These are the personal reflections of a feminist Old Testament scholar who reads the text of the Hebrew bible primarily as a woman in a patriarchal world, and secondarily, but inevitably from her being a white Afrikaner woman from a Reformed church tradition, teaching gender studies at an ecumenical faculty. It is but one woman’s story among many others told from various cultural contexts on the African continent; each unique and authentic in its own right; each attempting to expose the androcentric nature of the biblical text and to find ‘legitimate’ ways of having the text interact with real-life issues; each intent at transforming the patriarchal status quo informed by the text; each interpreting from the margins, since in varying degrees, all women live a marginal existence within oppressive traditions. Women do not share the same experiences however: as a white, Afrikaans-speaking woman I do not share the multiple burdens of domination wrought by sexism, racism and classism and the damages that followed in its wake, experienced by African-South African women. My exegesis and my way of actualising my exegesis are informed by who I am: occupying a privileged position on the threshold, inside yet outside, between Western European and African biblical scholarship as well as between two South African cultural groupings.

To assist filling-in the background of my position within the framework of this conference on exegesis and actualisation in Africa and Europe and to emphasise the relevance and appropriateness of its agenda, my reflections begin with an overview of the current debate

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1 This question is asked by Athalya Brenner in her review of the contributions in Vander Stichele and Penner’s book, *Her Master’s Tools: Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse*. 
within feminist biblical research. A brief profile of Euro-American (Western) and African-postcolonial feminist approaches\footnote{Whilst there is no uniform Euro-American or African-postcolonial feminist exegetical method \textit{per se}, feminist literary works are grounded in women’s experience. The diversity of women’s experience has thus caused an abundance of methods to come to the fore. I therefore admit to generalising.} serves as the setting against which my personal case history is projected.

\textit{Historical Criticism: A Bone of Contention}

On the international biblical feminist scene, methodology has been a popular focus area of late in papers and debates at various academic congresses. As Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner have recently pointed out, the discussions seek to:

Explore the juxtaposition that exists between the…interpretation offered by traditional historical criticism and that proffered by the various and diverse feminist and postcolonial interpreters who have found the methods, or…the results offered by early practitioners, lacking, largely because their own experiences simply did not resonate with those projected in the metaphors, myths and meanings of their ‘forefathers’ (2005:3).

The heart of the discussion involves the usefulness of historical criticism, especially for feminist exegesis. Can it account for the afterlife of the text and does it provide the tools for addressing feminist concerns? With her well-known statement that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Vander Stichele and Penner 2005:1), Audre Lourde, the African-American feminist and writer offers a bold challenge to this question, which comes under scrutiny.

Biblical research of the past was indeed disconnected from contemporary questions. Historical criticism was a modernist enterprise with modernist goals. Biblical historians aimed for certainty and objectivity in their endeavours to place texts in their historical context in order to discover the original and therefore the ‘true’ meaning of the texts. With its emphasis on ‘how it was’ and ‘what it meant’ it was not geared to deal with existential questions and to be ‘relevant’ to and for the feminist cause. The text came to be perceived as locked in the distant past, separated from matters of faith and the challenges of our time.

Not all historical critics used the historical-critical method in this way. Some, among them feminist exegetes, examine the bible’s