A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON THE “DEBATE” BETWEEN ELISABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA AND MUSA DUBE

By

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ABSTRACT

My thesis critically examines the current debate between biblical feminists Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Musa Dube and the accuracy in their depictions of one another. While both women maintain the importance of building strategic feminist alliances in a global context, their engagement, spanning over a decade, frustrates this goal in the manner in which they portray each other’s scholarly position. Based on close readings of key texts, historical dates, contexts, and dialogue partners, my thesis claims that both women too quickly reify and homogenize the other in her theoretical and social “positions” within the feminist biblical landscape. In each case, the depiction polarizes the other and leads to a misreading which effectively weakens or limits dialogue and solidarity within global feminist biblical scholarship. In addition to this significance, my thesis seeks to contribute to contemporary feminist methodologies which witness the broader complexity and changing fields of feminist dialogues and debates.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A. Introduction to the Thesis

1. Thesis Introduction and Statement

This thesis critically explores the mutual criticisms raised between German-American scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and African scholar Musa Dube. My assessment of this debate yields the following thesis statement: *in various and important ways, each scholar has at times significantly misrepresented the other.* In each case, the misrepresentation results in a polarization; as this thesis shows, each author reifies and homogenizes the other and *too quickly* associates her within a binary framework understood as fundamentally problematic. This thesis will show the development of thinking of each individual over time and highlight the failure of each scholar to follow the developments of the other. Each scholar simplifies the other and in turn, reifies or freezes the other in an unchanging position.

In Dube’s view, Schüssler Fiorenza’s work reinscribes Western imperialistic rhetoric. My findings show that Schüssler Fiorenza’s thinking regarding empire did significantly develop since the 1980s and that Dube largely overlooks this development, focusing her intense criticism on Schüssler Fiorenza’s earlier perspective. Here, I find that Dube’s assessment is too narrow and, at times, guilty of anachronism. Moreover, I find that Schüssler Fiorenza’s response to Dube is similarly narrow. For Schüssler Fiorenza, Dube’s postcolonial feminism is constituted by a heavy reliance on postmodern and French literary theory and also engages in an oppositional rhetoric to Western feminists. However, my research finds that Dube’s own personal and scholarly developments resist such a portrayal and categorization. Effectively, this thesis reveals many instances in which each scholar’s claims about the other must be re-examined. By clarifying the adequacy of these claims, this thesis offers a reassessment of the debate and the possibilities for global feminist solidarity within biblical feminist scholarship.
2. Context and Relevance

Many times in my undergraduate and graduate studies, I began to feel disillusioned when faced with what seems like increasing disputes between competing feminist articulations within theological and biblical studies. The wide and growing range of feminist publications testifies to the great diversity and intense debates among feminists up to the present. At the same time there also exist texts, conferences, and organizations which reveal a common desire to find strategies toward building global feminist alliances.¹ I share this vision.

In her introduction to Feminist New Testament Studies: Global and Future Perspectives, Kathleen O’Brien Wicker writes that in order to effectively counteract global systems of domination and violence against women the contributors of the aforementioned book call for solidarity. She writes that strategic coalitions are required “if anything significant is to be accomplished to bring about global justice.”² She refers to the African proverb which says: “If anyone thinks that co-operation with each other is not useful, let her hold her lower lip and see whether the upper lip alone can speak.”³ A prerequisite for this co-operation is mutual respect.

Another prerequisite, according to many of the contributors, is decentering our understanding of the globe, and recognizing the shift of the Christian faith from the global North to the South.⁴ In many cases, this shift necessitates a critique of the academy of the North; for those in the South biblical interpretation is not detached and abstract, nor is it exclusively for the

³ Ibid., 8.
⁴ Ibid., 8.
individual. Many scholars of the North have little impact on faith communities across the globe. Conversely, Christian communities of the South “proceed in their process of interpretation with confidence, knowing that they are dealing with a ‘spiritual thing.’” For these communities, the Bible “was written for the community in response to their lived experiences.” Feminist New Testament scholarship must work alongside these communities if it is to have any relevance for women and their concerns across the world.

While recognizing the significance of the shift to the global South is necessary for the future of feminist New Testament scholarship, possible global alliances can and do become fragile. This fragility is particularly evident in direct disputes and criticisms between individual scholars. In these cases, not only do the authors argue amongst themselves, readers of their texts are also implicated in the debates. These debates are therefore not only restricted to the realm of writing — they also affect the act of reading.

With the intention of addressing these prerequisites for global feminist alliances, at various points in this thesis I problematize the locations of power affecting the production of knowledges in global feminist biblical studies. These structures benefit feminists of the global North and exclude and marginalize those of the South; ‘good’ scholarship typically presupposes Western standards. While clearing up the misunderstandings between Dube and Schüssele Fiorenza opens the way to broader dialogue and solidarity, there nevertheless remain differences in the organization and financing of scholarship in the North and the South which continue to shape/mis-shape feminist biblical studies in each context. Thus, while I show that these two scholars can find shared values, and that a closer reading of the misrepresentations at the heart

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5 Ibid., 10.
6 Ibid., 10.
of this debate reveal greater possibilities for convergence and expanded dialogue, I raise further questions about the empire of Western feminist biblical scholarship in the context of the debate between Schüssler Fiorenza and Dube.

3. Methodology and Procedure

Chapter one is the introduction to this thesis. Chapter two reflects my initial reading of Dube’s first two chapters in her book, Postcolonial Feminist Biblical Interpretation. The first chapter outlines the need for a postcolonial framework in biblical interpretation. The second chapter of her book outlines the need for a feminist postcolonial interpretation of the Bible. This latter chapter includes Dube’s critique of Western biblical feminists, including Schüssler Fiorenza. She argues that, in several important ways, Schüssler Fiorenza’s works reinscribe Western imperialistic discourses in feminist biblical studies.

As a step towards clarifying the adequacy of Dube’s characterization and criticism of Schüssler Fiorenza, chapter three offers a brief overview of Schüssler Fiorenza’s works with a concentration on two key terms: “kyriarchy” and “the ekklesia of wo/men.” I show that Schüssler Fiorenza engaged in critiques of Western feminist imperialist discourse before the publication of Dube’s book. Dube’s book Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible is

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8 Dube’s first and second chapters constitute Part One in her book which ‘defines the problem’ as well as the need for feminist postcolonial reading strategies of the bible. Her book has two other parts. Part Two outlines decolonizing methods for reading imperialistic ancient and modern texts, specifically The Aeneid and Joseph Conrad’s book Heart of Darkness, respectively. In Part Three, Dube offers a postcolonial feminist reading of Matthew 15:21-28. For Dube, Matthew is another “collaborative postcolonial narrative that arises from among the colonized but that deflects from the root cause of oppression, the imperialists, and focuses instead on other victims.” See Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, 135.

9 The terms, “the West”, “Western”, “First World”, and “Two-Thirds World” are used both by Dube and Schüssler Fiorenza up to and including Dube’s book that is examined in the initial part of this thesis. Since this time, both have used more nuanced expressions. I will keep this terminology to better reflect the historical and epistemological context(s) of this debate.


Chapter four reflects my further reading of Dube’s work since her book, *The Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (2000). This chapter presents Dube’s account of her personal changes and scholarly evolution. These changes include a turn from the largely theoretical modes of scholarship within postcolonial feminist discourse to directly addressing more practical and immediate concerns in Africa. As she reports, she felt compelled both personally and professionally to address questions of HIV/AIDS in churches and communities, thus moving away from theory towards more concrete practice with specific communities in specific contexts.

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\(^{11}\) Since her writings in the early 1990s, Schüssler Fiorenza introduces the “slash” in the word “wo/men.” The reconfiguration of this word has two implications: its earlier introduction was to destabilize the assumption that women are the same. In her later works, Schüssler Fiorenza writes that “wo/men” includes both men and women; where women have always had to think twice about whether they are included in the term “man” and “mankind”, so also does ‘wo/men’, conversely, invite men to think twice about their possible inclusion. The perspectives of Schüssler Fiorenza in this thesis for the most part convey her earlier formulation where “wo/men” refers to only women but marks their many differences.


In chapter five, I turn to Schüssler Fiorenza’s recent response to Dube in her book, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire*. Here, I will first look at (A) Schüssler Fiorenza’s understanding of postcolonial biblical interpretation and of feminist postcolonial biblical interpretation, which includes Dube’s work. Then I will (B) note that Schüssler Fiorenza, writing seven years after Dube’s changed direction, continues to frame Dube’s works in terms of ‘feminist postcolonialism’. Schüssler Fiorenza claims that this paradigm both relies too heavily on postmodernism and constructs a dualism between the West and the Two-Thirds World. However, Schüssler Fiorenza’s failure to recognize Dube’s changes, and continued classification of Dube’s perspective as ‘postcolonial feminism’, unfairly freezes Dube in an earlier position, and distorts the dynamic evolving character of Southern feminist biblical scholarship.

Chapter six concludes this thesis. This chapter will summarize my reading of the debate between them. It will summarize the ways both Schüssler Fiorenza and Dube have, at times and in varying ways, presented each other problematically, thus polarizing the debate, and failing to recognize its evolving character.

Finally, I suggest this thesis contributes to clarifying some obstacles to dialogue and offers ways forward in nurturing global feminist alliances. From Dube’s perspective, *feminists of the West* create roadblocks to possible alliances because they reinscribe western imperialistic rhetoric. On the other hand, for Schüssler Fiorenza, *postcolonial feminists* frustrate alliances because they have set up a “West and the Rest” rhetoric creating an inherently oppositional discourse to their Western counterparts. In Schüssler Fiorenza’s view, this encourages

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postcolonial feminists to “disregard rather than engage” with feminists living and publishing in the West.\footnote{Schüssler Fiorenza, \textit{The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire}, 121.}

I show that Schüssler Fiorenza has in many ways helped to critique colonizing Western feminisms, many years before Dube wrote her book. In this respect, Schüssler Fiorenza’s work does not limit possible alliances with Dube or other Third World feminists. On the other hand, I also show that since her changed direction, Dube no longer fits in Schüssler Fiorenza’s narrow framing of postcolonial feminist discourse. In this respect, Dube’s work does not limit possible alliances with Schüssler Fiorenza or other feminists who may be critical of the postmodern aspects of postcolonial discourse.

4. Social Location of the Thesis Author

I am a Canadian Roman Catholic female who was born in the mid-eighties. Fortunately, I received financial aid for my graduate work and could attend the widely recognized Toronto School of Theology as well as access the resources offered by many of its large libraries during the research of this thesis. As previously mentioned, my own orientation towards feminist New Testament scholarship was shaped by a desire to engage in global feminist strategies towards building alliances. This desire came as a response to what I saw as increasing and fragmenting disputes between biblical and theological feminists. I recognize that many of these disputes are significant and indicate the growing diversity of feminisms. However, many of these debates frustrate possibilities for solidarity, particularly in the way feminists portray or frame each other. My engagement with the work of Schüssler Fiorenza and Musa Dube thus comes from the desire to identify some of these barriers as well as to promote and contribute to this growing field of dialogue.
B. Introductory Contexts

1. Of the Life and Works of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza was born in 1938 in Romania. Her small hometown was three miles from the Hungarian border and thirty miles from the border of Yugoslavia. After the Romanian government joined with Russia in declaring war on Germany in 1944, Schüssler Fiorenza and her family became refugees, fleeing their home country from danger and violence. According to Glen Elander, at one point her family had to beg for food and shelter during their travels, and much of their time was on a horse drawn wagon.\(^{17}\)

The effects of war later shaped the development of Schüssler Fiorenza’s critical feminist theology of liberation; it “planted in her a deep concern for oppressed and forgotten people.”\(^{18}\) As Schüssler Fiorenza has written, “[t]he characteristic elements of my work have their roots in this experience of war, displacement, migration, and xenophobia.”\(^{19}\) Schüssler Fiorenza describes the women in her family, her grandmother and mother, as well as the other women she travelled with, as having created “a ring of safety and love.”\(^{20}\) These women told young Schüssler Fiorenza not to dislike the Russians, who did not to offer shelter or food, because they “did not know better.”\(^{21}\) Her experiences in war-torn Europe contributed to the development of Schüssler Fiorenza’s consciousness of the pain and suffering of others, and “inspired her not to forget the forgotten; not to overlook their suffering; and not to demean, diminish, or disregard those who live under oppressive societal structures.”\(^{22}\)

\(^{17}\) Glen Enander, *Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza* (Philadelphi: Chelsea House, 2005), 16.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., 17.
\(^{20}\) Enander, *Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*, 17.
\(^{22}\) Enander, *Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*, 18.
In 1945, Schüssler Fiorenza moved to Germany where her father took a job as a tailor. Schüssler Fiorenza began to shine academically and in grade school she qualified to advance to a higher level. She recalls wishing to be pope in grade three, but she soon developed a suspicious attitude about the official Roman Catholic claims of authority. An early instance in which she began to question the teachings of the Church was when she was a young girl: Elander recounts that Schüssler Fiorenza became suspicious when she was not divinely punished after she dressed up in an outrageous costume, painted her face, and laughed as loud as she could in an empty church. This suspicion later became a “major element in her critical feminist hermeneutic of liberation”, giving her the distance and freedom needed in order to recognize the androcentric dimensions of biblical texts, interpretations, and traditions. As a teenager she once confided in her pastor that she was considering becoming a nun. The pastor insightfully replied that she did “not have a vocation to obedience.”

In 1962 Schüssler Fiorenza earned her Master of Divinity degree at the University of Würzburg. Her licentiate thesis in pastoral theology focused on women’s ministerial roles, a thesis which earned her the highest scholarly distinction. Schüssler Fiorenza then started doctorate work at the same university. Being the first woman to take a full theological degree at this school, Schüssler Fiorenza experienced many feelings of isolation and discrimination, and, although she received high academic achievements, she was denied a coveted fellowship by her supervisor because of her gender; he told her he could only give the fellowship to those individuals with a future in theology, and as a woman, she had no such future.

23 Ibid., 18.
24 Ibid., 20.
25 Ibid., 20.
26 Ibid., 20.
27 Ibid., 22.
the University of Münster. From 1964 to 1970, Schüssler Fiorenza worked on her doctorate degree, and upon completion of this she earned the best thesis award by the university faculty.\footnote{28} Schüssler Fiorenza personally felt the marginalization of the kyriocentric bias in the German educational system, an experience that would shape her work and efforts to change the hermeneutics and teaching styles of biblical studies at the university level. Although she became aware of this bias in Germany, her move to the United States showed her that the German educational system was still more “academically inclusive.”\footnote{29} Schüssler Fiorenza was “shocked” by the divisions within biblical studies in the United States, such as the division between theology and exegesis or historical criticism.\footnote{30} Unlike much of the scholarship in the United States, Schüssler Fiorenza adopted a pluriform approach, using various methods of interpretation. Her work is often considered unique and original; she had to develop and provide her own theoretical tools in her critical feminist theology.\footnote{31}

She began her new job at the University of Notre Dame, and during her fourteen year stay there, Schüssler Fiorenza continued to uncover kyriocentric attitudes in the academic context. The publication of her book, \textit{In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins}\footnote{32} challenged the assumption of value-neutral scholarship as well as the belief that biblical texts came literally from God. Ultimately, Schüssler Fiorenza angered two large hermeneutical schools (those that saw scholarship as unbiased and those that interpreted the Bible literally) and her stay at University of Notre Dame was shortened.\footnote{33} The University of Notre Dame restricted her teaching to undergraduate levels and did not permit her

\begin{footnotes}
\item[28] Ibid., 23.
\item[29] Ibid., 23.
\item[30] Ibid., 23.
\item[31] Ibid., 24. While Schussler Fiorenza was a pioneer and was/is outstanding in many respects, she was not alone at that time and together with other feminists helped to forge new approaches to the Bible, tradition, church, systematic theology, and ethics.
\item[33] Enander, \textit{Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza}, 28.
\end{footnotes}
to use *In Memory of Her* in the classroom.\(^{34}\) In the tenth anniversary edition of *In Memory of Her*, Schüssler Fiorenza writes that while scholars criticized the intellectual tone of it, it was actually women, “less-educated but perhaps more willing or eager to learn”, who received the book with great enthusiasm.\(^{35}\)

After teaching at the Episcopal Divinity School for four years, a school which supported her development of a critical feminist interpretation of the Bible, Schüssler Fiorenza moved to teach at Harvard University. From 1988 to the present, Schüssler Fiorenza has taught at this school as the Krister Stendahl Professor of Divinity. Her contributions to women’s issues in religion as well as to the emerging discipline of feminist studies in religion are numerous. Along with Carol Christ, Schüssler Fiorenza served as the co-chair of the women’s caucus of the Society of Biblical Literature from 1971 to 1973. She was a member of the New York Feminist Scholars of Religion, a member of the American Academy of Religion Task Force on the Status of Women in the Academic Study of Religion, and she spoke at two Women’s Ordination Conferences in 1975 and 1978.

She was elected first female president of the Society of Biblical Literature from 1986 to 1987 and in 1985, along with Judith Plaskow, founded the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, widely considered as a “trailblazing” academic journal.\(^{36}\) This journal’s approach is that it would not focus solely on gender, as the journal describes women to be defined by “race, social position, economic status, and a variety of other factors.”\(^{37}\) Given the pressures on a scholar to publish or ‘perish’, Schüssler Fiorenza and Plaskow wanted to create a free and

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\(^{34}\) Ibid., 28.
\(^{35}\) Ibid., 28.
\(^{36}\) Ibid., 32.
\(^{37}\) Ibid., 32.
autonomous space and forum for women’s issues in religion.\textsuperscript{38} The *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*:

[...] has proved to be a catalyst for feminist religious studies, helped advance the careers of feminist thinkers and theorists, and given voice to thinkers and scholars too often marginalized by traditional academics.\textsuperscript{39}

Schüssler Fiorenza’s methods, approaches, concerns, and topics of research are wide and resist being confined to a certain discourse. For Schüssler Fiorenza, this pluriformity can challenge kyriocentric values and assumptions in academia. She denies any mold prescribed for her and her work and activities in feminist studies in religion witness her early and long standing involvement in challenging kyriocentric and androcentric attitudes in the classroom and university halls. Because of her, as well as because of the work of her feminist contemporaries, the discipline of feminist theology and biblical studies developed to where it is today.

\section*{2. Of the Life and Works of Musa Dube}

Musa Wenkoi Dube-Thembo-Ekwakwa was born in 1964 in Botswana, in Chadibe Borolong. Her parents were Zimbabwean nationals who migrated to Botswana. At the time of their move in the 1950s, Zimbabwean people, including Dube’s parents, had the choice of becoming servants to white settlers or of moving to the “infertile and crowded lands that were allocated to black people.”\textsuperscript{40} They chose to move to Botswana because the lands given to them were too small to sustain a family. Dube’s family was often referred to as “Batswaka” or “foreigners.”\textsuperscript{41} Dube’s “life therefore represents a personal encounter with settler colonialism” and this

\begin{footnotes}
\item[38] Ibid., 33.
\item[39] Ibid., 34-35.
\item[41] Ibid., 153.
\end{footnotes}
historical and personal context would later shape Dube’s resistance to colonial texts and interpretations, including those of the Bible.\(^{42}\)

Dube attended elementary and secondary school in Botswana, and earned her BA from the University of Botswana, where her high academic achievements brought her to study in England and in the United States of America. In 1990, Dube received her Master’s degree at Durham University in the United Kingdom. In 1997, she completed her Ph.D. at Vanderbilt University in the United States. The widely recognized professor Fernando Segovia was her supervisor at this school. Having finished her Ph.D., Dube went home to the University of Botswana to teach biblical studies.

Writing about her studies in the UK and the USA, Dube recognized that “compared to the majority of my fellow Batswana, I was indeed privileged to have funds availed to me to study overseas.”\(^{43}\) While she is now “equipped […] to do and teach biblical interpretation at the highest institution of learning in Botswana”, she nevertheless recounts her own sense of powerlessness while living abroad.\(^{44}\) As with Schüssler Fiorenza, travel had a profound influence on Dube’s experience of unequal power relations. Although in very different time periods and geopolitical locations, both women felt the status and pain of being a “foreigner”; for Schüssler Fiorenza it was as a German woman in the male dominated and androcentric academic institutions in biblical studies in the 1960s and 70s in the USA.\(^{45}\) For Dube in the 1990s, she experienced being a foreigner as a Botswanan woman studying and living in Euro-American academic locations with Eurocentric concerns and theoretical approaches in biblical studies.


\(^{43}\) Dube, Batswakwa: Which Traveller are You (John 1:1-18)?, 154.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 154.

Indeed, travel and her experiences traveling abroad had a lasting effect on the person and scholar, Musa Dube. Her essay, “Batswaka: Which Traveller Are You (John 1:1-18)?” is one of many of Dube’s own studies on the effects on colonialism, neo-colonialism, and globalization in a world of unequal power relations. Dube’s move to the USA was, for her, a “great shock” where she was not Botswanan but black or African. She writes: “the suffering and the stereotype about African people in the diaspora were suddenly mine. I was black with all the burdens that go with it.” Dube noticed that there were very few black people in the classrooms but they “predominated among the grounds, kitchen and cleaning staff.” This experience, writes Dube, was “often crippling me to silence in the classroom.” When watching TV in the USA, Dube learned that Africa is “presented as a wholly negative space with no normal life or anything positive”:

On the TV, Africa was the emaciated children of Somalia, the Zulu people shaking and raising their traditional weapons, the Mozambique war-ravaged kids begging for food, Liberian kids carrying guns and killing each other, the Rwanda and Burundi genocide, the terror of Ebola, AIDS, Zaire becoming the Republic of Democratic Congo, etc. In the movies Africa was “Out of Africa,” “The Gods Must Be Crazy,” “Coming To America,” “Far Away Places,” “Outbreak,” etc.

These experiences informed Dube’s reading strategies; she became more conscious of herself as a Sub-Saharan black person and with an oral culture. When living abroad she realized that

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47 Dube, Batswakwa: Which Traveller are You (John 1:1-18)?, 154.

48 Ibid., 155.

49 Ibid., 155.

50 Ibid., 155.

51 Ibid., 155.

52 Ibid., 155.

53 Ibid., 155.
“stories were written for me and not by me.” 54 Often these stories were “out to subsume me or insult my very being.” 55 Consequently for Dube, it became imperative for African peoples to be “distrustful of the narrative plots they receive.” 56

Dube had to associate herself with the stories of the powerful, including claiming her prestigious education in the UK and the USA, to be given power. In a very poignant way, Dube explains her own experiences with having this type of power by her analogy to being a hunting dog in a strange forest. The prey she catches for her master are victims much like her. 57 Dube’s travels and experiences in the UK and the USA led her to recognize the pervasive and imperializing effects of the reading strategies of the powerful: the colonization of the mind and imagination. Her education there fostered her own passion to read and speak as a Botswanan, with African concerns and approaches. 58 She developed feelings of distrust towards the invitation to follow the “story-maps” of the powerful. For Dube, it is necessary to take “different paths, to plot new journeys, and to draw new maps, and to establish new rules.” 59

Two major instances where Dube has drawn new maps are in her challenges to pre-existing modes of scholarship (through her work in postcolonial feminist biblical interpretation) and her efforts and achievements in bringing HIV/AIDS awareness into church consciousness and theological curriculum. Her work in postcolonial feminist studies in religion is perhaps best exemplified by her early book, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible. This book is based on her published Ph.D. thesis from Vanderbilt University. Schüssler Fiorenza herself writes that Dube’s work has been “pathbreaking” and along with the work of other women like

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54 Ibid., 155.
55 Ibid., 156.
56 Ibid., 156.
57 Ibid., 155.
58 For an example of these concerns and approaches, see her section on African Independent Churches (AICs) in The Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, 39-42.
59 Ibid., 155.
Kwok Pui Lan and Laura Donaldson, “has immensely enriched and sharpened feminist studies in religion.”

Her later work on HIV/AIDS in Africa is another notable instance of path-breaking efforts. While many of her struggles relating to this topic are illuminated in chapter four of this thesis, many achievements should be listed here. Note that while she has published numerous essays and books on this topic, which is itself a great accomplishment for the topic of HIV at the institutional level of theological scholarship, many of Dube’s achievements began at the “grassroots” level. As Schüssler Fiorenza challenged the inherent values in androcentric biblical scholarship in the 1970s, Dube also challenges theological institutions in an HIV/AIDS era; Dube became a leading voice urging faculties of biblical studies and academic journals to recognize the significance that “the church has AIDS.”

Both Dube and the Circle of Concerned African Woman Theologians, have “taken up this challenge, emerging as the most productive group of theological writing on HIV and AIDS on the continent.” Through such efforts, a number of academic journals like the Journal of Theology for Southern Africa (125, 1 and 126, 2, 2006) and Missionalia (29, 2, 2001) have had special publications on the themes of HIV/AIDS.

Dube understands that the HIV and AIDS crisis offers a possibility for African peoples to speak out about their own concerns, to empower “African researchers to realize that they could free themselves from Euro-American captivity.” It is predominately African women and children who are affected by the global AIDS epidemic, and thus Dube urges African

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60 Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word : Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 122. While Schüssler Fiorenza commends this enrichment in feminist biblical studies, she places strong emphases on its relatively recent development in feminist biblical studies, a development that sometimes overlooks its strong reliance on earlier feminist struggles within androcentric biblical studies from the 1960s and 70s. See *Power of the Word*, 123-125.

61 Chitando and Gabaitse, *Other Ways of being a Diviner-Healer: Musa W. Dube and the African Church’s Response to HIV and AIDS*, 89.

62 Ibid., 94.

63 Ibid., 94.

64 Ibid., 93.
scholars to act in solidarity with those directly around them. Ezra Chitando and Rosinah Gabaitse write that “the HIV epidemic offers a chance to African theologians to address their own challenges without paternalistic advice from outsiders.” While Dube sees this era as a chance for African autonomy in scholarship, she reminds her readers that it is not “us and them” and that HIV/AIDS affects the entire world. HIV/AIDS should not be isolated from global inequalities. Moreover, the management and treatment of HIV/AIDS should be a global concern, particularly a concern of wealthy countries.

65 Ibid., 94.
66 Ibid., 95.
CHAPTER TWO:
MUSA DUBE AND HER REVIEW OF
ELISABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA

A. Introduction

This chapter is a close reading of part one of Dube’s book, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. Part one is entitled “Defining the Problem” and includes two chapters. The first chapter focuses on Western imperialistic rhetoric and its relationship to the Bible; noting the work of Kwesi Dickson and Canaan Banana, Dube illuminates the use of the Bible in colonial exploitation. The second chapter focuses on the need for a postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible. Here Dube expands on the postcolonial critiques of Western feminism undertaken by Chandra Mohanty and Laura Donaldson and includes Western biblical feminists. This chapter unmask various dynamics of imperialist ideology within the writings of biblical feminists from the West. Dube’s own work focuses particularly on the scholarship of Schüssler Fiorenza. To illuminate Dube’s approach to Schüssler Fiorenza, this thesis will briefly outline the two chapters mentioned above in the subsequent sections.

B. Musa Dube on the Need for a Postcolonial Feminist Biblical Hermeneutic

In Chapter One, “The Postcolonial Condition and the Bible”, Dube explains how the Bible has been used to ideologically legitimate Westernization and/or modern Western colonization. A major factor behind such colonization is that the West was believed to be a channel of civilizing forces due to its own ideology of superiority. This ideology of superiority, which was perpetuated through Western biblical interpretation, justified the understanding that inferior, non-Western peoples need to be missionized and converted. As Kwesi Dickson notes, mission was a process of Westernization and the Bible was a central force in its authorization.¹

Both Kwesi Dickson and Canaan Banana agree that such a “self-serving paradigm of claims to chosenness or superiority” was effectively a leading ideology legitimating material, cultural, and religious colonization and exploitation.\(^2\) To this extent, Dickson and Banana have sought to shed light on the role of Western biblical interpretation in Western imperialism. Considering this relationship between the Bible with Western imperialism, Dube brings forth a postcolonial question: “how can postcolonial subjects read the Bible without perpetuating what Banana recognizes as a self-serving paradigm of constructing one group as superior to another?”\(^3\)

For Dube, processes of Western modern imperialism (which remain today by neo-colonization and globalization) have affected much of the world so deeply that postcolonial peoples themselves are described by Dube as a “people whose perception of each other and of economic, political, and cultural relationships cannot be separated from the global impact of constructions of Western/ modern imperialism.”\(^4\) Given the extent of Western imperialism, and the role of the Bible in its justification, Dube claims that “Western readers can no longer pretend that their reading of the Bible has no effect on those outside their immediate cultures, continents, or countries.” In addition to the people living in the West, Dube asks all peoples to critically assess whether their own readings reinscribe the imperialistic ideology that has supported and protected the exploitation and subordination of non-Christian and non-Western minds, cultures, and material goods.

For Dube, to read the Bible as postcolonial subjects (which include both the colonizers and the colonized) means to read the Bible critically and to pay particular attention to imperialistic rhetoric inscribed \textit{within} biblical texts as well as universalizing interpretations of them. The act of reading must be historically situated and ethically motivated. Scholars of the

\(^2\) Ibid., 14.  
\(^3\) Ibid., 15.  
\(^4\) Ibid., 16.
Bible, therefore, have a further responsibility to actively read against interpretations that reinscribe and authorize, among other things, group superiority. However, Western feminist Biblical scholars, according to Dube, often fail to disclose such imperialistic rhetoric in the Biblical texts as well as attend to this rhetoric in their own work. Dube begins this criticism by examining some problematic Western feminist assumptions.

Using Mohanty and Donaldson, Dube reflects on the need for Western feminists to acknowledge masked imperial constructions in their theories. Here, Dube shows how Western feminist literature largely reinforces the rhetoric of Western superiority through two examples. The first, as Mohanty critically develops, is the category of woman in feminist theories and its implicit function in reinscribing a monopoly of Western assumptions. The category of woman or womanhood, used in the singular, essentializes the range of diversity among ‘real’ women, and through such homogenization, silences the voices and concerns across much of the world. Along with Mohanty, Dube agrees that Western feminist constructions of woman proffer a universalist interpretation of women’s oppression: “a woman is supposedly oppressed by the man wherever she is and patriarchy is constructed as universal and absolute.”

Moreover, in such an essentialist analysis of women’s oppression resides a Western assumption about the supposed helplessness of their non-Western counterparts. There also exists a certain Western confidence in their own prerogative to speak on behalf of others. For Mohanty and Dube, the use of an essentialist understanding of woman ‘limits theoretical analysis as well as reinforces Western cultural imperialism.’

Dube illustrates how essentialist discourses are imperialistic in the work of two Western feminists. The first of such feminists, Maria Ross Cutrufelli, “participates in the old and

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5 Ibid., 24.
6 Ibid., 24.
persistent imperialist science of savagery, which epitomizes Africa as a paragon of evil.”7 In Dube’s reading, Cutrufelli portrays African women as prostitutes: “Either overtly or covertly, prostitution is still the main if not the only source of work for African women.”8 This portrayal supports Mohanty’s criticism of both the inherent superiority of Western people and their desire to help the helpless as well as essentialist feminist discourse in which all African women are the same. Dube concludes, “[o]nly within such a Western context and tradition does her statement become possible and acceptable.”9

Dube continues her review with Mary Daly’s famous work, Gyn/Ecology. As with Cutrufelli, Daly commits to the same homogenizing Western approach; Daly portrays all women in Africa as the same and, in their victimhood, in need of liberation. Dube notes that after Audre Lorde critiqued Daly’s work in this context, Daly did not reply. Dube asserts that “the refusal to respond is in itself consistent with the imperial tendency to hold no dialogue with or listen to Two-Thirds World races.”10

Donaldson contributes to the discussion by pointing out that biblical feminist readings must expose and challenge imperialist constructions within biblical texts themselves. Additionally, Donaldson calls for postcolonial feminist reading strategies that do not use “anti-sexist rhetoric to displace questions of colonialism, racism, and their concomitant violence.”11 In this regard, Donaldson is critical of the ‘gendering’ of oppression and its mystification of other structures of oppression in the lives of women.

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7 Ibid., 24.
9 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, 24.
10 Ibid., 25.
11 Ibid., 25.
In the review of Western feminists Cutrufelli and Daly, Dube finds that:

The failure of Western feminists to recognize and to subvert imperialistic cultural strategies of subjugation means that their advocacy for women’s liberation has firmly retained the right of the West to dominate and exploit non-Western nations.\textsuperscript{12}

Postcolonial feminist interpretation is therefore needed and it must destabilize both Western feminist assumptions (like the essential \textit{woman} as Mohanty suggests) and also reading strategies (that focuses only on gender, as Donaldson outlines).\textsuperscript{13} For Dube, Two-Thirds World women are recognizing feminists of the West to be “jealously guarding their imperialistic traditions.”\textsuperscript{14}

Dube includes the works of Mohanty and Donaldson in order to define the need for postcolonial biblical feminist interpretation and uses the very problematic feminists Cutrufelli and Daly to illuminate such an imperative. Dube does this in the space of three pages. To further illustrate the hidden Western imperialistic agenda within feminist \textit{biblical} studies, Dube turns to Schüssler Fiorenza and develops a critique spanning twelve pages. Dube argues that Schüssler Fiorenza’s works “highlight this problem” of masked imperial ideologies within Western feminist biblical interpretations.\textsuperscript{15} While Dube also writes that she recognizes the contributions of Schüssler Fiorenza to the field of feminist biblical studies, she goes on to insist that despite Schüssler Fiorenza’s “intentions, promises, and major contributions”, she is still working with imperialistic rhetoric.\textsuperscript{16}

C. Musa Dube on Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

1. Introduction

Dube’s treatment of Schüssler Fiorenza’s works is divided into two parts; recognizing to some

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{13} As we will see in chapter three, Schüssler Fiorenza similarly raises these concerns. It is therefore interesting to note the way Dube will distinguish these scholars despite arguably quite similar concerns.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 26.
degree Schüssler Fiorenza’s developments over a decade, Dube has organized problematic aspects of Schüssler Fiorenza’s works into earlier and more recent sections. In the first section, Dube attends to Schüssler Fiorenza’s early reconstructionist efforts to bring women back into history as well as Schüssler Fiorenza’s articulation of an ekklesia of wo/men. In both of these aspects, Dube claims Schüssler Fiorenza has reinscribed imperialist discourse.

In the section on Schüssler Fiorenza’s more recent publications, Dube briefly points out her evolution of thinking, here in terms of her explicit move away from a Western logic of identity to a radical democratic space in her feminist hermeneutical framework. Although Dube appears to commend Schüssler Fiorenza’s theoretical shift, Dube nevertheless claims Schüssler Fiorenza’s “feminist discourse of liberation avoids or writes into imperialist strategies of the West.” Dube argues that Schüssler Fiorenza’s so-called practice does not meet her theoretical goals and to this end finds that Schüssler Fiorenza’s works are still implicitly imperialistic and that the transparency of her later developments should therefore be questioned. While Dube admits the value of Schüssler Fiorenza’s work on “kyriarchy” as “admirable”, she also critiques this concept.

2. Earlier Writings

Dube begins her evaluation and critique of Schüssler Fiorenza’s earlier works with Schüssler Fiorenza’s past efforts to restore women to history. Schüssler Fiorenza’s very popular book, In Memory of Her sought to bring forgotten women back into early Christian history and to offer a history of Christian beginnings that reclaims a religious and cultural heritage for women

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18 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, 34.
19 Ibid., 36.
today. Schüssler Fiorenza showed the way patriarchal texts, translators, scholars and commentators have marginalized women in the past and in her attempt to restore women to history she also aimed to empower Christian women living today. Such reconstructive efforts include rewriting a history such that early Christian women are equal to men and also central to the missionary movements of the early church.

While admitting Schüssler Fiorenza’s efforts “are ethically motivated and committed to the empowerment of Western women”, Dube argues that Schüssler Fiorenza brackets and/or downplays the early imperial setting of that period.21 Because Schüssler Fiorenza did not, according to Dube, present Rome as an imperial centre, but a political centre and, for example, referred to the Roman Empire as the ‘Roman World’, Schüssler Fiorenza “bracketed imperial prescriptions and constructions of the biblical texts.”22 Schüssler Fiorenza’s oversight has thus “maintained the violence of imperial oppression against non-Western and non-Christian biblical feminists.”23

Because Schüssler Fiorenza did not recognize the imperial setting of early Christian beginnings, her focus on women’s oppression was not about exploitation due to class or race but gender. The Greco-Roman world was patriarchal. Dube reminds us that “the Roman imperial oppression of the Jewish people, both women and men, as well as of other colonized peoples, is sidestepped.”24 In effect, Schüssler Fiorenza’s critique “blames the victims of imperialism, equates them with the imperialist oppressor, and hides their exploitation.”25 Schüssler Fiorenza also failed to question, for example, the shift from being a resistance movement to a “mission

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21 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, 28.
22 Ibid., 28.
23 Ibid., 28.
24 Ibid., 28.
25 Ibid., 29.
oriented religion of the Gentiles in the empire.” Nor did she question imperial structures such as the client-patronage system.  

Moreover, contends Dube, Schüssler Fiorenza did not reject but embraced the dualism between liberating and inclusive Christian communities and other cultures; she did not question her own terminology of “believers and non-believers”, and “the temple of God and idol worship.”

Dube asserts that these binary oppositions are ideological constructions with the aim “to deny cultural differences between men and women of diverse races, religions, and nations that have been at the core of Western imperial self-validation.”

Dube reminds her readers of what Donaldson has called “anti-sexist rhetoric to displace questions of colonialism,” and finds it applicable to Schüssler Fiorenza here. For Dube, this rhetoric is part of a strategy to reclaim “a heritage to empower white, Western Christian women to compete with white, Western Christian men in dominating the world.”

3. The Ekklesia of Wo/men

This struggle for dominant power, expressed by Dube to be prevalent among white Western feminisms, relates to Schüssler Fiorenza’s “ekklesia of wo/men.” In her article, “The Will to Choose or to Reject: Continuing Our Critical Work,” Schüssler Fiorenza defined the goal of her hermeneutical space, the ekklesia of wo/men, as claiming “women’s religious power and liberation from all patriarchal alienation, marginalization, and oppression.” For Dube, this

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26 Ibid., 29.
28 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, 30.
29 Ibid., 25.
30 Ibid., 30.
32 Ibid., 126.
sounds hopeful for feminists but qualifies this by writing that Schüssler Fiorenza’s *ekklesia* of wo/men nevertheless “undercuts its liberational intentions and alienates Two-Thirds World and non-Christian women - to the extent that the *ekklesia* of wo/men is almost equivalent to the *ekklesia* of white, middle-class Christian feminists.”

Schüssler Fiorenza shifted the locus of divine revelation away from both the Bible and tradition to the lives of women. In doing so, she moved authority away from patriarchal texts and interpretations. However, Dube notes that authority is now given only to “various voices of biblical and theological feminists naming and subverting oppression as they have encountered it.” For Dube, therefore, Schüssler Fiorenza has strengthened the power that has now been transferred to academic First World women, and not, in effect, to the voices of all women from both the First World and the Two-Thirds World.

Dube writes that for Two-Thirds World and non-Christian feminists, the “devaluing of their religious traditions through Western imperial Christianity is a central concern.” In this manner, a feminist space cannot adequately address concerns of the Two-Thirds world if its participants are only First World academics with First World concerns. Dube concludes that Schüssler Fiorenza’s work on *ekklesia* of wo/men is an option only for feminists like Schüssler Fiorenza, white and middle class Christians.

**4. Recent Writings**

Dube continues her review of Schüssler Fiorenza by examining her more recent works. She notes that Schüssler Fiorenza now defines her *ekklesia* of wo/men, her feminist hermeneutical space, as “informed by a radical logic of democracy/equality rather than the logic of Western

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34 Ibid., 31.
36 Ibid., 31.
identity.” Despite this apparent development, Dube continues her critique and includes a claim that Schüssler Fiorenza’s recent works subscribe to cultural imperial discourses by privileging gender oppression over all other oppressions. She critically examines Schüssler Fiorenza’s understanding of patriarchy as “kyriarchy.” Secondly, Dube notes that there is a dissonance between Schüssler Fiorenza’s theory and ‘practice’. Here Dube gives two examples: (A) Schüssler Fiorenza’s reading of the Canaanite/Syro-Phoenician woman from a historical-rhetorical perspective and (B) Schüssler Fiorenza’s project to push canonical boundaries in Searching the Scriptures, Vol. 2: A Feminist Commentary.

5. Kyriarchy

Before moving on to Dube’s critique of kyriarchy, I will offer a brief sketch of Schüssler Fiorenza’s term. Schüssler Fiorenza’s concerns about women’s oppressions were and are informed by “Two-Thirds World and socialist feminists, who have continually called into question the white middle-class feminist discourse for subscribing to cultural imperialism and privileging gender oppression over other forms of oppression.” Schüssler Fiorenza’s awareness of cultural imperialism and the implications of a single oppression on women influenced her to re-evaluate patriarchy and the effectiveness of the term to capture the multiple and historically contextualized forms of oppressions. She finds that the term kyriarchy can better reflect multiple and multiplicative oppressions. Rather than analyzing women’s oppression solely in terms of gender, kyriarchy captures a pyramid of oppressions based on race, ethnicity, and class as well as gender. It is not merely the rule of the father, but that of elite,

37 Ibid., 34.
38 Ibid., 34.
40 Dube also makes these observations in her summary of kyriarchy. See Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, 34 and 35.
41 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, 34.
propertied men, of the master or Lord.\textsuperscript{42} Kyriarchy is a concept developed by Schüssler Fiorenza but refers, in part, to ancient Greek democracy; at the bottom of this kyriarchal pyramid are slaves, moving up to include “freed persons, tenants, and clients, freeborn children and kin, lady of the house, professional workers, and at the highest peak, free, propertied Greek men.”\textsuperscript{43}

Schüssler Fiorenza understands this kyriarchal pyramid to capture Eurocentrism insofar as it is the rule of white fathers and “white elite women of Christian religion” who believe they are civilizing agents of patriarchal values, culture, and religion.\textsuperscript{44} For Schüssler Fiorenza, kyriarchal structures must be recognized not only in terms of a gender analysis but in terms of racial, class, and colonial analyses. To this extent, kyriarchy is a theoretical tool to recognize the pervasiveness and interconnectedness of oppressive structures as they exist in varying historical contexts.

Dube critiques Schüssler Fiorenza’s understanding of patriarchy as kyriarchy. First, Dube finds that “the attempt to define patriarchy as imperialism is potentially co-optive, because even colonized people have their various forms of hierarchal and stratified patriarchal systems, but they are not equivalent to imperialism.”\textsuperscript{45} Dube’s main concern, however, is that the term kyriarchy mystifies imperialism and that “the attempt to shy away from the word imperialism, is, in fact, consistent with Western structures that have avoided this terminology in order to maintain its dominance.”\textsuperscript{46}

After such a criticism of Schüssler Fiorenza’s development of kyriarchy, Dube interestingly goes on to say this articulation by Schüssler Fiorenza goes “a long way towards

\textsuperscript{43} Dube, \textit{Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible}, 35.
\textsuperscript{45} Dube, \textit{Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible}, 36.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 36.
counteracting imperialism, if followed.” Dube raises the question about whether Schüssler Fiorenza follows her goals laid out in the development of ekklesia of wo/men and kyriarchy. She offers two examples which suggest that Schüssler Fiorenza does not live up to her own logic of radical democracy, a logic which subverts the Western logic of identity. The first example is Schüssler Fiorenza’s historical-rhetorical reading of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk. 7:25-30; Matt. 15:21-28) in her book, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation.* The second example, offers Dube, is found in Schüssler Fiorenza’s essay, “Transgressing Canonical Boundaries” in the book, *Searching the Scriptures, Vol. 2: A Feminist Commentary.*

Dube reminds her readers that Schüssler Fiorenza’s more recent works should uphold her previous efforts to move away from a Western logic of identity in her feminist biblical hermeneutics. In her book *But She Said,* Schüssler Fiorenza offered her own reading of the story of the Syro-Phoenician/Canaanite woman through her lens of a historical-rhetorical hermeneutic. Dube writes that “since this is a mission story, a narrative that validates universalism, one expects Schüssler Fiorenza to be cautious not to reproduce kyriarchal relationships.” However, for Dube, Schüssler Fiorenza reactivated her reading found in *In Memory of Her.* Given Schüssler Fiorenza’s goal to destabilize kyriarchal rhetoric in biblical texts and interpretations, Dube writes that readers must now pay close attention to how Schüssler Fiorenza’s reading “constructs foreign people, how it conceives power relations between women and men, between classes and races, and between nations and religions […]”

Unfortunately, writes Dube, Schüssler Fiorenza did not satisfy her own claims and goals outlined in her feminist hermeneutic of radical democracy. Rather, Schüssler Fiorenza’s reading

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47 Ibid., 37. I find it interesting that Dube first criticizes kyriarchy on a theoretical level (i.e., how ‘kyriarchy’ mystifies imperialism), and then affirms the theoretical value of this construct in Schüssler Fiorenza’s works.


49 Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible,* 37.

50 Ibid., 37.
strategy of the Syro-Phoenician woman attended to different concerns; Schüssler Fiorenza wanted to make the Syro-Phoenician woman visible as an apostolic foremother and by recognizing this woman’s role, to relativize the centrality of Paul in the debate about the mission to the Gentiles. Dube notes that this debate did not “dwell on how the mission is conceived and how the power relations it advocates may duplicate kyriarchal domination.” Another concern of Dube’s is that Schüssler Fiorenza did not expose the way the characterization of the foreign, Syro-Phoenician woman “as a helpless dog, begging for crumbs from the master’s table, evokes a kyriarchal ideology of subordination.”

Dube recognizes that Schüssler Fiorenza’s reading here is still a valuable rhetorical approach “to the androcentric interpreters in the Western academy and the church.” However, continues Dube, if this is the case, Schüssler Fiorenza’s reading was primarily a debate between white Western Christian women and white Western Christian men “seeking to share in the power of dominating the whole world.” Because Schüssler Fiorenza did not question the way this story validates universalism but is instead concerned with bringing women back into early Christian history, and the way she did not reflect on the characterization of the foreign woman as a dog, Dube concludes that Schüssler Fiorenza’s reading is still inscribed within Western imperial ideology. Effectively, Schüssler Fiorenza’s work on this story alienates non-Western and non-Christian women “who have been constructed as helpless dogs, heathens, and savages in order to validate their subjugation.”

Moving from Schüssler Fiorenza’s work, But She Said, to her essay “Transgressing Canonical Boundaries” in the anthology Searching the Scriptures, Vol. 2, Dube offers another

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51 Ibid., 37.  
52 Ibid., 37.  
53 Ibid., 37.  
54 Ibid., 37-38.  
55 Ibid., 38.  
56 Ibid., 38.  
57 Ibid., 38.
issue for dispute, an example in which Schüssler Fiorenza did not live up to or satisfy her own
goals for a logic of radical democracy. In this instance, Dube considers Schüssler Fiorenza’s
argument to expand the Christian biblical canon: the biblical canon “reflects an androcentric
selection process […] that has functioned to inculcate kyriarchal imperial order.” 58 Schüssler
Fiorenza wrote that the early struggles in the formation of the Christian canon came with the
“kyriarchal co-optation of the ekklesia” and that because of this, feminist biblical scholarship
should not “remain within the limits drawn by the established canon.” 59

Dube agrees in part with Schüssler Fiorenza’s insistence to extend the boundaries of the
Christian canon but holds that this does not go far enough. For Dube, Schüssler Fiorenza’s
work with Christian-Jewish extracanonical sources is still “a comfortable way of rocking the
boat, given that male biblical scholars have always dealt with these texts.” 60 Dube additionally
notes the comfort of this position in comparison with Canaan Banana’s argument for a new
Bible, a Bible that affirms all experiences and perceptions of the divine. In light of this more
radical position, Dube contends that Schüssler Fiorenza did not recognize that her logic of
radical democracy is here an invitation to only Jewish and Christian Western feminists. It
excludes the concerns and experiences of non-Western and non-Christian men and women.

In this final assessment of Schüssler Fiorenza in her book, Postcolonial Feminist
Interpretation of the Bible, Dube makes the following claim: “In short, the logic of radical
democracy invites international women to the ekklesia as long as they speak the language of the
‘civilized’ and the ‘cultured’.” 61 In her case against Schüssler Fiorenza, Dube is also calling on

60 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, 38.
61 Ibid., 39.
all biblical interpreters to reassess the way biblical texts and their interpretations have
suppressed traditions and texts of different religions of the Two-Thirds World and among the
natives in Canada, Australia, and the Americas. The approach here to ignore other religious
traditions “also ignores the writers from these places who constantly make it ‘a dialogue of the
deaf’: the power of the First World to close its ears to the voices of the Two-Thirds World while
it disseminates its ideas and material goods to them.”\(^62\)

While Dube certainly finds problematic issues in Schüssler Fiorenza’s work, the way she
frames Schüssler Fiorenza needs to be closely examined; Dube devotes many pages to Schüssler
Fiorenza’s very early work and the overall rhetorical effect of this characterization masks
qualitative shifts in Schüssler Fiorenza’s developments. Moreover, Dube includes the earlier
work while admitting Schüssler Fiorenza has since reformulated her approach. In her review of
Schüssler Fiorenza’s recent publications, Dube addresses only two instances in which
Schüssler Fiorenza’s practice does not live up to her theory. This is sufficient for Dube to claim
that her recent publications still reinscribe imperialistic rhetoric. Combining these concerns,
along with her rather strong choice of words, Dube’s portrayal of Schüssler Fiorenza can
certainly lead the reader to frame Schüssler Fiorenza as another imperialistic Western feminist.
The following chapter will critically engage with this portrayal and question this assumption.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., 39.
CHAPTER THREE:
A CLOSER READING OF ELISABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA

A. Introduction

This chapter follows my own move from reading Dube’s assessment of Schüessler Fiorenza’s work to reading Schüessler Fiorenza’s texts themselves. I look at those publications written before Dube’s critique. Given Dube’s concentration on Schüessler Fiorenza’s key terms “kyriarchy” and the “ekklesia of wo/men”, I organize this chapter in a similar way, with subsections on these two neologisms. Before looking at these terms themselves, I prepare the reader with a brief overview of “the politics of otherness.” The influence of this concept is apparent in her work on kyriarchy and the ekklesia of wo/men. This turn to Schüessler Fiorenza’s texts themselves reveals that she had done much anti-imperialistic work before the publication of Dube’s book. At the end of this chapter, I then revisit Dube’s claims, identify some problematic oversights and question certain aspects of her conclusions. The argument of this chapter is that at times Dube has misrepresented this German-American scholar and that her overall portrayal of Schüessler Fiorenza is polarizing.

B. Key Theoretical Developments and Terms

1. The Politics of Otherness

Schüessler Fiorenza’s employment of the key theoretical terms, the “ekklesia of wo/men” and “kyriarchy,” has developed since her earlier publications and continues to develop.¹ My reading

¹ In In Memory of Her we see the beginnings of her work on the ekklesia of wo/men. The term “kyriarchy” itself was not yet introduced as a term to reflect multiple and multiplicative oppressions on women until after But She Said (this book uses the terms ‘kyriarchal’ and ‘kyriocentric’ but not ‘kyriarchy’ itself). However, although the explicit word was not used, we see that from her article “The Politics of Otherness” from as early as 1989, Schüessler Fiorenza’s theoretical awareness of these numerous oppressions had already been significantly developed.
suggests that these neologisms have been influenced by two major factors. Firstly, there were
the global feminist movements since the 1970s and the concerns raised by African American
feminists as well as the challenges of feminist voices from the Two-Thirds World beginning
around the mid-1980s. These voices have particularly influenced Schüssler Fiorenza’s
formulations of the “ekklesia of wo/men”, a critical feminist space developed for interpretation
and debate. Second, is the school of critical social theory. This factor had influenced her
development and critique of the concept of “the politics of otherness.”

The “politics of otherness” is particularly illuminative in the context of this thesis
because of Schüssler Fiorenza’s article, “The Politics of Otherness: Biblical Interpretation as a
Critical Praxis for Liberation.” Written in 1989, this is a relatively early example in her debate
with Dube in which Schüssler Fiorenza, using the concept of the politics of otherness, insisted
on the importance of women’s differences. The diversity of women is needed in order to
counter the androcentric othering of women. This othering relies on a rhetoric of sameness, on
which the politics of otherness elaborates.

To destabilize this rhetoric of sameness, argued Schüssler Fiorenza, means to recognize
that women are very different, including their many oppressions. Women are not just oppressed
based on their sex or gender, but because of their race, class, or colonial status. Given the need

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3 Schüssler Fiorenza recognizes the influence of critical theory on her work in a number of publications. See
   Schüssler Fiorenza, “Feminist Theology as a Critical Theology of Liberation.” *Theological Studies* 36, no. 4
   Educational Space* (Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 79. See also Loraine MacKenzie
   Shepherd, “Attending to the Other: Feminist Critiques of Theological Method in a Postmodern Era” (Ph.D. diss.,
   Toronto, 1998), 14 and 20. For a fuller discussion on the relationship between Schüssler Fiorenza and critical
   theory, which Schüssler Fiorenza herself notes in *The Power of the Word*, see Marsha A. Hewitt, "Dialectic of
   Hope: The Feminist Liberation Theology of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza as a Feminist Critical Theory," in
   *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*, edited by Fernando F.
   Ethical Paradigms in a Feminist Critique of Critical Social Theory," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*
to destabilize this rhetoric of ‘othering’, a rhetoric that Schüssler Fiorenza found to be both deeply at work and yet hidden in the oppression of women, analyses must not be limited to gender alone but must also include race, class, and colonialism. This significantly affected her work on kyriarchy.

The politics of otherness had also influenced her development of the *ekklesia* of wo/men, a feminist hermeneutical framework. Again, in order to challenge the rhetoric of sameness, the diversity among women must be protected and made theoretically visible. Responding to the proliferation of feminist voices around the globe, Schüssler Fiorenza challenged essentialist discourses of women that inadvertently reinscribe this rhetoric of sameness, or as she referred to it, the logic of unity. As with Mohanty and Dube, Schüssler Fiorenza also critiqued Western feminists for creating feminist hermeneutical frameworks based on an abstract and ahistorical category of “woman.”

The politics of otherness, therefore, which can be considered a form of identity critique and informed by the school of critical social theory, had been particularly influential in Schüssler Fiorenza’s work in challenging Western imperialistic rhetoric. While it had been very influential in Schüssler Fiorenza’s article “The Politics of Otherness”, as well as in a number of books, including *But She Said* (1992), her later publications do not refer to this concept as much. This is largely because of other feminist work she undertakes. While the politics of otherness is a theoretical reason to protect and promote the visibility of women’s differences, whether they be socio-political locations or epistemological approaches, the influences of other feminist

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voices from around the globe have also deeply shaped Schüssler Fiorenza’s understanding of the *ekklesia* of wo/men and kyriarchy. Some of these feminists will be mentioned in this chapter.  

Schüssler Fiorenza’s politics of otherness refers to a philosophical and political rhetoric of otherness that legitimates the subordination of one group of people based on their alleged inferiority in nature. This rhetoric, wrote Schüssler Fiorenza, is a dangerous patriarchal ideology that stems from the ancient Greek democratic government and extends to modern forms of the ‘Man of Reason’ in both androcentric texts and interpretations. It also, she claimed, had been adopted by Euro-American feminist discourses.

Schüssler Fiorenza wrote that the patriarchal politics of otherness, which conceives differences between people as differences in nature, developed at a point of contradiction between the Sophists’ claims that all human beings are by nature equal and with the ancient Greek democratic system whose participants were only elite propertied men. This system excluded freeborn propertied women, poor women and men, slave women and men, and barbarian women and men. To justify this system of government, where only the above mentioned men profited as full citizens, an ideology of difference was needed. Schüssler Fiorenza wrote that “this exclusion required ideological justifications as to why only freeborn propertied Greek male heads of households could be full citizens if, as the Sophists maintained, all are equal by nature.” Differences were *naturalized* such that those who were not elite propertied men were inferior by nature. This could support both the Sophists’ claims as well as protect the power structures afforded to elite, propertied free men.

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5 While Schüssler Fiorenza referred to many of these influences in her publications, given the scope of this thesis I am able to only point out a few otherwise notable voices. At times, it is unclear to what extent these numerous Two-Thirds World feminists have influenced Schüssler Fiorenza or to what extent she referred to them only to mark her theoretical agreement. In any case, a more substantial assessment of these influences would be very illuminative but in the case of this thesis would mean a very different project. One needs only to survey her footnotes to grasp the vast range of her reading and research in this respect.


7 Ibid., 315.
According to Schüessler Fiorenza, both Aristotle and Plato formulated such ideological distinctions and effectively constructed the subordination of women and non-elite men through their “constructs of difference.” Schüessler Fiorenza continued her theorization by writing that these constructions of difference “were reproduced not only in early Christian writing and malestream theology but also in the modern democratic discourses of political philosophy, in the Enlightenment construction of the Man of Reason, as well as in colonialist articulations of racism.”

The politics of otherness has set up women as both inherently different from men as well as inferior to them. As the politics of otherness generates gender dualisms or polarities, this rhetoric collapses differences among women and also “its totalizing discourse of male-female dualism masks the complex structuring of patriarchal domination in Western societies and religions.” To this extent, therefore, it not only perpetuates the inferiority of an essential woman through a rhetoric of the other, the politics of otherness also obfuscates its own imbrication in “racism, classism, colonialism, and militarism as structures of women’s exploitation and oppression.” This complex structuring of patriarchal domination is called “kyriarchy.”

2. Kyriarchy

Schüessler Fiorenza explained her reformulation of women’s oppressions from patriarchy to kyriarchy by again referring to the classical form of patriarchal democracy in Ancient Greece. Here, Schüessler Fiorenza found a heuristic or diagnostic tool with which to account for,

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8 Ibid., 315.
11 Ibid., 316.
12 Schüessler Fiorenza’s book, But She Said, marks the early stages of her work on “kyriarchy” and continues to evolve throughout the decades.
recognize, and thus deconstruct oppressions voiced by African American and Third World feminists. According to Schüessler Fiorenza, Western Greek society and family accord power to not just the rule of the father (patriarchy), but also the rule of the *master or Lord* (kyriarchy).\(^{13}\) *Kyrios* itself is a title that would have referred to an ancient emperor.\(^{14}\) Schüessler Fiorenza referred to the rule of the master as kyriocentric by which elite propertied men have power over others.\(^{15}\) At the top of the Greek patriarchal and democratic hierarchy are rulers, heads of households, masters and patrons. These people were also free, propertied, Greek males. Moving downwards in this hierarchy are the artisans, workers, farmers — those who are free males of lower status. Below them are freeborn women, then moving down to freeborn children both male and female. Below this are male and female tenants/clients, and further, freed persons and mercenaries. Under this are the unfree, the slaves, who are men, women, and children. The bottom of this hierarchy consists of uncultured barbarians.

Schüessler Fiorenza wrote that patriarchal democratic Greece developed a kyriarchal system based on ‘othering’ people for their supposed differences in nature (here we can see Schüessler Fiorenza’s work on the politics of otherness). Kyriarchy therefore is a term developed by Schüessler Fiorenza in the late nineteen-eighties to theoretically understand that (a) it is not men as such who are at the top of the hierarchy of power, but elite propertied men *and women*. And (b) it is not just gender but also race and class that structure various historical oppressions.

Schüessler Fiorenza referred to the work of Elizabeth Spelman who suggested that in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, natural gender differences applied only to freeborn elite men and women; “strictly speaking, slave women and alien resident women are not *woman*. They are gendered not with respect to slave men or alien resident men, but with respect to their


\(^{15}\) In *But She Said*, Schüessler Fiorenza had yet to use the neologism “kyriarchy” and instead still used the term patriarchy but characterized as a pyramid of multiplicative oppressions.
These masters include elite women. Thus, wrote Schüssler Fiorenza, slave women are subordinated to not only elite men but also to elite women. In effect, this hierarchal, kyriocentric pyramid (referred to as ‘kyriarchy’) gave rise to not only male-female but female-female “natural differences.” In this instance, therefore, Schüssler Fiorenza began to offer a theoretical tool which demystified the claim of patriarchy that *men universally oppress women*. Instead, around a decade before Dube’s critique, Schüssler Fiorenza showed that elite propertied women also form the top of the power hierarchy. In this regard, kyriarchy does not operate from an essentialist Western paradigm which ultimately benefits Western women; it implicates and critiques “imperial pale females” in their role in colonial and imperial formations.

Schüssler Fiorenza continued her work on kyriarchy as a multiplicative and hierarchal pyramid of oppressions when she examined modern capitalist patriarchy. As with ancient Greece, modern democracies also legitimate the exclusion of certain peoples based on ‘natural differences’. She wrote that this classical patriarchal discourse emerged in modern Eurocentric political philosophy and theology. Notably, Schüssler Fiorenza showed how this patriarchal discourse had engendered the modern Euro-American discourses on the ‘White Lady’, and the Western colonialist perspective of ‘uncivilized savages.’ In both cases, kyriocentric rhetoric

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19 In his book, *The Politics of Heaven: Women, Gender, and Empire in the Study of Paul*, Joseph A. Marchal comments on the criticisms raised by some postcolonial feminist scholars about Schüssler Fiorenza’s concept ‘kyriarchy’. He writes that he himself finds these concerns with kyriarchy to be “quite odd” given its strength in foregrounding imperial dynamics in feminist analyses. In his book, *The Politics of Heaven*, Marchal adopts Schüssler Fiorenza’s ‘kyriarchal’ analysis with the “contention that such a concept can remain a relevant and helpful tool for feminist, postcolonial analyses of biblical literature and interpretation.” See ibid., 7.
upholds its superiority by making claims about people in nature. Because it is not the male sex but the so-called White Father that is legitimated by the kyriocentric rhetoric of elite Euro-American men, Schüssler Fiorenza argued that not just gender, but race, class, and colonial status must be recognized in their various forms.

Thus, those feminist theories and theologies which only support analyses based on sex/gender dualisms will consequently obfuscate other oppressions. Through this mystification, these theories are in danger of generating further the rhetoric behind the “complex, multiplicative and hierarchal structures of oppression” that comprises kyriarchy.21 For Schüssler Fiorenza, theoretical recognition and critique can be emancipatory. Her work aimed to penetrate the ideologies generating and perpetuating structures of oppression. Schüssler Fiorenza maintained that the feminist theories that considered only sex/gender dualisms mask the dominations, inscribed within women and in the relationship of dominance and subordination between women[…], it also masks the participation of white elite women and of Christian religion in patriarchal oppression, insofar as both have served as the civilizing conduits of patriarchal knowledge, values, religion, and culture.22

Schüssler Fiorenza sought to decentre discussions on patriarchy as solely gender oppression because she recognized the concerns of the Third World Women who had typically been ignored in Euro-American feminist theories of the time. These women had pointed out that women are also oppressed by racism, classism, and colonialism. Schüssler Fiorenza was “challenged by black feminists in religion” and so she “sought to articulate for the past decade or so a critical feminist theology of liberation that does not understand patriarchy just in terms of the binary gender system.”23

22 Ibid., 123.
23 Ibid., 115. Schüssler Fiorenza referred to the work of bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins, among others, and their influence in her recognition of not only gender oppression but those oppressions based on racism, colonialism, and
Schüssler Fiorenza wrote that “whenever mainline liberal, radical, or socialist-Marxist feminists do pay attention to the objections of Third World feminists, however, they tend to adopt an adding on approach of listing oppressions in feminist discourses.”24 Adding on or listing oppressions in terms of parallel systems of domination “obscures the multiplicative interstructuring of the pyramidal hierarchal structures of ruling which affect women in different social locations differently.”25 A dual-systems approach, one that analyzes women’s oppressions in terms of ‘patriarchy and capitalism’ or ‘patriarchy and imperialism’, cannot theoretically account for the complex interstructuring of oppressions determined not just by sexism, “but also by racism, classism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, colonialism, nationalism, and militarism.”26 Moreover, challenged Schüssler Fiorenza, using a dual-systems approach as a tool to analyze oppression in women’s lives reinscribes dualistic and essentialist discourses on “woman.”27

Thus, for Schüssler Fiorenza, the category “patriarchy” itself was and is very problematic. It did not capture various socio-political oppressions on women, oppressions arising from structures that are not transhistorical but historically interdependent and situated. Moreover, those feminisms which saw women’s oppressions in terms of sex/gender (patriarchy) were in danger of universalizing white, middle class, Euro-American concerns on to other women. To help prevent kyriarchal oppression against women, therefore, Schüssler Fiorenza encouraged and sought to protect differences among women, including epistemological ones, in order to challenge and dismantle the ideologies behind exploitation and imperial subjugation.

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24 Ibid., 114.
25 Ibid., 114-115.
Instead of patriarchy, in the late 1980s Schüssler Fiorenza offered kyriarchy as a more responsible concept to use.

3. The *Ekklesia* of Wo/men

Schüssler Fiorenza continued her critique of imperialistic rhetoric, a rhetoric which is supported by “the politics of otherness”, and its co-optation with Euro-American feminisms. Before offering a portrayal of what the *ekklesia* of wo/men *is*, we will first look at the problems it aims to address. Indeed, Schüssler Fiorenza developed this feminist hermeneutical framework precisely in response to prevailing and problematic Euro-American feminist theories. For Schüssler Fiorenza, the *ekklesia* of wo/men is meant to be both a radical and rhetorical counterspace valuing diversity among women as such, including the diversity of socio-geo-political contexts and feminist approaches.

Roughly a decade before Dube’s critique, Schüssler Fiorenza distanced herself from other leading feminist discourses of the time and warned of the way Euro-American feminisms are in danger of replicating the politics of otherness through their own construction of an idealized category of “woman.” Schüssler Fiorenza wrote that:

> Euro-American feminist discourse has tended to take its measure from an idealized version of the Man of Reason, the sovereign subject of history, culture, and religion. Its oppositional discourse has been in danger of reproducing the cultural-symbolic construction of masculine-feminine polarity and heterosexual antagonism that is constitutive of the patriarchal ‘politics of otherness.’

In their attempt to develop oppositional frameworks to patriarchy, these feminists, argued Schüssler Fiorenza, are in danger of replicating the very gender dualism they sought to destabilize: “feminist theory has kept in circulation the discourse of classic Western philosophy and theology on the gender-dualism or gender-polarity that understands man as the subject of

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history, culture, and religion, and women as the other.”

In their efforts to construct alterity, many of these discourses defined a standpoint or hermeneutic on the basis of an essentialist category of ‘woman’, ‘womanhood’, or femininity. Essentially, wrote Schüssler Fiorenza, this had maintained the rhetoric of otherness characterized by its denial of differences among women and its mystification of other systems of oppression based on class, race, and colonial status.

To speak of women as maternal or nurturing inadvertently re-established cultural norms of maleness understood as independent, rational, self-sufficient, and public. While the theory of the maternal feminine aimed to subvert “the assumed neutrality of logocentric and phallocentric principles, representations, and knowledge”, Schüssler Fiorenza argued it nevertheless reinscribed the cultural feminine. In addition, the common “alignment of the masculine with rationality and of the feminine with poetry, mysticism, magic, and religion,” wrote Schüssler Fiorenza, continued the Western logic of identity where differences are subsumed into a unity; all men are this and all women are that. The same logic that unifies groups of people had also produced “colonialist constructions of ‘the native’, the ‘noble savage’, and ‘the Oriental.’”

Here Schüssler Fiorenza understood that the Western rhetoric of otherness and identity supported ideologies working to subjugate peoples of different races and classes.

According to Schüssler Fiorenza, the Euro-American reinscription of the cultural feminine, shown in the feminist frameworks of Jungian feminists, Mary Daly, and French

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29 Ibid., 316. For Schüssler Fiorenza’s reading and critique of Euro-American feminisms which revalorized the feminine in an effort to construct alternative hermeneutical spaces, see, But She Said, 105-108. Of the feminists reviewed are Jungian feminists and the repressed feminine archetype, Mary Daly’s ontological-linguistic framework, maternal feminists like Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray. Note that Wisdom Ways (2001) adds a fourth feminism, relationality or sisterhood feminism, which similarly revalorized the feminine. In many cases these discourses convey a universalistic perspective of womanhood psychologically, ontologically, socio-historically, or epistemologically.

30 Schüssler Fiorenza elaborated by writing that those feminists who have been influenced by Jung, Lacan, Tillich, and Derrida, “have valorized women-body, sexuality, maternity, nature, a feminine archetype, essence or divinity.” Ibid., 316.


32 Ibid., 108.
feminists, had not taken into account new feminist challenges. African American feminist and
global feminist voices of the 1980s questioned and rejected “the essentialist understanding of
woman and the feminine in Euro-American feminist theory.” Third World women are
“doubly invisible” as the Other of the Other. Schüssler Fiorenza responded to these concerns.

Schüssler Fiorenza also distinguished herself from many of her Euro-American feminist
counterparts by her recognition of the so-called White Lady discourse. Kwok Pui Lan has been particularly influential on Schüssler Fiorenza here. In the White Lady discourse, white women are depicted as being the symbols of proper civilization. This had been significantly harmful towards non-White or non-Western women. She noted that despite the early women’s liberation movement expression that “no woman is free until every woman is free”, “feminist analyses and strategies generally have not taken their political measure, standpoint, and strategy for change with women on the totem pole of patriarchal oppression, with the ‘others of the others.’” For Schüssler Fiorenza, many feminist discourses at that time had not recognized the double and triple oppressions on women around the world and her various critiques of these discourses set her apart in as early as the nineteen eighties.

Now we will consider what the ekklesia of wo/men actually is. Although Schüssler Fiorenza wrote about this, her description is at times vague. Admittedly, this is partially because Schüssler Fiorenza wanted to avoid being prescriptive. The participation of women in the ekklesia of wo/men is not based on gender or social norms like those relating to femininity. It is not based on race. It was explicitly developed to reject these prescriptions. What made people wo/men of the ekklesia was sharing a common political commitment. Mohanty’s

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33 Ibid., 107. For Schüssler Fiorenza’s list of these African American feminists, including bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins, who are referred to in many of Schüssler Fiorenza’s publications, see footnote 13 in But She Said, 239.
34 Ibid., 113.
35 Ibid., 122.
“imagined community” had been particularly influential on Schüssler Fiorenza’s *ekklesia* of wo/men. Quoting Mohanty, Schüssler Fiorenza envisioned the *ekklesia* of wo/men to provide a space that has:

political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliance. Thus it is not color or sex which constructs the ground for these struggles. Rather it is the way we think about race, class and gender, - the political links we choose to make among and between struggles. Thus, potentially, women of all colors (including white women) can align themselves and participate in these imagined communities.\(^{38}\)

Schüssler Fiorenza also defined her *ekklesia* of wo/men as a “vision of alliances between different communities of women.”\(^{39}\) To not recognize differences among women (whether the feminist counterspace is understood as, for example, in the ideas of sisterhood or the maternal feminine), these groups will ultimately remain homogenous. They will attract “women whose cultural religious experiences and identities are alike.”\(^{40}\) For Schüssler Fiorenza writing in the early 1990s, mainline feminist groups in the United States had ultimately remained a “homogenous white women’s movement, often restricting itself to oppositional articulations of identity, spirituality, and liturgy in the paradigm of the logic of identity.”\(^{41}\)

For Schüssler Fiorenza since around the middle to late ‘eighties, it was of ultimate importance (for a variety of reasons, including theoretical ones) to recognize, articulate, and exemplify the diversity of women’s groups on the basis of race, class, ethnicity, colonial status, and sexual orientation.\(^{42}\) It was also imperative to allow for a space that protected the integrity

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\(^{40}\) Ibid., 127.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 127.

of competing discursive practices and the importance of public debate. To remain a homogenous feminist group is in clear danger of perpetuating colonialist “White Lady” discourses as well as the very pervasive rhetoric of otherness, a rhetoric which supports the status of elite white propertied men and women. This anti-imperialistic work on Euro-American feminist studies developed over a decade before Dube’s rather harsh criticism.

C. Revisiting Musa Dube and Assessing Some Claims

As this thesis claims, my research on Schüssler Fiorenza finds that Dube has in many cases misrepresented the latter and consequently has framed this German-American scholar in bipolar terms. My initial reading of Dube led me to understand Schüssler Fiorenza’s work as predominately imperialistic, for the many reasons offered and also largely because of the language Dube uses. She writes that Western feminists have failed to “recognize and subvert imperial strategies of subjugation”, thus firmly retaining the “right of the West to dominate and exploit non-Western nations.” Because she devoted only three pages for the more problematic feminists, Maria Ross Cutrufoelli and Mary Daly, and thirteen pages for Schüssler Fiorenza, I had believed that Schüssler Fiorenza’s strategy was another example of the many “hidden imperialistic strategies” of Western scholars. It was a strategy to reclaim “a heritage to empower white, Western Christian women to compete with white, Western Christian men in

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43 Schüssler Fiorenza criticized Rosemary Radford Ruether’s feminist critical principle for producing an abstract and universalistic understanding of ‘woman’ in her feminist theory and for failing to protect the particularity of diverse biblical texts as well as diverse feminist voices. For more on this, see But She Said, 148.

44 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, 26.

45 On the back cover of Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, Stephen D. Moore commends Dube’s “searing book” and the way she reveals “again and again” and “in devastating fashion”, “how so much ‘First World’ biblical scholarship – feminist scholarship included - is conducted in a conceptual vacuum with regard to such monumental realities as empire, colonialism, and neo-colonialism.” Again, given that the Western feminist scholarship included here could really only refer to Schüssler Fiorenza (due to the length of Dube’s criticism compared to the two others), Moore’s review seems to only perpetuate the sense that Schüssler Fiorenza is another Western imperialistic feminist.
dominating the world.”46 I believed this strategy included “anti-sexist rhetoric to displace questions of colonialism.”47 It was, in effect, a very questionable and dangerous strategy.

1. Earlier Writings

After turning to Schüessler Fiorenza’s publications themselves, I found that Dube had presented Schüessler Fiorenza in a problematic way. A significant portion of Dube’s treatment of Schüessler Fiorenza focused on her earlier works. Her book, In Memory of Her, was published in 1983. Admittedly, Schüessler Fiorenza had failed to recognize the imperial setting in the Greco-Roman world. She had not problematized Rome as an imperial centre. While this, I find, is correct, my research suggests that the context in which Schüessler Fiorenza was writing was very different than that of Dube’s fifteen years later. Schüessler Fiorenza’s aim in this book was to challenge the prevalence of value-neutral scholarship within androcentric institutional academia, biblical studies included.48 In the tenth anniversary edition of In Memory of Her, Schüessler Fiorenza writes that the first step in her “model of feminist historical theological reconstruction… seeks to interrupt and change dominant interpretive discourses.” These dominate discourses claimed that interpretation is value neutral.49

While Dube is certainly correct in saying that Schüessler Fiorenza’s dualistic language in In Memory of Her of “believers and unbelievers” and “the temple of God and idol worship”50 denies cultural and religious differences among men and women in the non-Western and non-Christian world, it is also apparent that Schüessler Fiorenza was writing with different concerns in mind.51 At this point in Schüessler Fiorenza’s scholarship she was engaging with Jewish

46 Ibid., 30.
47 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, 25.
48 Enander, Elisabeth Schüessler Fiorenza, 37.
50 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, 30.
51 At this point, the scholarship of ‘empire’ was not so well articulated. It is possible that certain aspects of Dube critique is anachronistic.
feminists and her book *In Memory of Her* included deliberate attempts not to ostracize but to promote the growing field of feminist Jewish-Christian dialogue. Schüssler Fiorenza, as well as others during this time, contributed to the relatively early efforts in feminist inter-religious dialogue.

After studying the development of Schüssler Fiorenza’s thinking, and learning more about the development of critical discourses and debates more generally, it seems evident to me that Dube criticized Schüssler Fiorenza from the vantage point of later discussions in interreligious dialogue. Interestingly, at the time of *In Memory of Her*, Schüssler Fiorenza had been engaged with the relatively new debates and discussions initiated by Jewish feminists.

Dube’s review of the *ekklesia* of wo/men centres on Schüssler Fiorenza’s earlier text from 1985, “The Will to Choose or to Reject: Continuing Our Critical Work” even though Schüssler Fiorenza’s use of the term developed considerably in later writings. By claiming that Schüssler Fiorenza’s practice does not fulfill her theory (and here Dube refers to Schüssler Fiorenza’s dismissal of non-Christian and non-Western traditions in *In Memory of Her*), Dube

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52 Enander, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 52. See also, Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 1983, and the chapter, “The Jesus Movement as Renewal Movement within Judaism” in *In Memory of Her*, 105-159. Note that while Dube argues that in *In Memory of Her*, Schüssler Fiorenza’s dualistic language of “us and them” denied religious and cultural differences in the non-Christian world, Dube would have nevertheless encountered a development in *But She Said*: writing on her *ekklesia* of wo/men and the diversity it invites, Schüssler Fiorenza refers to, among others, Kwok Pui Lan’s dialogical imagination model that proposes to use Asian cultural and religious texts to reflect on the Bible (155). It is interesting that Dube does not read past *In Memory of Her* on this subject. For more information on Kwok Pui Lan’s dialogical imagination, see Kwok Pui-lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995).


quickly concludes that the *ekklesia* of wo/men therefore “is almost equivalent to the *ekklesia* of white, middle-class Christian feminists.”

In the previous section in this chapter, I followed Schüssler Fiorenza’s own reasons for her formulation of the *ekklesia* of women. In light of this reading, it seems now that there are very strong reasons to argue that Dube has not *sufficiently* attended to Schüssler Fiorenza’s work on this topic. Dube overly identifies Schüssler Fiorenza here with her earlier work, short-changes subsequent developments, and therefore is misleading concerning current possibilities for dialogue and solidarity. Schüssler Fiorenza was deeply influenced by Third World feminist concerns. Given these concerns, as well as her own theoretical work on the politics of otherness, Schüssler Fiorenza sought to develop a feminist rhetorical counter-space protecting and comprising of different, divergent, and therefore sometimes competing feminist articulations. She hoped to contribute to the “theoretical visibility” of difference. Moreover, she consistently critiqued many Euro-American feminists for their imperialistic and essentialist category of “woman” and the way they inappropriately revalorized theories of the “feminine.” Some of these feminists included the notable scholars Rosemary Radford Ruether, Luce Irigaray, Mary Daly, and more general schools of feminist thought, including French feminism (and its adaptation with American feminists) as well as Jungian feminism.

The *ekklesia* of wo/men was configured as both a vision and an imagined community. For Schüssler Fiorenza, it was and is explicitly intended to rhetorically counter the homogenous white women’s groups in the West. It begins with a denial of a common understanding of womanhood. While Dube includes Mohanty’s critique of the category of “woman” in the

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57 See her chapter “Justa – Constructing Common Ground” in *But She Said*, 103-132.
section before her review of Schüssler Fiorenza, it is interesting to note that the latter had spent over a decade writing on this very issue.58

2. Recent Writings

Along with Dube’s rather unwarranted claim that Schüssler Fiorenza’s *ekklesia* of wo/men is an *ekklesia* of white, middle class, Western women, another claim also needs to be more fully addressed. In her section on Schüssler Fiorenza’s “recent writings”, Dube writes that “kyriarchy” mystifies imperialism. Dube claims that “the attempt to shy away from the word *imperialism*, is, in fact, consistent with Western structures that have avoided this terminology in order to maintain its dominance.”59 Dube is concerned that using another word for imperialism will consequently hide the reality of its existence. We cannot challenge or defeat what we cannot label, grasp, define, or bring to consciousness.

Schüssler Fiorenza’s work on kyriarchy seemed to have some very different concerns, perhaps from very different theoretical moorings regarding the nature of imperialism. Part of Schüssler Fiorenza’s work on this issue comes out of previous criticisms of dual-systems theories in feminist thought. For Schüssler Fiorenza, analyzing women’s oppressions in terms of parallel systems, like those of patriarchy and Marxism, or patriarchy and imperialism, cannot adequately capture the interlocking and multiplicative “pyramidal hierarchal structures of ruling which affect women in different social locations differently.”60 For these women, among others, “listing” or “adding on” oppressions cannot conceptually address the reality that they are interconnected.

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58 In her very early book, *In Memory of Her*, published in 1983, Schüssler Fiorenza writes that women’s identity is not based on biological sex or essential gender differences but in common historical struggles. See *In Memory of Her*, 31.

59 Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 36. It is interesting to note, that Schüssler Fiorenza’s disagreement with the term and tool of patriarchy was because of other First World feminists who focused only on the gender dimension of women’s oppression. She also wanted to implicate ‘gender only’ analyses of First World feminisms within imperial discourses.

With the conceptual tool Schüssler Fiorenza calls kyriarchy, it is not sexual difference that constitutes the basis for women’s oppression; instead oppression varies according to where we live, how we are born, and the power structures existing at that time. For Schüssler Fiorenza, kyriarchy was a response to the challenges of African American and Third World feminists. It does not study gender oppression alone. In her essay, “Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Postcolonial Studies”, Kwok Pui Lan makes a similar observation. She writes that through her work on kyriarchy, Schüssler Fiorenza “has remained sensitive to racial minority women and the cries of third-world women.”

Schüssler Fiorenza’s response to these challenges substantially shows she was not making it a “dialogue of the deaf” as Dube claimed during the closing portion of her review of Schüssler Fiorenza.

Dube certainly highlights the need for more questions about mission, intercultural hermeneutics, religious diversity, and the reality that the Bible is no longer a book of the West. The rest of Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible includes decolonizing reading methods of ancient and modern texts, as well as a postcolonial reading of Matthew 15:21-28. While Schüssler Fiorenza certainly commends the breakthrough work of Dube and other feminist postcolonial biblical scholars, she makes three comments on Dube’s critique that I will include here. She writes that she is “puzzled” why some postcolonial feminist authors, have singled out my work for harsh criticism (see the widely quoted book of Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible) or why this criticism has been repeated almost verbatim without critically engaging my arguments while neglecting to scrutinize feminist academic works that focus exclusively on gender, or on wo/men, without paying attention to Two-Thirds World wo/men.

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62 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, 39.
63 Dube poignantly reflects this reality in Postcolonial Feminist Biblical Interpretation, 20. Also, Dube certainly raises new questions when she argues with Canaan Banana for a new Bible, a Bible that affirms all experiences of the divine.
Moreover, writes Schüssler Fiorenza, she feels disappointed that some postcolonial authors “feel entitled to such mis-readings in the name of Two-Thirds World Christian wo/men, many of whom have found my work helpful.”65 Ultimately, Schüssler Fiorenza writes that she found this experience “depressing.”66 She quotes K. A. Appiah’s remarks on art to elaborate this experience:

It is an important question why this distancing of ancestors should have become so central a feature of our cultural lives. . . . To sell oneself and one’s products as art in the marketplace, it is important, above all, to clear a space in which one is distinguished from other producers and products – and one does this by the construction and the marking of differences.67

Schüssler Fiorenza expresses her disappointment in the way differences between feminist scholars have been at times unnecessarily created in order to distinguish scholar from scholar. This chapter of the thesis suggests that Schüssler Fiorenza had done much work in her own social location to challenge imperialistic Western discourses. Like Dube and others, she critiqued the essentialist Euro-American understanding of “woman.” Like Dube and others, she sought to recognize not just gender but race, class, and colonial status. She herself engaged in many professional and probably personal debates early on with other feminists on these topics. Like Dube and others, she recognizes the significant effects of ideology, the colonization of the mind, as well as the importance of rhetorical reading strategies that are not value neutral. With respect to the understanding that scholarship is not value-neutral, Dube presupposes much of Schüssler Fiorenza’s original groundwork.

As I briefly outlined in Schüssler Fiorenza’s biography, she was one of the earliest women working towards the establishment of feminist biblical studies.68 She met with much discouragement. Due to women like her challenging the androcentric prejudice towards

65 Ibid., 124.
66 Ibid., 124.
68 Enander, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 71.
feminist academic scholarship, others like Dube could build on, as well as critique, the relatively new establishment in this area of research, publication, and teaching.

To this extent, therefore, there is a distinction between Dube and Schüssler Fiorenza: they have lived and worked in very different contexts, with at times very different concerns and goals. Schüssler Fiorenza hopes that possible differences do not later become ideological barriers between feminists; she hopes these differences are not turned into reasons for unnecessary dispute or debate.69

CHAPTER FOUR:  
SUBSEQUENT SCHOLARLY CHANGES FOR MUSA DUBE

A. Introduction

Chapters four and five comprise the next part of this thesis. Chapters two and three argued the claim that Dube has polarized Schüssler Fiorenza in her rather harsh treatment of the latter’s works. Similarly, this next section of the thesis follows my reading that Schüssler Fiorenza also misrepresents and polarizes the work of Dube, albeit in a different way.

This chapter focuses on the changes in Dube’s theological concerns and methods since her writing of *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. These changes can initially be understood as a move from the so-called theory dimension of postcolonial scholarship to that of Dube’s practice in addressing HIV/AIDS issues in Africa; Dube’s new efforts attend to pastoral questions arising due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in her home country and continent as well as implementing ways to better address these questions and concerns in church, society, and community.

Dube does not leave academic scholarship unchallenged even though the tone, style, and audience of Dube’s publications and speaking engagements shift from the academic world to that of the wider church. Dube also seeks to institutionally integrate AIDS into biblical scholarship. For Dube, this can slowly be done in terms of increased publications and more classroom lectures.¹ Dube’s challenge to theological scholarship to include and reframe their questions and methods suggest Dube’s turn was not only a turn to practice but to reframe theory to include contextual issues in an AIDS/HIV era.

Her growing recognition of the reality of AIDS was the painful turning point away from both her work in *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* and her confidence in its

relevance as well as the relevance of pre-existing theological modes. The next section will describe how Dube’s scholarly dreams of being a “hard core academician” from around the time of Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible were painfully shattered.²

B. On AIDS/HIV in Africa and Dube’s Shattered Dreams

In her article, “Doing Theological/Religious Education: A Paradigm of Shattered Dreams and Cul de Sac/ed Roads”,³ Dube reflects on her own shifting directions from around the time of writing Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible. Her dreams of changing scholarship so that “no one would once more say, ‘Show me the Tolskys’ of Africa!” as well as her dreams of becoming an associate professor by the age of thirty eight were shattered in the face of AIDS.⁴ While being in graduate school at Vanderbilt University in the mid-nineties, a school which she also describes as revolutionary and progressive, Dube would see on television that her country and continent “was the hardest hit by HIV/AIDS.”⁵ After receiving news that people she knew and loved were no longer alive, Dube began to write songs in this foreign country to help her deal with her feelings of grief and loss. These songs were of resistance and of joy.

Dube soon became cognisant of the fact that HIV/AIDS had not yet been incorporated in academic biblical scholarship and other theological disciplines despite the pandemic existing for over a decade.⁶ Since its outbreak until the time of writing her article, “Doing Theological/Religious Education”, HIV/AIDS had taken 21 million lives and had infected 40 million. For Dube, “the reality of HIV/AIDS in Africa necessitates theological maturity on the

² Ibid., 9.
³ Ibid. This paper was initially presented at the International Network for Advanced Theological Education in 2003 and later published in the journal Ministerial Formation with the World Council of Churches in 2004.
⁴ Ibid., 5.
⁵ Ibid., 5.
⁶ Ibid., 6.
part of theologians and church leaders.” She began to realize that in the HIV/AIDS era, African theological institutions could no longer engage with abstract biblical studies.

The immediacy of this pandemic forced Dube to forego her dreams, both personal and scholarly, and after returning to the University of Botswana, Dube turned to face that which “sabotaged” her dreams by centering her work on the AIDS epidemic. While teaching her regular classes at the University of Botswana, Dube realized that the abstract methods of biblical interpretation that she taught began to feel artificial and strange; Botswana had one of the highest HIV/AIDS rates in the world and was demographically prevalent among the young people who made up more than half of her classes. The concerns of her students were thus not being addressed. Because of this, Dube could not avoid the question that itself challenged her own vocation: “How does one propound a theology of healing where there is no healing? In this rereading of the healing miracles of Jesus I have no point of reference.”

Dube recognized that academic biblical interpretation could not appropriately respond to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and for her, “relying on theological trends in Europe and North America resulted in “half-baked” graduates who were not equipped to respond to African issues.” The new questions, and the painful fears and hopelessness of her community around her brought her to a cul de sac/ed road and personally forced from her a ‘You-turn’ away from common forms of scholarship. Since writing her book, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, a time in which Dube described herself as feeling “fed up with colonizing

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7 Chitando and Gabaitse, "Other Ways of being a Diviner-Healer: Musa W. Dube and the African Church's Response to HIV and AIDS", 92.
8 Ibid., 92.
10 Ibid., 6.
11 Ibid., 7.
12 Chitando and Gabaitse, "Other Ways of being a Diviner-Healer: Musa W. Dube and the African Church's Response to HIV and AIDS", 92.
scholarship”\textsuperscript{13}, Dube began to question the feminist, historical, redactive, narrative, and other forms of biblical criticism that she was teaching in her classes.\textsuperscript{14} Ultimately, these new feelings brought her to ask questions about possible ways forward, about how to address and include HIV/AIDS in theological education. The next section of this chapter will continue on Dube’s new focus and will describe this young African woman’s leading role in addressing AIDS at a grassroots level in theological education across Africa as well as globally.

\textbf{C. On Dube’s Work Introducing HIV/AIDS in Theological Education}

In the fall of 2000, Dube proposed to her university the idea of running a year-long series of seminars centering on different aspect of HIV/AIDS. Although she had the support of a few individuals, the general reply was that focusing a whole academic year on HIV/AIDS was too long and was “too tiring.”\textsuperscript{15} Dube knew that she could not proceed without the support of her colleagues. After realizing that “academicians want to be published and to be published in refereed journals”, Dube wrote to the editor of \textit{Scriptura} (an international journal of religion and theology that gives special attention to issues relevant to South Africa) in Stellenbosch, South Africa, as well as to her external examiner Tinyiko S. Maluleke.\textsuperscript{16} Both replied positively and Maluleke himself was particularly enthusiastic and offered to co-edit with Dube an issue on AIDS in the \textit{Missionalia}. Dube again went to her colleagues and with enthusiasm they accepted the task given such publishing opportunities they were offered. With the success of the journal issue as well as the series of seminars over the course of the year, Dube and her department began to receive recognition for their work in HIV/AIDS.\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Dube, "Doing Theological/Religious Education: A Paradigm of Shattered Dreams and Cul De Sac/Ed Roads", 5.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 6.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 7.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 7.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} For the special journal issue in \textit{Missionalia} co-edited by Dube and Maluleke, see “HIV/AIDS as the New Site of Struggle: Theological Biblical & Religious Perspectives”, in \textit{Missionalia} 29/2 (2001): 119-124.
\end{itemize}
Dube began to present and publish a number of papers on HIV/AIDS. Her paper entitled, “Fifty Years of Bleeding: A Storytelling Feminist Reading of Mark 5:24-43”, which was presented in 2001 at the fiftieth assembly of the World Council of Churches, continued her AIDS focus but within a feminist framework. Dube feminized the epidemic and according to Ezra Chitando and Rosinah Gabaitse, her work “illustrated that HIV in Africa carries a young woman’s face.” In her analysis of the spread of HIV, Dube believes that gender inequality is a prevailing force behind the spread of HIV in sub-Saharan Africa. Dube attacked both female and male gender constructions “as the fertile soil in which the virus thrives”:

Women who have been constructed as powerless cannot insist on safer sex. They can hardly abstain, nor does faithfulness to their partners help. Men, who have been constructed to be fearless, brave and sometimes reckless, think it is manly when they refuse to admit that unprotected sex can lead to HIV/AIDS infection.

Gender constructions are not the only problem when dealing with HIV in Dube’s feminist frame; poverty, violation of children’s rights, racism, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, social status, and ethnicity, as well as international injustice, all need to be addressed theologically in an HIV/AIDS context. Dube perceives HIV/AIDS as a call for a paradigm shift in pre-existing theological scholarship.

Chitando and Gabaitse write that although The Circle (which Dube herself is actively involved with) has attended to the marginal status of women in African religions and has helped African women to rise, they state that Dube herself “became the most active African woman

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20 Ibid., 89.
21 Ibid., 89.
Dube sought to challenge the church’s attitude that HIV/AIDS and gender inequality was outside itself. She also invoked the need for solidarity when she wrote that Jesus has AIDS, that “the church has AIDS.”

In 2002, the World Council of Churches asked Dube to take the position of regional HIV/AIDS Consultant for Southern Africa. After some hesitation, she agreed. At this point Dube had been working on the theological curriculum in Kenya as well as running two Trainers of Trainers workshops for theological institutions in South Africa. While working to institute issues of HIV in theological education internationally, including countries like Kenya, Norway, and Germany, Dube was also working full time teaching classes at the University of Botswana. She writes that during this time she became so overextended that during October and November of 2001 she was losing her speech and failing to write “proper academic papers.”

At this time Dube found that her audience had changed from the academy to the church. In 2003 she published, *Africa Praying: A Handbook on HIV/AIDS Sensitive Sermon Guidelines and Liturgy*. According to Chitando and Gabaitse this book was extremely popular and was directed to helping various lay and women’s groups to respond to issues of HIV/AIDS. Some of these issues include dealing with stigma, how to foster healing communities, and how to address AIDS during special days on the church calendar.

Dube is concerned with making the Christian faith relevant to her wider church community, and she particularly addresses the social stigma and silence occasioned by the

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23 Chitando and Gabaitse, “Other Ways of being a Diviner-Healer: Musa W. Dube and the African Church's Response to HIV and AIDS”, 87. Chitando and Gabaitse also claim that Dube’s article “Preaching to the Converted: Unsettling the Christian Church” “remains one of the most articulate exhortations to the church in Africa to regard the HIV epidemic as belonging to the very core of its mission”, 87-88.


HIV/AIDS virus. She takes a stand in solidarity with those affected by HIV/AIDS and associates her own “shattered dreams” with all those facing the devastating effects of AIDS.\textsuperscript{26}

Thus, Dube, dissatisfied with prevalent modes of theological scholarship, was forced to move, in part, from theory to practice. Here the woman who wrote \textit{Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible} was personally and professionally changed. While some of her later works remained postcolonial, her concerns were no longer with being a “hard core academician” but with the friends and family around her who were dying of AIDS and who could not find healing.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 11.
CHAPTER FIVE:
ELISABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA
AND HER REVIEW OF MUSA DUBE

A. Introduction

This chapter follows my own turn to Schüssler Fiorenza’s more recent discussions. Here the presentation of Dube by Schüssler Fiorenza is very different from the Dube encountered in the last chapter. At the end of the chapter I point out various discrepancies between Schüssler Fiorenza’s critique of Dube and the Dube who is an organizer, a trainer of trainers, a petitioner, a woman who is active and engaged with a subject that at that time was not yet the topic of publications or lectures. Schüssler Fiorenza does not recognize or address Dube’s turn since her earlier book, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*.

In this chapter I will turn to Schüssler Fiorenza’s recent response to Dube in her book, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* published in 2007. I will first look at Schüssler Fiorenza’s understanding of postcolonial biblical interpretation and of feminist postcolonial biblical interpretation, in which she includes Dube. Schüssler Fiorenza claims that this paradigm relies too heavily on postmodernism and French theory, and that its “oppositional consciousness” often constructs a dualism between the West and the Two-Thirds World.¹ Her writing on this subject warns of these problems and offers her own paradigm, that of a “critical feminist interpretation for liberation” with the purposes of fostering a constructive critique and to help “make possible critical alliances between feminists of all worlds.”²

I note that Schüssler Fiorenza’s association of Dube with the previously mentioned paradigm is problematic because, writing seven years after Dube’s changed direction, or ‘You-turn’, she still frames Dube’s work in her own terms of ‘feminist postcolonialism’. Thus, I

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² Ibid., 126.
claim that Schüssler Fiorenza portrays Dube in a limited manner and that this portrayal is
problematic because her narrow categorization misleads possibilities for dialogue and solidarity.

B. Schüssler Fiorenza on Feminist Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation

1. On Postcolonial Interpretation

In chapter four, “Toward a Critical Feminist Decolonizing Interpretation” of her book, The
Power of the Word, Schüssler Fiorenza writes that her ekklesia of wo/men can be a decolonizing
space by which wo/men can interpret biblical inscriptions of empire as well as clarify and assess
reading strategies used in such interpretations.\(^3\) Schüssler Fiorenza chooses to use the verb
decolonizing in order to express a process that is still continuing.\(^4\) However, she also chooses to
use the term decolonizing for her paradigm rather than postcolonial “because of the positive
valuation of nationalism in some postcolonial discourses, their often heavy reliance on the
French school of theory, and the lack of feminist analysis in key postcolonial articulations.”\(^5\)

For Schüssler Fiorenza, the methodological underpinnings of the paradigm commonly
associated with postcolonial studies need to be assessed in the context of how well they can
reflect wo/men at the bottom of the kyriarchal pyramid of domination. For her, this pyramid is
in a context of capitalist neo-liberal globalization. Given this concern, Schüssler Fiorenza finds
that the postcolonial adoption of postmodern literary and cultural reading strategies is
problematic. For an adequate understanding of women’s oppressions, socio-economic analyses
are needed.

\(^3\) Ibid., 111.
\(^4\) Schüssler Fiorenza here refers to being influenced by Fernando Segovia’s understanding of ‘decolonizing’ in his
book, Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins. She writes that just as critical feminist studies
(which she herself identifies with), so also did postcolonial studies (not yet postcolonial biblical studies) become
introduced to the academy in the USA in the 1970s. Although she also writes that some would consider the
beginnings of postcolonial studies with the publication of Franz Fanon’s text, The Wretched Earth in 1963.
\(^5\) Ibid., 126.
Referring to R.S. Sugirtharajah, Schüssler Fiorenza describes postcolonialism to be more “a mental attitude rather than a method”\(^6\) and agrees with the way Ato Quayson likens postcolonialism to postmodernism and poststructuralism due to the way it is “highly eclectic and difficult to define.”\(^7\) According to Schüssler Fiorenza, postcolonial studies found its home not in social and political studies, “as one would expect”, but in cultural and literary studies due to its focus on “representation, identity, hybridity and cultural location.”\(^8\) Due to the influence of postmodernism and poststructuralism on postcolonialism, writes Schüssler Fiorenza, the postcolonial focus on representation brings up a number of theoretical issues, particularly about the ideological function of difference in the construction of power structures:

> It seems to me that ‘imperial identity’ has not so much been established by the denial of difference, in the interest of the ‘same’, but rather that kyriarchal domination has been forged in and through the ideological articulation of the differences between colonizers and colonized, white and black men and women, West and Orient, rich and poor in subordinationist dehumanizing terms.\(^9\)

The construction of differences is thus problematic for Schüssler Fiorenza in this context because of the danger of legitimating a rhetoric of inherent otherness. The danger falls when these groups are reified as separate and distinct from each other and then are used ideologically for subordination.\(^10\) Referring to Sugirtharajah again, she reiterates his criticism that the French school of theory’s “celebration of differences […] lead to horizontal violence” as well as “the assignment of subalterns to the space of Otherness.”\(^11\) For both scholars the French school of

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\(^9\) Ibid., 114.

\(^10\) The ‘politics of otherness’ and the logic of identity has been for Schüssler Fiorenza an ongoing danger in the work of biblical interpretation. We can see that this remains to be a significant concern for her given her early work in the politics of otherness dating back to the late-eighties.

theory is problematic and warrants a critical distance in both postcolonial and decolonizing discourses.

Schüssler Fiorenza continues her critical reflection on postcolonialism by claiming that due to its oppositional stance to the West, it “has not sufficiently focused on global structures of exploitation and domination.”\footnote{Schüssler Fiorenza, \textit{The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire}, 116. Emphasis mine.} The wo/men that are at the bottom of the kyriarchal pyramid of domination are in a world affected by capitalist neo-liberal globalization. For Schüssler Fiorenza, neo-liberal globalization is frustrating the divide between the ‘West and the Rest’, between the haves and the have notes, “with the West (i.e., Europe and the United States) becoming more and more part of this global ‘equalization of the oppressed.’”\footnote{Ibid., 115.} Schüssler Fiorenza finds that the dualities of the West and the Two-Thirds World as colonizer and colonized must give way to a more accurate analysis. This is because of the changes neo-liberal globalization is bringing, changes such that it is “evoking a future where a handful of the world’s most well-to-do families may pocket more than 50 percent of the world’s $90 trillion in assets and securities (stocks, bonds, etc.).”\footnote{Ibid., 116.}

The current climate of the neo-liberal economic model therefore challenges the oppositional consciousness of the ‘West and the Rest’, which Schüssler Fiorenza attributes to postcolonialism. It is challenged because “the kyriarchal pyramid of global capitalism is not static but consists of ever-shifting and intersecting structures of domination and exploitation, it cannot be reduced to fixed geographical locations.”\footnote{Ibid., 127.} Moreover, this climate requires explicit attention to global processes through socio-political analyses. However, due to the “alliance” between postmodernism and postcolonial criticism, the latter has privileged literary and cultural analysis over socio-political analysis. In this regard, Schüssler Fiorenza writes, “postcolonial
criticism has not sufficiently focused on global structures” and the wo/men who she believes are the most oppressed and exploited are directly at the bottom of these structures.\textsuperscript{16}

\section*{2. On Postcolonial Biblical Studies}

Schüssler Fiorenza also finds a split between socio-political and cultural-literary analysis in postcolonial \textit{biblical studies}. She writes that this “split has been provoked by malestream postcolonial criticism” and in the following section of this chapter on feminist postcolonial biblical criticism we will see how various feminists have continued this. According to Schüssler Fiorenza, Sugirtharajah and Fernando Segovia have both advocated cultural postcolonialism while Richard Horsley “has adopted an implicit Marxist approach.”\textsuperscript{17} Again, for Schüssler Fiorenza, such a split issued by postcolonial criticism is problematic and in her evaluation of wo/men oppressed and exploited by global processes of globalization, such a split cannot adequately assess and reflect on wo/men’s oppression.

Using Segovia as an example, she claims that this split has come about by an opposition to analyses that find their origins in the West. Segovia writes that, “neither the project of Marxism nor the project of feminism suffices in and of itself, since they both reflect their own origins in the West.”\textsuperscript{18} For Schüssler Fiorenza, this essentializes discourses in the West and also overlooks postcolonialism’s own dialectical relationship with Marxism and postmodernism, both of which have their origins in the West. The insistence in denying Western frameworks leads to disengaging and disregarding feminist theories that have been foundational for later postcolonial feminist criticism. In a similar vein, Schüssler Fiorenza finds the split between

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 116.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 120.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 121.
\end{flushright}
Marxist and cultural analysis as well as oppositional rhetoric between the colonizers and the colonized within postcolonial feminist biblical criticism.

3. On Postcolonial Feminist Biblical Criticism

In her collection of essays, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*¹⁹, Kwok Pui Lan lists five characteristics that define postcolonial feminist criticism. Out of the five, she does not list feminist theory as an influential framework. For Schüssler Fiorenza, this disregard is problematic because for her the split between the West and the Two-Thirds World occasioned by malestream postcolonial biblical scholars is continued in feminist postcolonial biblical criticism (here feminist studies is overlooked because of its position in the West). Again, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, this “Manichean dualism” between these geographical locations “homogenizes and essentializes wo/men in either world.”²⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza writes that if “other postcolonial concepts, such as hybridity, diaspora, resident alien, or migrancy were taken into account”, other nuanced feminist locations could be more effectively articulated.²¹

In addition to the split between the West and the Two Thirds World, a split that essentializes both worlds, as well as denies postcolonial involvement in Western frameworks

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²⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 123. For more about the way postcolonial critics are themselves in danger of essentializing Third World women as well as the tendency of Western feminisms to exoticize such women, see Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). In the article, “The White Woman’s Burden” From Colonial Civilization to Third World Development” authors Jawad Syed and Faiza Ali highlight “the continued role of white women as active partners in postcolonial agendas and strategies of developing and civilizing the Third World.” They write that ‘white feminists’ have not included race or class in their feminist analyses and with their prevailing conviction of being “saviours” of other peoples and cultures, white feminists continue their role in colonial projects. Syed and Ali’s presentation of white feminists is overly simplistic and homogenizes a great diversity among these women themselves. See Jawad Syed and Faiza Ali, “The White Woman’s Burden: From Colonial Civilization to Third World Development,” *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2011): 361.

²¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 125. I find it quite interesting that Schüssler Fiorenza uses Kwok Pui Lan as an example of a postcolonial scholar who constructs an oppositional dualism between the West and the Two Thirds World when Kwok Pui Lan herself (a Chinese-American) has been a leading voice on diaspora and hybrid feminist locations and identities. See for example, Kwok Pui Lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*. 
like Marxism, postmodernism, and its roots in critical feminist theory\textsuperscript{22}, postcolonial feminist interpreters of the Bible also make another dangerous split. Given Schüssler Fiorenza’s own work on the \textit{interconnected} kyriarchy of oppressions, she warns about the split between gender/patriarchy and postcolonialism/imperialism in feminist postcolonial frameworks. This split is particularly troublesome for her because these analyses of women’s oppression are understood as independent from each other. A dual-systems analysis of patriarchy and imperialism cannot adequately assess the multiplicative interconnections of domination through axes of race, gender, class, heterosexism, and imperialism. Moreover, the rhetoric of a postcolonial framework, one that does not “engage in a critical theoretical discussion of an intersectional feminist theoretical analytic, […] inadvertently re-instates a ‘dual-systems’ approach to feminist discourse.”\textsuperscript{23} For Schüssler Fiorenza, therefore, feminist postcolonial analysis is in danger of limiting the awareness of interconnected structures of women’s oppression and according to her the prevalent dual-systems approach is inadequate for theorizing about those women who are at the bottom of the pyramid.

While commending the work of Laura Donaldson, Kwok Pui Lan, and Musa Dube as “pathbreaking” and that their work has “immensely enriched and sharpened feminist studies in religion”, Schüssler Fiorenza voices her disappointment in postcolonial biblical feminists for their harsh treatment of critical feminist theory.\textsuperscript{24} She continues by adding that their adoption of (malestream) postcolonial biblical frameworks has further supported the disqualification of liberationist and critical feminist biblical studies. For Schüssler Fiorenza, the lack of engagement between postcolonial and critical biblical feminists has led to increasing

\textsuperscript{22} Schüssler Fiorenza, \textit{The Power of the Word : Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire}, 124.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 125.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 125.
fragmentation among feminisms.25 She writes that there needs to be critical theoretical and epistemological interaction and debate and reminds the reader that as with malestream postcolonial biblical studies, so too does feminist postcolonial biblical studies offset this meeting ground by its opposition to Western white feminists.26

Schüssler Fiorenza continues her conversation on the necessity for feminisms to theoretically engage and debate with each other when critically commenting on the work of Musa Dube. She claims that Dube misreads and caricatures her work, including her neologism ‘kyriarchy’, a term used to express the interstructural and multiplicative dimension of power and domination:

[R]ather than engaging my epistemological proposals on theoretical grounds, she goes on to caricature them and to fault me for not practicing my ‘goals.’ Instead of arguing why her dual-systems analysis – patriarchy and imperialism- does better critical feminist work than my intersectional analysis of kyriarchy, she misconstrues my arguments.27

Schüssler Fiorenza’s comments on postcolonial feminist biblical interpretation are largely critical of the way this interpretation has not engaged with her own work. With her continuing and evolving recognition on the need for strategic global feminist alliances, Schüssler Fiorenza finds both the criticism of her work, as well as the lack of engagement with her work, a barrier to such a vision and goal.28

C. Problematizing Schüssler Fiorenza’s Inclusion of Dube in the Postcolonial Biblical Feminist Paradigm

Schüssler Fiorenza’s presentation of Dube does not account for Dube’s “turn” during the early

25 Jennifer Bird from Greensboro College makes an interesting observation in her review of The Power of the Word. She writes that for someone who strongly protects and promotes the importance of feminist debates and discussions, Schüssler Fiorenza relegates her response to Dube to her footnotes. For Bird, a critical engagement in the body of her work would be more appropriate. See Jennifer G. Bird, “The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire,” Bible & Critical Theory 4, no. 3 (2008): 51.2.
27 Ibid., 128.
28 Ibid., 125-127.
2000s. This turn included a move away from pre-existing modes of scholarship toward attending to concrete issues of HIV/AIDS among African peoples, in their churches, schools, and communities. Instead, Dube is presented as a “postcolonial feminist”, as Schüssler Fiorenza understands it. Readers of Schüssler Fiorenza would therefore associate Dube with Schüssler Fiorenza’s rather narrow portrayal of postcolonial and postcolonial feminist interpretation: she warns that this interpretation relies heavily on postmodern thought and French theory, and thus predominately uses literary criticism over socio-economic criticism in its hermeneutics. Given that Dube does not fit into Schüssler Fiorenza’s conceptualization of postcolonial feminist discourse, Schüssler Fiorenza has at times misrepresented and polarized Dube in this debate and in the minds of her readers.

While Schüssler Fiorenza describes the importance of attending to wo/men at the bottom of the kyriarchal pyramid through socio-political analyses, she writes with little recognition of Dube’s own grassroots work which foregrounds practical responses to the women and children affected by the HIV/AIDS virus and stigma. Dube is very aware that this epidemic closely relates to the economic and political climate of some Two-Thirds World countries, most significantly those in Africa. Since Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, Dube has significantly moved from a focus on decolonizing reading strategies (like her work on Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness, for example), to more immediate concerns and increasing dangers among women. These are the same women and situations Schüssler Fiorenza consistently reminds her readers of.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The final chapter of this thesis, the conclusion, is organized in the following way: first, I will briefly summarize the arguments of this thesis. Following this, I move to offer some additional reflections regarding Dube’s misreading of Schüssler Fiorenza and of Schüssler Fiorenza’s misreading of Dube. Lastly, I finish this concluding chapter by conveying the significance of this thesis to feminist debates within biblical interpretation.

A. Summary of Thesis

In summary, this thesis has critically reflected on the mutual criticisms between Schüssler Fiorenza and Dube. It has shown the ways in which both scholars, in varying aspects, have presented each other problematically. Both scholars reified and homogenized each other in their position, and in both cases this polarization leads to a misreading of the other. This has weakened and limited dialogues for feminist solidarity.

In the book, The Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible (2000), Dube argues the need for a postcolonial feminist hermeneutics of biblical interpretation. In her overview of this need, she points out the way Western biblical feminists have reinscribed an imperialistic rhetoric in their works. While I certainly agree that some Western feminists have done and do this, my turn to Schüssler Fiorenza’s publications themselves reveal that in many important ways, Schüssler Fiorenza was a relatively early critic of universalizing and colonizing feminist categories and frameworks.

Particularly, Schüssler Fiorenza called for a shift in analyses of women’s oppression from a sex/gender analysis to one that can recognize oppressions based on race, ethnicity, colonial status, and class. This has been a concern among many African American and Two-Thirds World women. Moreover, her work seeks to avoid a listing of these oppressions.
because, for Schüssler Fiorenza, such a superficial measure cannot adequately interrogate the deeper structures of oppressions themselves. Her notion of kyriarchy is ultimately a response to this danger as well as to the concerns of feminists around the globe. The *ekklesia* of wo/men is similarly a response to these women. The formulation of the *ekklesia* of women, in contrast to many Western frameworks of alterity at that time, did not presuppose an essentialist understanding of “woman.” In many instances, Schüssler Fiorenza directly disputed other feminisms for reinscribing a common, abstract, and prescribed category of “woman.” Some of these feminists include Mary Daly, Luce Irigaray, and Rosemary Radford Ruether, among others. This thesis has illuminated a side of Schüssler Fiorenza that Dube has not sufficiently accounted for.

After my closer reading of Schüssler Fiorenza, I turned to Dube’s activities and essays after her first book. Here I found that Dube’s personal and scholarly life changed from the one we saw in *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. Her dreams of being a “hard core academician” were shattered due to the reality of HIV/AIDS in Africa.¹ Since this turning point in her career, Dube worked diligently to facilitate new discussions about the place of HIV/AIDS in the academy, society, and in the churches. Much of this work had not yet been addressed by leaders in churches and universities.

In the fourth chapter I returned to Schüssler Fiorenza, although this time to her later works. Here I found Schüssler Fiorenza’s response to Dube in her book, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (2007). In this book, Schüssler Fiorenza critically engages with postcolonial studies, including biblical and feminist postcolonial discourses. Interestingly, while Schüssler Fiorenza responds to Dube she does so by framing Dube according to her own understanding of “postcolonial feminism.” This understanding does not

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recognize Dube’s changed scholarly direction, but continues to associate her with an otherwise narrow conceptualization of the discourse.

Schüssler Fiorenza finds that postcolonial feminists have promoted the very “West and the Rest” dichotomy that they purportedly disavow. Moreover, due to their relationship to postcolonial discourse and postcolonial malestream biblical discourse, Schüssler Fiorenza writes that the feminist counterparts also heavily rely on a postmodern literary analysis over a socio-economic analysis of women’s oppressions. While Schüssler Fiorenza makes some insightful observations in this regard, her association of Dube within this critique is problematic. In many ways Dube is still being portrayed based on her earlier book. This problem indicates that Schüssler Fiorenza abstracts Dube from her own ongoing development and reproduces an earlier picture. In contrast, Dube’s concerns have notably less to do with theoretical debates about postcolonial feminist criticism but rather are focused on more immediate concerns and practical responses in theology and in the work of theologians as well.

**B. Additional Reflections**

In my reading of Schüssler Fiorenza, I have argued that Dube has portrayed the former in a problematic way. While this work questions such a portrayal, I will also offer my concern that Dube and other Two-Thirds world scholars have had to compete with Western biblical feminists for their own place in the economics of knowledge production within institutions of biblical studies. Indeed the West, or rather in Arif Dirlik’s idiom, the ‘global North’, holds a monopoly over both the content and institutionalization of knowledges. This also applies to those universities of the South which have internalized the ideals and values of their Northern counterparts. While I have asserted that Schüssler Fiorenza engaged in anti-imperialistic critiques before the publication of Dube’s book, I would nevertheless raise the point that Dube’s
criticism of Schüssler Fiorenza may also have been shaped so polemically due to the power of the North in the production of knowledge. Schüssler Fiorenza certainly enjoys much privilege in this regard.

In chapter two of her book *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, Dube often refers to the confidence of Western feminists in their ability to speak for and help women of the Two-Thirds World.² This may be a very important point to consider. In her article presented in at a conference in Claremont, CA, “Rahab is Hanging out a Red Ribbon: One African Woman’s Perspective on the Future of Feminist New Testament Scholarship,”³ Dube again reiterates this concern. In this article Dube invites feminist biblical scholars in the global North to recognize the integrity of voices from the South and thus to choose to say to those voices, “Our life for yours!”⁴ Dube is asking for feminists of the global North to give up some of the power and privilege they enjoy so that Two-Thirds world feminist concerns, articulations, and approaches can more readily be recognized globally and institutionally.

According to Dube, there are very few feminist New Testament scholars from the South. At the time of writing “Rahab is Hanging out a Red Ribbon” in 2003, Dube wrote the following:

In the whole of Africa, a land that is purportedly three times the size of the United States, I know only four women New Testament scholars. One is still writing her dissertation. In Asia and Latin America, the situation is not any better. Indeed, even among the North American minority groups, the number of trained FNT [Feminist New Testament] scholars is only a handful.⁵ Dube recommends contributing financially to scholarships that fund women of the Two-Thirds World. Given that the Christian centre is no longer in the West, setting up such funds is “imperative to the global future of the FNTS.”⁶ Dube also writes that the standards for global

⁴ Ibid., 179.
⁵ Ibid., 185.
⁶ Ibid., 189.
FNTS must not come from the standards of Feminist New Testament studies in the West. Thus, what is involved is not merely the inclusion of Two-Thirds World women in the academy halls of Euro-American biblical studies, but a shift in the “standards” of methods and concerns of Feminist New Testament scholarship. Ultimately, for Dube, a shift to the global South means a shift in the location of power and its institutions. Dube writes that we need “First World feminist readers who are prepared to commit the necessary ‘cultural treason’ for the sake of justice and liberation. North American FNT scholars will need to factor that they are the current empire.”

While this thesis argues that Schüssler Fiorenza had engaged in varying anti-imperialistic critiques before the publication of *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, it should be noted that she holds a position as a leading scholar in U.S. feminist biblical scholarship and has had the means to publish extensively for decades on a vast range of topics, including the concerns of Two-Thirds World women. It may be that for Dube, Schüssler Fiorenza is among those feminists of the North who should say to those of the South “our life for yours!”

In addition to Dube, I would like to also address a number of issues regarding Schüssler Fiorenza and her engagement with postcolonial discourses. While the latter has read a wide array of theological and biblical publications, and has herself published immensely in both German and English, my own concern arises with the ease in which she categorizes methods, scholars, and movements, including those that are postcolonial. I believe that at times Schüssler Fiorenza stereotypes scholars and too quickly essentializes these individuals who, with a closer lens, are actually very different.

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7 One concern that Dube has is how to relate FNTS to the millions of “ordinary” women readers of the bible.
8 Ibid., 192.
In her treatment of Dube, Schüssler Fiorenza seems to reinscribe identitarian thinking even though her work over the past few decades warns about the divisive ideological function of this form of thinking. It is interesting to note that Schüssler Fiorenza believes the differences between herself and postcolonial biblical feminists are not based on identity but method.\(^9\) I find, however, that she categorizes Dube not on the basis of Dube’s evolving methods, but on a narrowly defined feminist postcolonialism. In this respect, I find she reverts to representational thinking despite her claims to the contrary. Given her long standing history of promoting and working towards feminist alliances, her theorization of “feminist postcolonialism”, for example, does not seem to pave ground for effective feminist engagement if she cannot fully recognize the increasingly diverse range of methods and their evolutions within this eclectic category. In this regard, I wonder if her valuation of postcolonial feminism does very much to help encourage feminist solidarity, particularly given the expressed desire by many feminists to speak for and define themselves.

**C. Significance**

This thesis is a positive contribution to what are evidently many disputes among biblical feminists, including those of diverse socio-political and epistemological frameworks. I have shown, in this debate between leading scholars Schüssler Fiorenza and Dube, that some of their harsh criticisms are unwarranted. In this respect, the debate between Schüssler Fiorenza and Dube need not be framed as antagonistically as they themselves have constructed it.

This thesis has clarified some important ways these women have misread and polarized each other and I believe it opens the grounds for future collaboration between these two scholars. It is very interesting to note what Schüssler Fiorenza and Dube believe off-set the

\(^9\) Ibid., 113.
possibility for building these alliances: Dube writes that Western feminist biblical scholars have not sufficiently attended to the fact that the Bible as well as feminist biblical interpretation, *have been and are used as a colonizing force among non-Western people*. For Dube, this is “a problem that needs to be addressed in order to promote and establish strategic coalitions among women of different backgrounds and situations, across borders, and beyond narrow identity politics.”

While Dube associates Schüssler Fiorenza with those *Western biblical feminists who pose a barrier to global feminist solidarity*, I have shown that Schüssler Fiorenza’s works have been an early voice recognizing and challenging both the imperialistic use of the Bible and particularly the reinscription of imperial rhetoric in Western feminist biblical hermeneutics.

It is also very interesting to note, particularly in the context of this thesis, what Schüssler Fiorenza herself believes is a barrier to forming global alliances. For Schüssler Fiorenza, *it is the oppositional and dualistic rhetoric of postcolonial feminist discourse* understood as the colonizers and the colonized, or the ‘West and the Rest.’ Schüssler Fiorenza finds that this rhetoric prevents both the formation of “a feminist intellectual tradition” (which she believes initiated in the West with “critical feminist work in biblical studies”\(^\text{11}\)) as well as possibilities for global feminist alliances.\(^\text{12}\) My work has shown that Dube’s scholarly changes over the past decade have constituted a move away from the very oppositional discourse Schüssler Fiorenza warns about. Schüssler Fiorenza need not identify Dube as such a barrier to further feminist networking across borders.

This thesis contributes to a broader, more complex, fluid and changing field of dialogue and debate, in which the thinking of major contributors like Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Musa Dube change in significant ways and with greater possibilities for dialogue and

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\(^{12\text{}}}\) Ibid., 22-24.
collaboration. By attending to historical dates, dialogue partners, and particular personal and scholarly contexts of these authors, I have highlighted their evolution of thought and clarified some misunderstandings as well as isolated some misreadings. To this end, the debate between these well-known scholars, the German-American Schüssler Fiorenza and the Botswanan Dube, can be seen in new terms and offer hope and possibilities for some actual alliances within a context of numerous and clashing feminisms and disputes.
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