

## Book Reviews

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Grobbelaar, Jan and Jones, Chris (Eds). 2020. *Childhood Vulnerabilities in South Africa: Some Ethical Perspectives*. Stellenbosch: Africa Sun Media, Sun Press. ISBN: 978-1-928480-94-5. Paperback. Includes Table of Contents. 272 pp.

Vulnerability is a condition into which all people are born. *Childhood Vulnerabilities in South Africa: Some Ethical Perspectives*, edited by Jan Grobbelaar and Chris Jones, probes the situational nature of vulnerability by emphasising some of the social, structural, and systemic challenges in the global and local worlds of children. “Poverty, child support grants, male circumcision, child marriages, corporal punishment, racism, stigmatisation, FASD, LGBTIQ+ children and LGBTIQ+ parented families” (16) are identified and analysed in the respective chapters as challenges that contribute to childhood vulnerabilities in South Africa. The text is structured around the core theme of childhood vulnerabilities from an ethical perspective but each chapter takes its style, focus, interpretation, and construction from the author’s epistemological and ontological positioning. The analyses offered in each chapter makes it evident that the complex living realities listed above have severe consequences for the wellbeing of children in their past, present, and future lives. The diverse meanings of childhood and vulnerability are acknowledged throughout the various chapters, and this appreciation of the heterogeneity of vulnerability in relation to children is also seen in the intentional selection of the concept “vulnerabilities” in its plural form in the book’s title. The volume succeeds in making its envisaged contribution that is to promote academic theological ethical reflection on South Africa’s vulnerable children and the moral obligations that arise as a result. There are appreciative perspectives on initiatives in the international and national religious sector aimed at respecting the full humanity and bodily integrity of children, while awareness is also raised of the harm religious discourses and practices can cause, deepening the problems in the life worlds of children.

This edited volume raises the public issue of childhood vulnerabilities in South Africa particularly as a critical agenda for theology, child theology and its relation to theologies of childhood, churches, Christian leadership and faith communities. The insights offered by the authors from diverse academic disciplines equally stimulate awareness and critical reflection on the need for comprehensive and holistic responses to childhood vulnerabilities in the broader African context. The work is relevant to a variety of role players who work as academics, policymakers,

or practitioners in the inter- and trans-disciplinary field of child wellbeing, whether or not they have a religious orientation. The volume is recommended to anyone who takes seriously the cultivation of ongoing ethical imagination in light of childhood.

From the perspective of transformative research, emancipation and liberation, it could have been strengthened by presenting children's own views and their lived experiences of vulnerability. Their suggestions on what children's agency may mean in the co-construction of meaningful responses to vulnerabilities that they themselves have identified, would also have strengthened the volume. However, in highlighting this potential limitation it is important to note that the matter of including children's voices in such a volume brings methodological and ethical challenges of its own. Ethical perspectives on childhood vulnerabilities, specifically from a childist approach, may also imply more focused attention to the value of critical reflection and reflexivity for both adults and children as relational subjects. It is my hope that the scholarly contributions offered in this volume will stimulate intentional partnership-oriented research that may encourage adults to embrace the idea of children as co-constructors of knowledge. Research with children may grow the practice of listening to children and learning from them in imagining and acting together to create a hopeful vision of life that embraces humane and just spaces of living for all. This may mean that adult researchers have to extend their exercise of power directed at "giving children a voice to speak out" by listening to and respecting the voices that children already have and that they present in their distinct and diverse ways on platforms and in spaces where they feel safe to be authentic.

The volume adds a scholarly and much needed contribution to the discourse of moral obligations towards children, and South African children in particular. The knowledge base of the academic fields of ethics and (theological) childhood studies are certainly enriched by its ethical perspectives and guidelines centred on the support and protection of children as well as their dignity and rights. At the same time, it also underscores the need for engaged scholarship in partnership with children in the context of their communities in order to explore age-inclusive ways of thinking about and responding to vulnerabilities, potential positive qualities of universal vulnerability (for example co-constructing resilience through interdependence), and shared responsibilities in adult-child relational spaces.

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Van Klinken, Adriaan. 2021. *Kenyan, Christian, Queer: Religion, LGBT Activism, and Arts of Resistance in Africa*.

University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press. ISBN 9780271083803. Hardback. Includes Table of Contents and Index. 232pp.

The publisher of this book has given ‘LGBT’ an upper case in the sub-title, but Adriann van Klinken prefers ‘lgbt’, “as an indication of the unstable and unfixed nature of these categories” (x). Here van Klinken, collaborating with his sub-title, engages in a small but significant art of resistance. The sub-title derives, van Klinken acknowledges (188-190), from James Scott’s somewhat subversive analysis of domination and resistance, foregrounding the agency of subordinate groups. Like Scott, van Klinken recognises and analyses the presence of arts of resistance in the interface between the public and hidden transcripts, arguing that his Kenyan case studies are more public than hidden (189). The four case studies, which include the prophetic use of social media (chapter 1), music video (chapter 2), autobiographical story telling (chapter 3), and Christian religious belief and practice within a local church (chapter 4), each “analyze how religion, specifically Christianity, is drawn upon in lgbt activism in Kenya” (4).

More boldly, and bodily, van Klinken inserts himself into the structure of the research and the book which has emerged from the research (23). This too is an art of resistance, for van Klinken is not only overt about his positionality, foregrounding his scholarly presence, providing “insight into the embodied nature of qualitative research, specifically in the area of religion and sexuality” (24), he also acknowledges “the erotic and sometimes explicitly sexual dimension inherent in the embodied and relational dynamics of fieldwork in general, and (possibly) of fieldwork on issues relating to sexuality in particular” (24). In addition to a profoundly vulnerable section on “Accounting for the Ethnographic Self”, van Klinken includes a series of four personal narrative “interludes” between the chapters, within which he intersects and transgresses the boundaries between the researcher’s private and public selves and between the researcher and the research participants (23).

van Klinken is not only theoretically astute with respect to his understanding of ‘queer’ (7), he is also attentive to queer intersections with African studies, religious studies, and African theology. He is particularly attentive to “the ways in which African queer subjects themselves adopt and navigate an originally Western and now globalized narrative of lgbt identities and rights, and to the tensions and fissures that the adoption of this narrative frequently creates” (9). This book contributes theoretically to an emerging body of scholarship, grounded in “grassroots negotiation of religious and sexual identities” by focussing on an

“understudied” dimension “of publicly visible forms of lgbt activism and queer politics” (16). For readers of JTSA, this book “presents a methodological example of how African queer theology might be developed” (22).

The case studies make it clear that “religion is not only a source of homophobia in Africa but also a source of lgbt activism and queer politics” (ix). van Klinken’s book demonstrates that, in the Kenyan context, “[t]he strategic use of highly public instead of hidden forms of [queer theological] resistance, and the explicit rather than disguised strategies of [queer] political action, indicates that the individuals and communities involved feel rather emboldened and empowered” (189). van Klinken’s research in the Kenyan contexts summons us to similar research in other African contexts, offering us “insight into the ways in which Christianity can be employed as a key factor in African queer politics”, and in so doing enabling us to interrogate “the secular underpinning of Western queer studies” (7).

The theoretical and methodological contributions of this book are substantive. van Klinken is widely and deeply read in African studies, religious studies, theological studies, queer studies, feminist studies, HIV studies, ethnographic studies, postcolonial studies, and decolonial studies. In a clear and accessible style, van Klinken brings these discourses into conversation, using “a scavenger methodology” (19), using what is at hand in order (in the Foucauldian) sense to collaborate with African colleagues to forge the analytical resources we need to engage our own African realities.

van Klinken acknowledges, along with Marc Epprecht, whom he cites, that queer theory “awaits a rigorously theorized indigenous term or terms ground in African culture and contemporary struggles” (8). van Klinken grounds his research within contemporary African, Kenyan, struggles, which in their turn are grounded in African culture; van Klinken also assembles the kind of eclectic, global and local, theory making resources with which to forge African queer theory. In so doing, van Klinken places these Kenyan resources alongside the “Izitabane” research being done here in South Africa.

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Graybill, Rhiannon and Huber, Lynn R. (Eds.) 2021. *The Bible, Gender, and Sexuality: Critical Readings*.

London: T&T Clark. ISBN 9780567677556. Hardback. Table of Contents and Index included. 384 pp.

In this volume, Graybill and Huber bring together twenty-two previously published essays, spanning several decades, by scholars writing on the intersection between the Bible and its contexts, and gender and sexuality. It is divided into three sections: Gender/s in and around Biblical Contexts, Sex and Sexualities in and around Biblical Contexts, and “Critiquing Gender and Sexuality in and around Biblical Contexts.

The first section showcases various historical and literary methods and theories that have been used to understand its broader subject matter. These include, amongst others, archaeology (Nakhai on Israelite religion), geography and the construction of space (Davidson on Jeremiah), masculinity and disability in the Bible (Hentrich), and a close reading within the ambit of virginity and purity studies (Foskett). The second section is largely informed by the way that our assumptions influence the way that we understand sex and sexuality in the Bible and its contexts. For example, what would happen if we did not read Boaz as a heterosexual man (Krutzsch)? How do gender, sexuality, and ethnicity intersect in Esther and expose the narrator’s “racist politics” (Bailey)? Why do scholars assume that the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis is about sex, not food (Stone)? How do our own exigencies colour what we see in texts? This question is addressed in the third section, which deals with how our contexts influence our reading of biblical texts and vice versa. How do the tenets behind Disney’s Pocahontas relate to the view of Rahab within a post-colonial reading of Joshua (Rowlett)? Is Judith a heroine or a villain or both, in light of Wonder Woman and Lyndie England’s violent beheadings of their male subjects (England)? What if we read the Great Whore of Revelation from a queer-lesbian perspective (Huber)?

The articles in this volume are on the cutting edge of Biblical Studies. As indicated they approach texts from a variety of perspectives, such as womanism, archaeology, disability, post-colonialism, and intersectionality. However, as also already indicated, none of them are new to this volume as they have been published elsewhere. The introduction acknowledges this (3), but very few of the essays do so. It would have been helpful if each author gave an indication of when the articles were first published and they now view their work since the first publication. England’s essay on Judith has such a self-appraisal, but it is one of the few. The essay was first written for *A Feminist Companion to Tobit and Judith* (Brenner-Idan, A. with Efthimiadis-Keith, H. 2015. London: T&T Clark).

Furthermore, I would also have appreciated a list of contributors, indicating who they are, what are their specialisations, and where they currently work and/or reside. Short bibliographical sketches of the authors would have helped the reader to contextualise the volume and better test the volume's stated interest in intersectionality (4). The essays may employ intersectionality, but the volume as a whole does not seem to do so. Most of the contributors are white with a few authors of African and Asian descent, but no contributors are from the African continent. Why have the works of eminent African feminist theologians and Bible interpreters not been included? While the introduction acknowledges various lacunae (3) such as disability and concern for extra-canonical works, it fails to mention or explain the absence of African feminist theologians/interpreters such as Madipoana Masenya Ngwan'a Mphahlele, Musa Dube, Mercy Oduyoye, Makhosana Nzimande, Hoyce Jabon, and others. What should we make of this, as African women theologians and biblical interpreters? Has our voice been silenced? My view is that it has.

The book seems to be aimed at emerging feminist and gender biblical scholars, for whom it could be a 'go-to' text. However, I would hesitate to call it "a path-breaking collection of intellectual conversations" (Florence Egbeyale 2021) or a "tour de force" ("Reading Religion", 2020). How can it be when it omits the voices of prominent feminist and gender scholars from the African continent? If I was to teach a course on Feminist Biblical Interpretation, I would certainly use some of the essays in this volume, but would do so in relation to African feminist contextual interpretations.

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