s equality, respectively, within existing class societies”. Landry and MacLean, Materialist Feminisms, p. 22.

44. While in prison, he was permitted two books, apart from the Bible. So he began to read and then write. The result was his study of the Jew, eventually completed in Paris. Initially the study of Job was not published because Negri wrote it as a process of self-education, a way of dealing with doubt and fear and suffering while in prison. Antonio Negri, The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor (trans Marco Mandarini; Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009 [2002]).
under house arrest and had his passport confiscated for a number of years. My point on the role of intellectuals, such as Negri the philosopher or Marxist feminist biblical critics, is not that they need to spend time in prison. Rather, they need to create the cultural climate for thinking about alternative possibilities. They need to write works that radical activists may read.

The third issue concerns the mode of production which is both largely historical and the focus of those studying the Hebrew Bible. Both Gale Yee and David Jobling have maintained, following Norman Gottwald, that the early settlements in the Judean hills (which may or may not be early Israel) developed a distinct mode of production. They call it variously the familial or domestic mode of production, with ultimate debts to Marshall Sahlins. Its features include a focus on the household as the prime economic and social unit, which provided the social determination of economic life; extensive agriculture; optimal rather than maximal use of soil, water, and animals; risk aversion through diversity in crop growing and animal husbandry; the collection of small surpluses for lean years; allocation of land shares, labor, and produce; minimization of the division of labor and class stratification; and thereby a relatively more egalitarian status for women. This mode of production, they propose, stood in contrast to the tributary mode of production characteristic of the aspiring despotism of the little and big kingdoms, often called empires.\(^{45}\)

In this list of features I have actually included more than either Yee or Jobling provides. But I have done so for a specific reason: they are in the end mistaken in speaking of a distinct mode of production. It is better to speak of a socio-economic regime within a mode of production.\(^{46}\) The regime in question is a subsistence regime, made up of two building blocks or institutional forms known as subsistence survival (focused on agricultural organization) and kinship household (the social determination of economic life), the combined features of which I have described above. This regime was, and for many still is, a tried method used over millennia in many parts of the world, in which human beings need little rather than wanting much.\(^{47}\)

\(^{45}\) I follow Liverani in using such terms because ancient texts already use them, see Mario Liverani, Israel’s History and the History of Israel (trans. Chiara Papi and Philip Davies (London: Equinox, 2005), p. 7.

\(^{46}\) I draw this terminology from the regulation school of economic theory, a Marxist inspired approach that provides the framework—with appropriate modifications—for reconstructing the economies of the ancient world. What follows is a brief summary of Boer, The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel, pp. 92-109.


This regime, characteristic of village communities across ancient Southwest Asia, was primarily allocative rather than extractive in its working. That is, it focused on allocation and reallocation of land, labor, and produce. It struggled with two other regimes in ancient Southwest Asia that were extractive, in which the non-laboring ruling class, based in the towns (few real cities existed), extracted its ‘needs’ from peasants. These two are the palatial regime, based on palatine and temple estates, which dominated from time to time until the end of the second millennium; the regime of plunder, based on tribute-exchange as variations on tax, tribute, and exchange (long-distance exchanges and local produce), which flourished in the first millennium and provided the basis for the expansion of the Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Hittite, and Persian empires. This latter period is when Israel finally appeared. Due to its late arrival and marginal economic and political status, Israel (and the southern Levant more generally) tended towards a subsistence regime, preferably out of reach of the great powers whenever possible. Indeed, given the destructive effects on the subsistence regime by the extractive mechanisms of these powers (and their regime of plunder), the peasant labors of the subsistence regime found the absence of palatine and then plunder regimes highly desirable. They often acted to bring them to an end when the opportunity arose.

This reconstruction guides together earlier insights and proposes a new model for making sense of the social and economic realities of ancient Israel within ancient Southwest Asia. Indeed, Yee has begun to make deployment of this reconstruction for her project on poverty.\(^{48}\) In her use of this model, we can see how Yee’s concern for the production of poverty and agency of marginalized groups may be located within economic structures. Accordingly, palatine and plunder regimes, focused on towns and fostered by the ruling class, exacerbate poverty among peasants. However, the relatively stable subsistence regime constitutes the basis for resistance against such domination. This view is really a modification of Yee’s earlier familial mode of production (except that now ‘mode of production’ is not an appropriate term), where the minimization of division of labor and thereby of class difference provided greater scope for women. To be added is the need for all hands to work the land, especially in light of the constant shortage of labor.

\(^{48}\) Unfortunately, David Jobling is no longer able to engage with such work.

Future Directions

On the issue of economic reconstruction, I turn to potential future directions. While a reasonable amount of work has been done, much of the current economic studies are beholden to neo-classical economic theories.
which are particularly inadequate for dealing with the ancient world. In order to understand the situation better in relation to women, class, and exploitation, a more workable model based on alternative economic theories is required. The key is to focus on the centers of power—temple and palace—but rather on the labor done by 90% of the small populations of ancient Southwest Asia: agriculture, by which I mean both animal husbandry and crop growing. Indeed, the economic modes characteristic of such agriculture, on the borders or outside the wavering range of the power of the petty despots who appeared from time to time in ancient Southwest Asia, are quite different from the modes of palace and temple. Needless to say, the clashes between them became constitutive of the economics of the ancient world.

Second, the question of political emancipation remains central, especially in relation to the reading of biblical texts. Are they so deeply enmeshed within the production of empire and exploitation that even what looks like resistance is actually playing a role in sustaining the status quo? Or can one locate, even in the midst of the ruling class hegemony of texts, traces of resistance, whether in terms of a negative depiction of such resistance or in conflicting voices that inadvertently made their way into the text or as the inevitable inconsistencies and contradictions of that hegemony?

Finally, more work needs to be done in biblical criticism using Marxist feminist approaches. I have discussed three key contributors, which also happen to be the three Hebrew Bible contributors to the edited collection, Marxist Feminist Critiques of the Bible. In this work, reading for resistance or the instability of such readings is once again at the forefront. Little, however, is devoted to economic reconstruction, with a preference for the careful reading of texts and engagement with various Marxist feminist philosophical theories. Yet this is to be expected from a collection that was an early foray into a potentially rich area of biblical criticism. Texts needed to be identified and theories developed. Much more remains to be done, especially in terms of sustained economic analysis and more sophisticated approaches to modes of resistance. The collection is in many respects an early foray into expanding such studies and it would now look quite different.


50. Dow and Östlund (eds.), Marxist Feminist Critiques of the Bible.

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SPACE FOR WOMEN AND MEN,
MASCULINITY STUDIES IN FEMINIST BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Katherine Low

The method of masculinity studies exists because of ground-breaking efforts of women's studies to examine the roles of gender in society. Those engaged in masculinity studies acknowledge that for at least two decades, the women's movement (and also, since 1969, the gay liberation movement) has suggested that the traditional enactments of masculinity were in desperate need of overhaul.1 This overhaul came with questioning a 'sex-role paradigm' in which the biological bodies of males and females are socialized to fit into certain sex-roles in society. Gender roles—masculinities and femininities—are historically and socially conditioned, vary over time, and are not static. In other words, the assumption that the biological body sets as a container with which to fill-in appropriate sex-roles ignores the importance of culture in constructing numerous ways that people live out masculinities and femininities in everyday life. Both men and women can step into masculine gender roles in society. When the so-called 'crisis of masculinity' emerged in the late nineteenth-century in the United States, it did so because of the pervasiveness of the feminist model to question traditional sex roles in society. To call masculinity in crisis means different things depending on who uses the term, but, in academia, this idea of crisis evidences that what was once a fixed and stable concept is now under the scrutiny of scholarly analysis.

An influential study from 1985, Between Men, by feminist scholarive Kosofsky Sedgwick, heralded what would be called 'masculinity studies' by the 1990s. The work calls into question homosocial bonds for constructions of heteronormative desire, making it important for queer studies as well. Between Men also attests to the continual impact of feminist thought on

