



Feminist Biblical Interpretation through an Intersectional Lens:

Diverse Developments in Theory, Methodology, and Practice

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Abstract: This paper traces the development of feminist biblical interpretation from its marginal beginnings to its current position as a mainstream academic approach. It examines the field's evolution through four historical phases: early enlightenment (late 19th -mid 20th century), systematic development (1960s-1980s), theoretical diversification (1990s-early 2000s), and contemporary intersectional analysis. It explores key theoretical frameworks, methodological innovations, and significant contributions that have shaped this field. Special attention is given to recent developments in intersectionality and global-south perspectives, which have profoundly enriched biblical interpretation through diverse cultural lenses. The paper also addresses the impact of digital humanities technologies on biblical scholarship. While highlighting feminist biblical criticism's achievements in challenging patriarchal interpretations and recovering overlooked female voices, the paper acknowledges ongoing challenges, including methodological debates and tensions with traditional approaches. It concludes by emphasizing feminist biblical interpretation's continued relevance and potential for promoting social justice.

Keywords: Feminist Biblical Interpretation, Gender and Religion, Hermeneutics, Intersectionality, Global-South Perspectives

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1. Introduction

Originated from the feminist movement in the late 19th century, feminist biblical criticism gradually developed into an independent and diversified academic field in the second half of the 20th century. As an important branch of Feminist Theology, Feminist Biblical Criticism aims to challenge the traditionally male-dominated mode of biblical interpretation and to reinterpret the scriptures through a female perspective in order to show the subjectivity and position of women in the biblical text and the real society (Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, p. 11; Ruether 1983, pp. 25-26). It is generally accepted that the feminist movement, women's theology and feminist biblical interpretation are intertwined with the common aim of promoting gender equality, social justice and human liberation (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1975, p. 611; Russell 1985, pp. 16-17).

In recent decades, feminist biblical interpretation has gradually become an important direction in contemporary biblical studies. Especially in the context of globalization and multiculturalism, the introduction of feminist perspectives has brought about considerable changes in biblical studies, leading to a gradual transformation of traditional exegetical methods and concepts (Kwok 2005, pp. 17-18; Levine 2006, pp. 82-83; Dube 2006, pp. 178-93). The purpose of this study is to examine the development of feminist biblical interpretation from historical to contemporary times, focusing on its theoretical framework, methodological approaches, and practical implications. The scope of this study is clearly set within the field of feminist biblical interpretation, and the methodology of literature analysis, and comparative study is employed to demonstrate the diverse development and significant contributions of the field by analyzing and comparing representative literature and scholars' perspectives at various stages of the development process.

It will firstly reviews the historical development of feminist biblical interpretation, including the early Enlightenment stage, the systematic development under the second wave of the feminist movement, and the introduction of postmodern and pluralistic theories until the rise of intersectional analyses and the Global South perspective since the 21st century; secondly, it discusses the core theoretical frameworks and research methodologies; next, it elaborates on its academic and practical contributions; and finally, it puts forward challenges and controversies facing the field of study and makes concluding reflections. Finally, we will present the challenges and controversies facing the field of research and make concluding reflections.

2. Historical Development of Feminist Biblical Interpretation

The development of feminist biblical interpretation can be roughly divided into four phases: late 19th to mid-20th century as the early Enlightenment phase, 1960s-1980s being the second wave of feminist movement and systematization of relevant theories, 1990s to early 2000s as the postmodern and pluralistic theoretical turn, and the 1st quarter of this century the contemporary phase.

An early example of feminist biblical interpretation was *The Woman's Bible* by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), who criticized the patriarchal ideology that was deeply entrenched in traditional biblical interpretation, emphasizing that biblical interpretation had long been dominated by men and that it needed to be reinterpreted from a female perspective (Stanton 1895, pp. i-vi). Despite the many criticisms of the book at the time of its publication, it undoubtedly symbolized the formal emergence of feminist biblical interpretation (Mace 2009, pp. 5-6). It is conceivable that this should have been a result of earlier female struggles. In early colonial America, women religious leaders such as Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643) and Mary Dyer (1611-1660) had already begun to challenge traditional religious authority. Against this backdrop, Antoinette Brown Blackwell (1825-1921) became the first officially ordained female minister in the United States, setting a precedent for women's equal rights in the religious sphere (Lerner 1993, pp. 16-19).

During the second wave of the feminist movement (1960s-1980s), feminist biblical interpretation became more systematic and academic. Phyllis Trible and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza are representative figures of this period. Trible proposes "Depatriarchalizing Hermeneutics", which seeks to remove patriarchal overtones from biblical texts and restore the dignity and subjectivity of women's roles (Trible 1973, pp. 30-48). Schüssler Fiorenza, on the other hand, proposed "Hermeneutics of Suspicion", which advocates a critical examination of power structures in biblical texts and emphasizes the restoration of women's contributions to early Christian history (Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, p. 56). Notable feminist scholars including Letty Russell, Luise Schottroff, and Amy-Jill Levine have similarly advanced feminist hermeneutical methodologies and will be examined subsequently.

In the last decade of the last century, feminist biblical interpretation began to incorporate multiple theoretical perspectives, including postcolonial theory, Queer theory, and eco-feminism. Among them, Kwok Pui-lan and Musa W. Dube outstandingly integrated postcolonial critique into feminist interpretation, exploring the intersection of colonial experience and gender oppression (Kwok 2005, pp. 57-58; Dube 2000, pp. 18-19). Queer theory, introduced by scholars such as Marcella Althaus-Reid and Ken Stone, challenges the biblical

exegetical tradition of heterosexism (Althaus-Reid 2000, pp. 12-13; Stone 2004, pp. 110-34). Rosemary Radford Ruether, an eco-feminist, is concerned with the relationship between humans and nature and advocates an eco-ethical dimension in biblical interpretation (Ruether 2003, pp. 23-33).

Since the 21st century, intersectionality has become a mainstream methodology in feminist biblical interpretation. This analytical framework, which originated with African American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, pp. 139-67) has evolved from its roots in legal discourse to become an increasingly important tool in biblical criticism. Its ideological foundations can be traced to earlier Black feminists who articulated the experience of multiple, simultaneous oppressions (Mehring 2024; Yee 2020, pp. 7-26). Before Crenshaw coined the term, these scholars had already explored the interconnections between gender, race, and class, highlighting the need for a theory that addresses forms of oppression beyond a single category or perspective focused primarily on white women's experiences (Janssen 2022, pp. 112-25; Kartzow 2010, pp. 364-89). After Crenshaw provided a concrete framework in legal studies, the concept crossed disciplinary boundaries into the social sciences and spread to Europe and beyond during the 1990s (Mehring 2024). The core of intersectional analysis is the understanding that an individual's identity is not merely a separate collection of categories such as gender, race, and class, but rather results from their interplay and co-construction; multiple systems of oppression operate simultaneously and reinforce each other, creating unique impacts on individuals (Newberry 2024, pp. 321-48; Diko 2023, pp. 612-34; Yee 2020, pp. 7-26).

In biblical studies, intersectionality has been applied in a comparative deal to analyze power relationships and marginalized experiences in texts, connecting ancient scriptures with contemporary social justice issues (Newberry 2024, pp. 321-48; Diko 2023, pp. 612-34; Yee 2020, pp. 7-26). The introduction of intersectionality as an explicit analytical framework in biblical studies, particularly New Testament studies, took place primarily in the early 21st century (Newberry 2024, pp. 321-48). Although some scholars employed intersectional approaches before the term gained popularity (Newberry 2024, pp. 321-48), figures such as Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, Joseph A. Marchal, Mitzi J. Smith and Jin Young Choi, and Gale A. Yee have been identified as important pioneers in formally introducing intersectionality into biblical scholarship (Newberry 2024, pp. 321-48; Smith and Choi 2020). Schüssler Fiorenza's work, while using the term "kyriarchy" to describe multi-layered power structures in ancient societies, also significantly advanced understanding of the intersections of race, gender, class, and empire in early Christianity (Mehring 2024; Nasrallah and Schüssler Fiorenza 2009). As intersectionality has gained traction, it has proven particularly valuable for revealing cultural complexity in biblical texts

(Kartzow 2024, pp. 1-11; Cobb 2024, pp. 43-60), and for encouraging researchers to move beyond single perspectives to consider how multiple social categories interact, with special attention to marginalized experiences (Diko 2023, pp. 612-34; Yee 2020, pp. 7-26).

Entering the 21st century, the use of intersectionality in biblical studies has increased and diversified significantly. For example, scholars analyze cultural complexity and power structures. Kartzow has made extensive use of the intersectionality framework, particularly in her study of the relationship between Galatians 3:28 and the Colossians family code, suggesting that intersectionality is an effective way of understanding the cultural complexity of the ancient Roman Empire, revealing how social spheres intersected with each other and co-constructed identity and class (Kartzow 2010, pp. 364-89). Her “asking another question” approach encourages researchers to go beyond single-category analyses and examine how different categories interact with each other (Kartzow 2010, pp. 364-89). She believes that intersectionality is a useful tool for revealing the cultural complexity of ancient societies and prompting interpreters to take the complexity of the contemporary world seriously (Kartzow 2010, pp. 364-89). A special issue edited by Denise Kimber Buell et al. attempts to extend the scope of intersectionality analysis to dimensions such as the body and locality for the study of the Jesus Movement (Buell et al. 2010, pp. 309-312).

Marginalized groups and social justice issues are also important concerns. Scholars apply intersectionality to examine the experiences of marginalized figures in biblical texts and connect them to contemporary social justice issues (Newberry 2024, pp. 321-48; Diko 2023, pp. 612-34; Yee 2020, pp. 7-26). Yee advocates “thinking intersectionally” in biblical studies, arguing that it can help to expose multiple oppressive power relationships in the text and uncover marginalized voices that have been ignored or silenced. She points out that intersectionality applies to everyone, including privileged groups who should reflect on their privilege (Yee 2020, pp. 7-26). South African scholar Mlamli Diko employs intersectionality to analyze women’s oppression in the Old Testament and South African contexts, exploring the complex intersections of gender, race, class and history (Diko 2023, pp. 612-34). He emphasizes that intersectional analyses can reveal the complex oppression that women face in the Old Testament due to the interweaving of gender, social status, ethnicity and cultural backgrounds (Diko 2023, pp. 612-34). Ndikho Mtshiselwa also explores the intersectional perspective of Exodus 1-15 in relation to the oppression of Zimbabwean immigrant women in South Africa (Mtshiselwa 2021, pp. 503-29).

Intersectionality is also used for in-depth analysis of specific biblical characters and their complex identities. Hanna-Maria Mehring conducted an

intersectional analysis of the Samaritan woman in John 4, focusing on her gender, ethnicity/religion and other identity dimensions, and exploring power structures in the text, historical background, and interpretive history (Mehring 2024). Julie Newberry combines intersectionality and intertextuality analyses as a means of studying Elizabeth in Luke 1. She argues that this approach deepens understanding of the text and highlights its relevance to contemporary issues of social justice (Newberry 2024, pp. 321-48). Elizabeth's complex identity is viewed as embodying the intersection of multiple identities with which intersectionality is concerned (Newberry 2024, pp. 321-48).

Intersectional analysis has gradually incorporated more dimensions, such as age, disability, nationality, religion, etc. (Newberry 2024, pp. 321-48; Dempsey et al. 2024, pp. 1-51; Mehring 2024). Scholars have also begun to focus on children, viewing children's experiences as a category requiring intersectional analysis and recognizing their diversity (Diko 2023, pp. 612-34). Religious belief itself is also explored as a dimension that can intersect with other categories (Janssen 2022, pp. 112-25; Mehring 2024). Additionally, Christy Cobb applies intersectionality to analyze slavery relationships in early Christian literature, revealing the complex experiences of female slaves and female slave owners. Cobb's analysis highlights how these female slave owners occupied complex positions, experiencing oppression as women within patriarchal structures while simultaneously participating in and benefiting from the broader system of kyriarchal domination by exercising power over their slaves through their social status and privilege as property owners (Cobb 2024, pp. 43-60).

Cross-cultural and regional applications are also a trend that cannot be overlooked. Although the term originated primarily from American scholars, intersectional thinking and research methods have received positive responses in non-Western regions. For example, in India, although the term "intersectionality" is not always used, scholars naturally address the intertwined effects of caste, gender, religion, and class when focusing on local contexts, which is viewed as a default position in local biblical studies (Melanchthon 2021, pp. 55-74). In South Africa, intersectionality is also used to analyze phenomena of oppression and is combined with local perspectives such as African feminism (Diko 2023, pp. 612-34; Mtshiselwa 2021, pp. 503-29).

Scholars have also reflected on the methodology of intersectionality analysis, emphasizing its value in revealing cultural complexity (Kartzow 2024, pp. 1-11; Cobb 2024, pp. 43-60). The Discussions include how to avoid oversimplifying or distorting the position of intersectionality analysis as rooted in Black feminism and critical race theory (Mehring 2024; Cuéllar 2021, pp. 4-10; Melanchthon 2021, pp. 55-74). The application of contemporary frameworks to the

interpretation of ancient texts poses a challenge, as scholars attempt to calibrate their interpretations by combining historical research, literary analysis, theological reflection, and intertextuality analysis (Newberry 2024, pp. 321-48; Mehring 2024). The researcher's own social position affects interpretation, so reflection on the interweaving of their own identities becomes an important orientation (Janssen 2022, pp. 112-25; Yee 2020, pp. 7-26; Newberry 2024, pp. 321-48). Reflecting the importance of intersectionality in the study of Hebrew biblical feminism, the *The Oxford Handbook on Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible* edited by Susanne Scholz covers analyses of multiple structural oppressions and has been cited as a marker of a shift in the field (Dempsey et al. 2024, pp. 1-51).

As can be seen, from the introduction of the concept in the late 20th century until today, intersectionality in biblical criticism has evolved from a relatively marginal method to a key tool for analyzing complex identities, power relationships, and inequalities in texts (Newberry 2024, pp. 321-48; Mehring 2024). It encourages researchers to move beyond single perspectives and consider the interactions between multiple social categories, with particular attention to the experiences of marginalized groups (Diko 2023, pp. 612-34; Yee 2020, pp. 7-26). Through combination with other methods, such as intertextuality, and reflection on researchers' own positions, intersectional analysis continues to deepen understanding of biblical texts and their relevance to contemporary social justice issues (Newberry 2024, pp. 321-48; Mehring 2024; Yee 2020, pp. 7-26). Despite methodological discussions and challenges, the influence of intersectionality in the field of biblical studies continues to grow, promoting more inclusive and socially conscious exegetical practices.

In addition, the rise of the Global-South perspective and the development of digital humanities technologies (Nockels 2025, pp. 46-65) have led to further diversification and methodological innovation in the field. The "global-south perspective" is a loosely defined term referring to approaches emerging from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and other regions outside North America and Western Europe. This perspective challenges Western academic hegemony by offering readings rooted in local cultural, historical, and social experiences. Christians in the Global South identify powerfully with the biblical world, an agricultural society marked by famine, plague, and persecution, giving Scripture a vividness unavailable to most believers in the industrialized North (Jenkins 2006, pp. 68-70). These interpretations often yield both fundamentalist and socially liberating readings, particularly regarding women's rights and social justice. Huffard notes that as Christianity's demographic center shifts southward, biblical scholarship increasingly reflects these diverse perspectives (Huffard 2006, pp. 65-72). South Korean Minjung theology, represented by Kim

Yong-Bock, interprets texts through the experience of the oppressed masses, connecting ancient liberation narratives with contemporary struggles (Kim 2013). Similarly, Tamez's work combines feminist concerns with liberation theology, reading biblical texts from the perspective of the economically marginalized in Latin America (Tamez 1982, pp. 25-38). These approaches prioritize ordinary readers' experiences, connect interpretation directly to social justice issues, engage indigenous cultural resources, and recognize the Bible's complex role in both colonization and liberation.

Digital technologies also have significantly transformed biblical studies through innovative methodological approaches. Researchers are now employing artificial intelligence and computational tools to analyze the scripture in unprecedented ways. Lima et al. developed an AI-based system for contextual biblical citation recommendations from the New Testament, demonstrating how natural language processing can extract semantic meaning from complex religious texts (Lima et al. 2023, pp. 125-30). Digital approaches have also prompted theological reflection, as Herzfeld explores in her examination of AI's implications for understanding human nature and the image of God (Herzfeld 2002, pp. 18-30). These technological developments expand access to biblical scholarship while creating new interpretive possibilities ahead (Eskandar 2024, pp. 140-45).

3. Theoretical Framework and Main Methodologies

At the heart of feminist biblical interpretation lies a critical "deconstruction" of established interpretive traditions and a "reconstruction" from the perspective of women and the oppressed, in order to reveal the impact of patriarchal structures and to seek an emancipatory understanding. This methodological distinction distinguishes feminist interpretations from "women's studies", which merely describes biblical women, or "academic gender studies", which seeks objectivity (Claassens 2024).

3.1 Deconstruction and Reconstruction Based on Women's Experiences

Critical feminist interpretation for liberation asserts that the Bible must be read in the context of women's struggle to change patriarchal structures of oppression in religious, cultural and social institutions (Sharp 2017, p. 151; Sharp 2021, p. 49). This interpretive approach challenges the view that feminist approaches to liberation theology do not respect conservative women's experience of reading the Bible. Through the use of critical feminist hermeneutics, it is able to reject biblical texts and interpretations that promote kyriarchal values. The aim of this critical approach, which has been labelled as "biblical essentialism", is not to disrespect conservative women's experience of deriving meaning

and self-esteem from reading the Bible, but rather to point out that if these readings fail to transcend the doctrinal, male-dominant (malestream) interpretation of the Bible, they should not be taken as a sign that the Bible should not be read. Rather, it points out that if these readings do not go beyond the doctrinaire male mainstream (malestream) framework of biblical interpretation, they remain trapped within it (Exum 1993, pp. 14-15; Sharp 2017, p. 151; Dempsey et al. 2024, pp. 1-51).

The central theory of feminist biblical interpretation lies in the dual action of deconstruction and reconstruction. The purpose of deconstruction is to reveal gender bias in traditional biblical interpretation (Schüssler Fiorenza 1992, pp. 154-55). Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's "Hermeneutics of Suspicion" (Schüssler Fiorenza 1992, pp. 53-55, 136), and Tribble's "depatriarchalising hermeneutics", are typical approaches to deconstruction. Deconstruction also involves critically investigating the theoretical frameworks and scientific methods we have adopted from mainstream male biblical studies, and questioning the established norms and practices of biblical studies (Schüssler Fiorenza 1988, pp. 3-17). This involves exposing the inscription of the biblical text by a dominating ideology (Schüssler Fiorenza 1992, pp. 96, 117).

Reconstruction aims to restore the diverse aspects of biblical texts themselves (De Troyer 2002, pp. 121, 154; Tov 1999, p. 154; Ulrich et al. 1999, p. 3). It attempts to reconstruct women's status in early Christian history, which requires shifting from male-centered texts to the experiential authority of women in liberation struggles (Dube 2000, p. 5). Reconstruction work includes rebuilding historical narratives through the use of additional literature and the incorporation of social science models with gender perspectives (Buss 1999, p. 7; Ulrich et al. 1999, p. 3; De Troyer 2002, pp. 121, 154; Tov 1999, p. 154). Sometimes, even simply reading the prescriptions in biblical texts can enable reconstruction through "reading against the grain" (Tribble 1984, p. 9). For example, prophetic condemnations of goddess worship can be understood as traces of sixth-century BC Israelite women's religious practices. Similarly, reading extremely patriarchal and androcentric texts like the Pastoral Epistles can inversely infer the existence of active female leadership groups. Reconstruction is not only historical but also concerns articulating a biblical spirituality and liberative vision for justice and well-being for all people (De Troyer 2005, p. 154). This reconstruction work is viewed as part of "rebuilding history" (Buss 1999, p. 7; Ulrich et al. 1999, p. 3; De Troyer 2002, pp. 121, 154; Tov 1999, p. 154), and is an important component in the three-step process of feminist work: "critique, reclaim, reconstruct". The ultimate goal is to transform oppressive structures, achieving profound social change with political and social revolutionary significance (Vander Stichele 2002, pp. 147-155). Effective hermeneutics must be based on

faith's response—it is a hermeneutics of life, liberation, and justice that challenges the status quo (Schüssler Fiorenza 1999, p. 29).

Schüssler Fiorenza proposed a complex model of critical feminist interpretations of emancipation (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, p. 157; Schüssler Fiorenza 1992, pp. 51-76, 195-218), which consists of four interpretative strategies: suspicion, reconstruction, evaluation and imagination (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, p. 157). These strategies are not independent, step-by-step steps or rules of methodology, but rather, they are interacting, simultaneous interpretive practices in the interpretation of biblical texts or any other cultural text. This model attempts to overcome the hermeneutical split between meaning and understanding, interpretation and apprehension, critique and recognition, distance and empathy, reading “behind” and “before” the text, present and past, interpretation and application, reality and imagination (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, p. 157).

3.2 Application and Innovation of Interdisciplinary Methods

The innovation of feminist biblical interpretation at the theoretical level is characterized by interdisciplinary exploration and application (Scholz 2020, p. xlix). The social scientific method plays an important role (Theissen 1978, p. 12; Meeks 1983, pp. 70, 73; Schottroff 1995, pp. 60-79). In addition to traditional historical-critical (Stock 1983, pp. 28-31; Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, p. 285), and literary approaches (McKnight 1980, pp. 53-69), feminist biblical interpretation also employs social science models (Meeks 1983, pp. 70-73), and engages with methods such as cultural studies and cultural criticism (Liew 2008, pp. 211-31). Cultural criticism focuses on the interactions between the text and the reader (McKnight 1980, pp. 53-69; Ringe 1998, pp. 136-51). Its methodology is heterogeneous, driven by diverse factors including class, culture, and ethnicity (Meeks 1983, pp. 70-73; Schottroff 1995, pp. 60-79; Liew 2008, pp. 211-31). This makes it necessary for the interpreter to be attentive to the specific context in which they find themselves (Ringe 1998, pp. 136-51; Dube 2000; Kwok 2005; Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, p. 289).

Contemporary feminist biblical interpretation significantly incorporates intersectionality analysis (Scholz 2020, p. xlix). As described by Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, intersectionality is a way of understanding the world, individuals, and the complexity of human experience, which recognizes that social inequality is not shaped by a single factor (such as gender, race, or class) alone, but is constituted by multiple intersecting axes of influence (Fadden 2020, p. 195; Collins and Bilge 2016). Examining biblical literature under social categories such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, disability, and geopolitical domination (Scholz 2020, p. xlix), helps reveal and dismantle the “rhetoric of empire” that prevails in today's world (Schüssler Fiorenza 2007, p. 79). The

term feminism itself also serves as a broad umbrella term, encompassing numerous kyriarchy-critical perspectives and approaches including gender, womanist, liberationist, postcolonialist, Asian, African or indigenous, Latina, queer, interreligious, and transnational studies (Jobling 2020, p. 57; Scholz 2020, pp. 11, 102, 573; Kwok 2002, p. 31; Bacon 2009, p. 34).

Specifically, the interdisciplinary application is demonstrated through various methodological approaches: Queer Theory and Queer Biblical Criticism provide insights for analyzing gender in the Bible (Punt 2020, pp. 65-80; Tamber-Rosenau 2020, pp. 479-93). The combination of animal studies and feminist studies can be used as a framework for interpreting biblical texts, revealing the dynamics of gender, kinship, and power within them (Stone 2020, p. 543). Postcolonial Feminist Biblical criticism analyzes biblical texts from a postcolonial perspective (Tan 2014, pp. 281-92; Scholz 2020, p. 573). Womanist and Mujerista/Latina Feminist interpretations focus on the experiences of African American women and Latina women (Scholz 2014, pp. 58-63; Bacon 2009, pp. 34, 121), while Asian Feminist Theology/Interpretation combines Asian culture and traditions to interpret the Bible (Melanchthon 2014, pp. 105-19; Scholz 2020, pp. 573-74; Kyung 1990; Kwok 2000).

Interreligious approaches emphasize learning from the history and interpretive methods of other religions, placing dialogue within the context of transformative reading (Gross 2002, pp. 58-78; Sinn et al. 2017). This helps broaden perspectives and recognize that no neutral interpretation exists when reading religious texts. Some scholars also rediscover traditional reading practices from Jewish feminist perspectives, such as interpretive practices of Jewish texts, while African women theologians employ African reading practices (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, p. 98; Olojede 2020, pp. 131-32).

This interdisciplinary and pluralistic methodological orientation of feminist biblical studies transcends mere academic exploration, seeking instead to transform both individuals and oppressive structures while connecting with women's social movements for change (Scholz 2020, pp. 55, 79, 589; Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, p. 211; Schüssler Fiorenza 1999, p. 29). It advocates for a liberative paradigm shift that views biblical studies as a rhetoric and ethics of inquiry and transformation (Schüssler Fiorenza 1999, p. 29; Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, pp. 158-59; Belsey 1983, p. 26; Scholz 2020, pp. 55, 79), aimed at overcoming the binary oppositions between theological and scientific, literary and historical, and sociopolitical and religious approaches. Through this comprehensive framework, feminist biblical interpretation continues to challenge established hermeneutical boundaries and opens new pathways for understanding Scripture in service of justice, liberation, and social transformation.

4. Contributions and Implications of Feminist Biblical Interpretation

Since its emergence, feminist biblical interpretation has had a profound and multifaceted impact on the field of biblical scholarship and church practice.

4.1 Academic Contributions: Reshaping the Biblical Interpretation Methods

The primary contribution of feminist biblical interpretation lies in its in-depth challenge to the traditional patriarchal mode of biblical interpretation. Traditional biblical scholarship has long been dominated by male scholars, unconsciously reflecting patriarchal cultural values, resulting in the neglect and even marginalization of women's presence and role in biblical narratives and the early Christian movement. Feminist interpreters have endeavored to uncover patriarchal or broader structural biases in textual and traditional interpretations (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, pp. 210-11; Geisterfer 2005, p. 133; Schüssler Fiorenza 2020, pp. 2-20), the latter of which Schüssler Fiorenza has called "kyriarchy", which encompasses intersecting oppressions of gender, race, class, and so on (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, pp. 210-11; Matthews 2014, pp. 233-48; Schüssler Fiorenza 2020, pp. 2-20). To counter this prejudice, feminist interpretation has developed and applied several innovative methodological approaches (Schüssler Fiorenza 2014, pp. 1-17). Schüssler Fiorenza proposes a critical feminist hermeneutics of liberation (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, pp. 151-52). She combines historical-critical methods and social-critical analysis to reconstruct marginalized and suppressed voices and traditions in early Christianity (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, p. 70). She explores the issue of women's historical agency in early Christianity by tracing its history, and rewrites the origins of early Christianity from a feminist perspective in *In Memory of Her*, a monograph that has been recognized as one of the most important works of feminist hermeneutics of liberation. This work is considered an important milestone in feminist hermeneutics, demonstrating how critical biblical scholarship can lead to a new understanding of Christian origins (Scholz 2014, pp. 53-70).

Trible, on the other hand, employs a literary-critical approach, especially rhetorical criticism, to analyze the biblical text itself, revealing its oppression and violence against women (Trible 1978, pp. 159-60; Tribble 1984, pp. 288-89). She contrasts methodologically with Schüssler Fiorenza, who focuses more on historical reconstruction, while Tribble focuses on the text itself, J. Cheryl Exum's work also uses literary analysis to explore the fragmented image of women in biblical narratives (Exum 1993, pp. 14-15).

Feminist biblical studies have also challenged the "objective science" perspective by pointing out that the social and political stance of the interpreter inevitably affects her understanding and reconstruction of the text (Schüssler

Fiorenza 2014, pp. 1-17; Geisterfer 2005, pp. 129-44). Feminist hermeneutics is therefore seen as a hermeneutic with a dual orientation of “suspicion” and “reconstruction”, criticizing oppressive elements in the text while seeking to reconstruct emancipatory visions or suppressed stories (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, p. 19). The reassessment of the role of women in Luke-Acts, and the interpretation of Paul’s epistles, have challenged the underestimation of women’s leadership in traditional scholarship (Martin 1994, p. 770). Luise Schottroff’s socio-historical research also provides an important contribution to understanding the situation of women in early Christianity (Schottroff 1995, pp. 46-50).

4.2 Practical Contributions: Impact on the Church and Social Change

The influence of feminist biblical interpretation extends beyond the academy to make practical contributions to theology, church life, and the pursuit of social justice (Schüssler Fiorenza 2016, p. 147; Schüssler Fiorenza 2014, pp. 1-17; Schüssler Fiorenza 2020, pp. 2-20). It is closely tied to the women’s movement and is rooted in the struggle for the dignity and equality of women in society and the church (Schüssler Fiorenza 2014, pp. 46-49, 175-78). This hermeneutic is seen as a liberative praxis that seeks to promote greater equality and justice (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, pp. 151-52; Schüssler Fiorenza 2014, p. 48; Sharp 2021, p. 49). It emphasizes the need for the interpretation of texts to be linked to the emancipatory struggles of the community and encourages the church community to re-evaluate which texts should be used in worship and teaching, prioritizing those with an emancipatory vision (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, p. xii).

Feminist biblical interpretation has had a direct practical impact on biblical translation by promoting the use of non-sexist or inclusive language (Janssen and Köhler 2014, pp. 339-63; Dempsey 2020, pp. 37-52). This is seen as an effort to move towards a just language that better reflects the value of equality in the gospel and avoids marginalizing or erasing the presence, agency and contribution of women (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, p. 19).

Contemporary feminist biblical studies have increasingly emphasized intersectionality, recognizing the multiple oppressions that arise from the intersection of gender and race, class, sexuality, disability, colonialism and so on (Scholz 2020, pp. xlviii-xlix). This has led to a broader perspective, incorporating voices and experiences from the Global South, post-colonialism, and different cultural contexts, which we have already touched on in Part 2. This cross-cultural dialogue enriches interpretive possibilities and situates feminist biblical studies within a global movement of change (Kwok 2002, p. 23). Despite multiple challenges, feminist biblical studies is committed to deconstructing kyriarchal structures and opening up different spaces for biblical interpretation and meaning-making (Schüssler Fiorenza 2014, pp. 1-17; Sharp 2017, p. 151).

5. Challenges and Controversies

5.1 Issues of Methodological Legitimacy

As feminist biblical interpretation expands in academia and church practice, questions and criticisms of its methodology have surfaced. One of the most frequently raised issues is the controversy over the subjective and selective reading of feminist biblical interpretation. Critics have argued that feminist biblical interpretation tends to be informed by contemporary values of gender equality, selectively highlighting texts that conform to its position and ignoring or downplaying those that conflict with it (Poythress 2019, pp. 147-58). This mode of interpretation, criticized as “ideology first”, has been accused of lacking objectivity and methodological rigor, and has even been seen as projecting contemporary values onto ancient texts, thereby distorting the original meaning of the Bible (Carson 1996, p. 147).

The use of modern theoretical frameworks has become another point of contention in feminist biblical interpretation. Critics have pointed out that approaches employing postcolonial theory, queer theory, ecofeminism, and other contemporary analytical frameworks face methodological challenges when applied to ancient texts. According to Anthony Thiselton, these frameworks were not originally designed for biblical studies, and their direct application to ancient texts may result in methodological misalignment and potential misreadings of textual meanings. Thiselton argues that the significant temporal and cultural distance between contemporary theoretical paradigms and ancient texts requires careful methodological calibration to avoid anachronistic or projective interpretations that distort the original contexts and meanings of biblical passages. Such concerns highlight the importance of maintaining historical awareness while engaging with contemporary critical approaches in biblical interpretation (Thiselton 2009, pp. 320-35). For example, when interpreting biblical texts within the framework of contemporary agency theory, it is important to consider the historical context in which the text was produced and the original meaning of the text, otherwise it is prone to overly subjective or projective interpretations (Cafferky 2014, pp. 19-28).

However, advocates of feminist biblical interpretation have offered robust responses to the aforementioned criticisms. First, Schüssler Fiorenza emphasizes that no hermeneutical method can be entirely neutral or objective, as all interpretive activities inherently embody the interpreter’s position and ideology. Thus, feminist interpretation is not exceptionally subjective; rather, it openly acknowledges and actively examines its standpoint and values, which constitutes a strength rather than a weakness of feminist hermeneutics (Schüssler Fiorenza 2001, pp. 10-15). Furthermore, scholars note that the

application of modern theoretical frameworks does not involve direct transplantation but rather creatively constructs a dialogical relationship between the text and the interpreter while fully respecting the textual context, thereby making interpretations more relevant to contemporary concerns (Thiselton 1980, p. 445).

5.2 Conflict and Dialogue with Traditional Biblical Interpretation

While challenging the traditional patriarchal model of biblical interpretation, feminist biblical interpretation inevitably leads to conflicts with traditional biblical interpretation in terms of methodology, understanding of biblical authority, and core theological concepts.

The conflict in methodology is mainly manifested in the principles and approaches of interpretation. Traditional biblical interpretation is usually centered on the Historical-Grammatical Method, which emphasizes a return to the original historical context and grammatical structure of the text, in order to reconstruct as objectively as possible the original intention of the biblical author (Osborne 2006, p. 67; Sharp 2021, pp. 46-51). In contrast, feminist biblical interpretation places greater emphasis on the experience and subjectivity of the interpreter, and tends to create an interactive dialogue with the text from the perspective of the contemporary interpreter (Baltazar 2003, p. 160; Geisterfer 2005, p. 135). This difference has led to the frequent criticism of traditional interpreters that feminist interpretations have ignored the objectivity and historicity of the original meaning of the text, while feminist interpreters have argued that traditional interpretations have been too narrow, ignoring the realistic meaning and emancipatory potential of the text (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, p. 13).

The understanding of biblical authority has also become another important point of contention. Traditional churches usually regard the Bible as absolute and ultimate authority, emphasizing the literalness and authority of the text (Grudem 2020, p. 62). Feminist interpretations, on the other hand, tend to understand biblical authority as dynamic rather than static, emphasizing the historical and contextual nature of biblical revelation, and arguing that biblical authority should be constantly reinterpreted and reinterpreted in the context of the interpreter's interaction with the text (Schüssler Fiorenza 2001, pp. 105-06). This difference has led to frequent difficulties in reaching consensus between the two sides and has challenged feminist biblical interpretation in the more conservative church environment.

Conflicts in core theological concepts should not be overlooked. For example, while the traditional theological understanding of God is usually based on patriarchal or male metaphors, feminist theologians have criticized this unisex

image of God and proposed a more inclusive and pluralistic theological expression (Johnson 1992, pp. 40-55). This shift in core concepts has often provoked strong reactions and resistance from traditional theological positions.

Despite these conflicts, dialogue and integration are not entirely impossible. Many scholars have argued that the two modes of interpretation can learn from and complement each other. Specifically, the rigorous historical-grammatical analyses of traditional interpretations can help feminist interpretations more accurately grasp the original meaning of the text, whereas the subjective experiences and practical concerns emphasized in feminist interpretations can help traditional interpretations more effectively respond to contemporary social issues (Hidalgo 2014, p. 200; Brenner 2005, p. 334).

5.3 Internal Diversity and Disagreements

Feminist biblical interpretation is not a single and unified theoretical system, and there are obvious plurality and differences within it, especially in the theological stance, cultural background, and understanding of core concepts, which also constitutes an important challenge within feminist biblical interpretation.

Firstly, in terms of theological position, feminist interpretations can be divided into radicals and moderates. Radicals advocate the complete overthrow of patriarchal structures and even the re-construction of the foundations of biblical theology (Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, pp. 35-37; Hauge 1993, pp. 8-12). Moderates, on the other hand, tend to make adjustments and reforms within the framework of the established church and biblical theology (Johnson 1992, p. xviii; Pennington 2017, p. 3). Secondly, differences in cultural backgrounds also led to internal divisions. Womanist and postcolonial feminist interpreters emphasize the intersectionality of race, culture and colonial experience in gender oppression, which is in marked contrast to Western white feminist interpretations (Williams 1993, pp. 15-20; Jobling 2020, p. 131). The expansion of feminist biblical interpretation has increasingly recognized geographical diversity matters. While early feminists focused primarily on “white middle-class North American and European positionality”, contemporary scholarship acknowledges that “race matters, class matters, and geographical matters”. Scholars from the Global South have developed distinctive approaches to challenge Western academic hegemony, offering readings rooted in local cultural, historical, and social experiences (Claassens 2024). And finally, there are also differences in the way core concepts such as “liberation” and “female experience” are understood, which complicates the integration within feminist biblical interpretation.

In response to these internal divisions, many scholars have proposed integrative strategies, such as “integral hermeneutics”, which emphasizes dialogue and integration from multiple perspectives, in an attempt to form an inclusive consensus based on respect for difference (Schüssler Fiorenza 2001, pp. 200-10).

Conclusion

This paper systematically explores the diverse development of feminist biblical hermeneutics from its origins in the late nineteenth century to its contemporary manifestations. The theoretical core of feminist biblical interpretation lies in the dual movements of “deconstruction” and “reconstruction”. Deconstruction reveals the gender bias in traditional biblical interpretation through methods such as Schüssler Fiorenza’s “Hermeneutics of Suspicion” and Tribble’s “depatriarchalizing hermeneutics”. Reconstruction actively recovers women’s subjectivity through frameworks such as Russell’s “partner theology”, Ruether’s eco-feminism, and feminist theology. These theoretical innovations are enhanced through interdisciplinary methods, including social science methods, literary criticism, postcolonial theory, and more recently, digital humanities techniques.

Feminist biblical interpretation challenges the hegemony of patriarchal interpretation, restores marginalized female voices and roles, and introduces pluralistic and cross-cultural perspectives into biblical studies. On a practical level, it inspires the reform of church rituals and language, promotes gender equality within religious institutions, and advocates inter-religious dialogue and social justice.

Nevertheless, the field still faces significant challenges. The problem of methodological legitimacy persists, with critics arguing that feminist interpretations tend to be subjective, selective, or overly dependent on contemporary theoretical frameworks which conflicts with traditional biblical interpretation methods, biblical authority, and core theological concepts remain unresolved. In addition, the internal diversity and disagreements between radical and moderate positions, Western and non-Western perspectives, and different understandings of key concepts contribute to the complexity of the field itself.

However, these challenges also conceive research opportunities. The growing use of intersectional analysis offers methods for studying the complex interactions of gender, race, class, and other identity factors in biblical texts. The expansion of global-South perspectives brings new interpretive perspectives from different cultural contexts. Digital humanities technologies create new possibilities for textual analysis and expand the scope of biblical scholarship.

The value of feminist biblical interpretation goes beyond academic innovation to address practical issues of gender equality, social justice, and human liberation. The critical perspectives and liberating visions it provides remain very important in our increasingly globalized and multicultural world. Feminist biblical interpretation continues to be important for academic research and social transformation by continuously engaging in dialogue with traditional interpretive models while embracing internal diversity.

Through this research, we have seen that feminist biblical interpretation is not simply a specialized academic pursuit but a vibrant field that connects rigorous scholarship with practical commitments to justice and equality—a connection that will continue to shape biblical studies and broader social discourse in the years ahead.

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