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### Feminist Reconstruction of Sacred Texts: An Analysis of the Hermeneutics of Fiorenza and Amina Wadud

Zahra Sharif

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Gender Theoretical Foundations Group/ Women and Family Research Institute, Qom, Iran.

\* **Corresponding author:** [za.sharif.za@gmail.com](mailto:za.sharif.za@gmail.com)

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#### ABSTRACT

In recent decades, feminist hermeneutics has emerged as a significant approach in the rereading of sacred texts. This approach, by critiquing patriarchal structures in religious traditions, seeks a new reading of the status of women in sacred texts and aims to present a new perspective. Among the thinkers in this field, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in the field of Christian theology and Amina Wadud in Qur'anic studies are considered prominent figures of the reconstructionist approach. By utilizing a "hermeneutics of suspicion," Fiorenza seeks a "historical reconstruction" of the power structures in the Bible and tradition. She emphasizes the "retrieval" of feminist liberatory and visionary elements, considering interpretation a historical and social process that must be reconstructed toward the liberation of marginalized groups. On the other hand, Amina Wadud, influenced by Fazlur Rahman's "Double Movement" theory, seeks to present an "inclusive ethical" reading of the Qur'an by distinguishing between the universal ethical principles of the Qur'an and the historical context of its revelation. Based on this, she offers a reading centered on verses of justice related to women. The present research, using a descriptive-analytical and comparative method, examines and critiques the reconstructionist patterns of these two thinkers in the interpretation of sacred texts. The research indicates that although both thinkers have played an important role in posing the issue of justice from a feminist perspective and critiquing patriarchal traditional structures of interpretation, they have faced challenges such as moving away from the ideological presuppositions of the tradition, selective interpretation of certain verses, and moving toward a "hermeneutics of suspicion" in Islamic studies. At the same time, the use of achievements from women's studies is one of the requirements of Qur'anic interpretation, necessitating simultaneous attention to hermeneutic principles and principles of interpretation in the Islamic tradition.

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**Introduction**The basis for the formation of the sacred text criticism was the conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism. Biblical criticism believes that the sacred text is the word of God but has been understood by humans in the form of human literary and linguistic frameworks and is interpreted accordingly. Consequently, based on different perspectives in linguistic approaches, different meanings can be inferred; this freedom in extracting meaning is called sacred text criticism, which is considered a theological activity and leads to the formulation of new questions and answers in theology. The investigative approach seeks common elements that theological approaches to the sacred text aim for. These are obtained through historical formulation or through understanding the internal structure of texts (Alexander & Froehlich, 2007: 173).

The relationship between sacred text and feminism is one of the most challenging issues in feminist theology. The fate of the text in feminist theology is determined by what spectrum of feminism a theologian belongs to and what perspective they have toward the sacred text. A feminist understanding of the text is not merely focused on a specific biblical tradition, but rather discovers and rejects theological elements present in all traditions that -by citing biblical schemes and texts- perpetuate patriarchal oppression and violence and strip women of historical consciousness. At the same time, this view must retrieve all elements present in the texts and tradition that express the liberatory parts of God and experiences and perspectives. By considering these two aspects, it proceeds to an analytical evaluation of the sacred text.

Initially, three approaches toward scripture can be envisioned among feminist Christians:

**The First View:** The Bible is considered the word of God and something beyond human understanding and reasoning, such that no protest or change is permissible in it, and it must be accepted exactly as it is. In this approach, even replacing "Man" with "Woman" is considered a type of arbitrary manipulation of the divine word. This group opposes setting aside any passage of the Bible and does not tolerate any change in interpretation and translation. This approach seems like a contradiction with feminism, which seeks liberation from discrimination, but its feministic aspect is the emphasis on ensuring women's freedom by acting upon the commands of this very the Bible (Cochran, 2005: 10).

**The Second View:** This approach, although it regards the Bible as divine revelation and the word of God, considers it a report by human authors who, in addition to divine teachings, shaped meanings under the influence of their societies and cultures. This category of thinkers has various spectra; one group does not practically engage in changing and interpreting the sacred text, but considers words usually applied to men as applicable to women as well. Another group tries to understand the logic of the text and establishes a balance between passages on that basis (Clifford, 2001: 70-73).

**The Third View:** Individuals with this view have a different relationship with the Bible and may consider the Bible merely as historical stories and teachings that have left their mark on the culture and values of life. They believe that basically, religiosity is not book-centered, and what is sacred is not a book or an object, but a pattern of life that Jesus performed; it is in the reform of life that the Bible is interpreted by the church (Fiorenza, 1983: 96).

The above approaches in feminist theology correspond to different theological-feminist viewpoints that form approaches toward the sacred text. These are based on the response to the question: "Is the patriarchal text inherently patriarchal, and if so, is its patriarchal characteristic a distinctive feature of Judaism and Christianity that cannot be erased, or can its essence be separated from it?" They are divided into five categories: Rejectionist, Loyalist, Revisionist, Sublimationist, and Reconstructionist.

The **Rejectionist** approach considers the religious tradition and the Bible disappointing, invalid, and irredeemable due to corruption and pollution, and rejects it completely. In contrast, the **Loyalist** approach emphasizes the goodness and validity of the Bible as the absolute word of God and a prescriptive text, believing that the text is not inherently oppressive, but the interpreter and the interpretive tradition are at fault. It responds to the challenge of women's submission through literal interpretations or by simply limiting the explanation of inferiority to the family and establishing harmony and unity. The **Revisionist** approach, as a middle point, places its basic assumption on the idea that the patriarchal framework dominant in the tradition is a historical deviation and not a theological feature; its discriminatory features are separable, and consequently, the Bible is capable of revision and reform. Finally, the **Sublimationist** approach focuses on the feminine "otherness" as inherently superior to the masculine and believes it operates based on its own specific principles, rejecting any gender equality or egalitarian thinking and emphasizing the preservation of the natural order. What deals with a deeper analysis of the text from a gender perspective is the **Reconstructionist** approach.

In feminist theology, the project of reconstructionist hermeneutics is not just about reinterpreting texts outside the patriarchal framework; rather, the goal is to provide an alternative perspective in the interpretation of the Bible that leads to the reconstruction of individual and collective structures and the transformation of the social order. Generally, reconstructionist hermeneutics seeks to change traditional patterns, including metaphors and images, to become forms of theological thought that support authentic humanity and liberation from historical patterns of oppression. The ultimate goal is to retrieve the liberatory core of religion and turn it into a theological tool for the practical realization of justice and equality in the present.

Parallel to this reconstruction in Christian biblical hermeneutics, feminist interpretations of the Qur'an have also emerged in the field of Islamic feminism. Islamic feminism, as a new paradigm in Islamic studies, seeks to provide a different reading of the Qur'an in which the status and role of women are fundamentally reviewed. Muslim feminists believe that women's relationship with the Qur'an is a fundamental matter, and a correct understanding of it requires liberation from patriarchal interpretations. These interpretations strongly critique traditional and atomistic approaches to verses related to women. They believe these approaches have led to the distortion of the true meaning of verses and presented an incomplete picture of women's status.

For this reason, they emphasize that using a systemic and integrated framework is necessary for a complete understanding of the Qur'an's message. The goal of this framework is to analyze verses in light of key Qur'anic principles such as justice, equality, and harmony. One of the key points in this approach is looking at gender as a fluid concept contingent upon history. This means that interpretations must be performed considering the historical context of the revelation of verses, and any reading leading to the reduction of women's value and humanity is invalid. This view

seeks to perform intellectual reforms in the modern world and makes Islamic feminism compatible with modern concepts. One of the main challenges this approach faces is the issue of the full compatibility of modern concepts like justice and equality with the text of the Qur'an. However, proponents of these interpretations try to show that these concepts are at the core of the Qur'anic message and can only be achieved by setting aside social hierarchies and patriarchy.

Leaders of the hermeneutic approach to understanding the Qur'an, namely individuals like Muhammad Abduh and Fazlu Rahman, deal with the interpretation of the Qur'an with ideas such as "distinguishing between the legal and ethical themes of the Qur'an" and "separating its conditional and unconditional aspects," as well as the link between "the idea of the eternity of Islam with changing principles." This method includes principles such as metaphorical and allegorical reading, understanding the historical context, attention to the limitations of human knowledge in understanding Qur'anic themes, invitation to a modern review of the Qur'an using rational interpretation, etc. Based on these, understanding the text is considered to require a complex process due to human limitations, not a deficiency of the Qur'an. Fazlur Rahman believes that jurisprudence, theology, and interpretation, due to ignoring the historical contexts of the Qur'an, are unable to understand the fundamental coherence of the Qur'an, while the principles of the Qur'an are in dialogue with contemporary needs and require the extraction of lasting principles and their redesigning from the perspective of modern thought, because the goal of the Qur'an is social justice and, at its head, human equality. In reality, this group seeks to change the authority of interpretation by challenging the authority of the class of clerical interpreters. Concurrently with the expansion of modern state structures in Islamic societies and the direct entry of a new group of thinkers into the field of understanding religious texts and interpretations, they pursue this; they do this under the title of reviving the concept of *Ijtihad*. Starting from the 19th century, critical educated women began discussing their growing role in Muslim societies and turned to redefining the concept of the modern yet authentic Muslim womanhood, emphasizing gender equality and social justice as basic and common principles contained in the Qur'an, and considered their work a critical change in the understanding of identity from "dependent caliph" to "independent representative."

A characteristic of this Islamic feminism is considering the relationship of women with the Qur'an as fundamental. Alongside Amina Wadud, personalities such as Asma Barlas, Azizah al-Hibri, Riffat Hassan, Kecia Ali, and Sa'diyya Shaikh are among them. These feminists' readings of the Qur'an can be categorized into three approaches:

1. **Historical Contextualization:** Believing in the necessity of understanding the correct conditions of the Qur'an's revelation to understand its (still eternal) meaning. This is done by emphasizing the importance of *Asbab al-Nuzul* (occasions of revelation), the distinction between descriptive and prescriptive verses, and the distinction between general and specific verses and the historical situation of Arabia at the time of revelation. They emphasize that some of the greatest restrictions on women are rooted in the universalization of specific concepts meant for specific conditions and individuals in the Arabian Peninsula. On the other hand, they emphasize that interpreters' views on gender are the result of the cultural, social, and historical environment of their time. Furthermore, many of the structures and propositions of the Qur'an regarding women are merely reports and

descriptions of the conditions of that period and should not be perceived as the prescription of gender norms by God.

2. **Intra-textual Consistency:** Believing in the existence of a systematic framework for the complete impact of Qur'anic coherence, where they believe an atomistic approach to gender verses has caused distortion. To reread these, they also refer to the gradualism in the text of the Qur'an and believe the Qur'an could not express all truths at once, so some rules were expressed gradually; for example, Qur'anic verses explicitly oppose the burying alive of daughters but begin a gradual negation and reform regarding wine and the striking of women. Since the conditions at the time of revelation did not allow for the completion of some matters like the status of women, it is the interpreters as identifying agents of the Qur'an who must complete this gradual reform.
3. **Tawhidic Paradigm Scheme:** Believes God is one, unique, and beyond experience, and no one can share in the Creator's power. Creating a hierarchy among humans is considered a claim to play God's specific role and is consistent with the logic of Iblis (Satan). Accordingly, the mediation of men and the prevention of women from direct communication with God, attributing masculine traits to God and God's traits to men (in the sense that a good woman is an obedient woman), and the role of men in divine judgment over women are considered instances of *shirk* (polytheism) and the logic of Iblis. This approach emphasizes the separation of text from interpretation due to human fallibility in understanding the divine message. Based on this, the process of equating the authority of the interpreter with the authority of revelation is considered equal to *shirk*. Interpretation is a dynamic matter, and no interpreter can claim exclusive understanding of its unlimited and absolute meaning, or else they commit *shirk*, meaning the claim of definitive understanding of the Qur'an which is exclusively God's. Therefore, multiplicity in meanings and the necessity of reviewing interpretation are essential requirements of this view (Hidayatullah, 2021: 90-160).

In this research, in order to understand reconstructionist feminist hermeneutics, we will examine the views of Schüssler Fiorenza as a Christian researcher and biblical scholar and Amina Wadud as a Muslim feminist and conduct a comparative analysis of the two approaches.

## Research Literature

### Theoretical Foundations of the Research

### Feminist Theology as Hermeneutics of Sacred Text

Feminist interpretation of sacred text took shape in the 1970s within Christian theology, but its roots can be traced back to the works of Cady Stanton in 1895. Stanton considers both the sacred text and its interpreters as patriarchal, arguing that this patriarchal framework has silenced women's voices in understanding religious structures and hierarchy. A central issue in this approach is the process of canonization—how the sacred text was compiled, which books or chapters were included, and what role women played in each stage of its formation. Similarly, in Islamic feminism, a parallel concern has emerged regarding the interpretation of the sacred text. Muslim feminists such as Amina Wadud question the traditional interpretive authority and argue

that patriarchal readings have distorted the egalitarian message of the sacred text. Thus, in both traditions, feminist hermeneutics begins with a critical examination of how sacred texts have been produced, transmitted, and authoritatively interpreted.

"How do verses familiar to the majority of Protestant readers have a role? Is it a fact that New Testament texts were captured by Reformers? Was the Old Testament based on the Hebrew law by Martin Luther and others? Must we base our analysis on the long tradition of the Catholic interest that includes writings placed in the Roman canon, known as the Deuterocanon, which are not included in the authoritative list of others and are called the Apocrypha? Is this intended to break the dominant narrative?" (Upton, 2002: 97). What remains undisputed is the impact of male-dominated traditions on texts that have been encoded over centuries, as well as the influence of institutional systems and ideological structures that have shaped interpretation. In the Islamic tradition, a similar dynamic is observed: the process of *tafsir* (exegesis) and *fiqh* (jurisprudence) has historically been dominated by male scholars, and feminist critics argue that this has led to the marginalization of women's voices and experiences in understanding the sacred text.

Tolbert has enumerated three major approaches among feminist theologians who have engaged in hermeneutic interpretation of the sacred text. First, individuals like Fiorenza who consider Christianity as having a liberatory and constructive essence that can empower women and understand texts by reference to this liberatory tradition. Second, those who, in order to create consistency in the text, refer to passages and texts that have been neglected or distorted by the Church Fathers. Third, a group that, through a type of historical rereading of **sacred texts**, tries to understand the real conditions of religions and understand texts in the form of conditions specific to themselves as something at the center of a communicative event (Tolbert, 1983: 122). In Islamic feminism, a comparable typology can be proposed: some Muslim feminists (like Wadud) seek a liberatory reading of the sacred text by distinguishing between universal ethical principles and historical context; others focus on neglected or overlooked passages that support women's rights; and still others emphasize a historical-contextual approach to understanding the sacred text as a communicative event in 7th-century Arabia.

The commonality among these feminist hermeneutical approaches is based on a "hermeneutics of suspicion," a concept that Fiorenza considers central to all these methods. This hermeneutics entails suspicion toward the patriarchal mindset in which women are often excluded from the symbolic and social order, their femininity is devalued, and they often become victims of religious authority. Fiorenza believes that the sacred text must emerge from its status as an unchangeable, supreme mythical archetype and be regarded instead as a primary historical document. Even if it was written in the language of men, it can be reinterpreted in ways that serve as a source of liberation. Similarly, Amina Wadud applies a hermeneutics of suspicion to the sacred text, questioning traditional interpretations that have been used to justify male superiority and women's subordination. She argues that the sacred text must be freed from patriarchal interpretive frameworks and reread in light of its core ethical principles, such as justice and human dignity. In this sense, both Christian and Islamic feminist theologies share a methodological commitment to critically reexamining the sacred text and challenging the patriarchal assumptions embedded in their interpretive traditions.

### **Reconstructionist Hermeneutics; A Critical Framework for Interpretation**

"Reconstructionist hermeneutics" originated from the critical hermeneutic tradition and emphasizes a dialectical understanding of the text, considering interpretation as a transformative and active process. By using "reconstruction" as the title for the interpretation process, it emphasizes the agency of the interpreter and the historical context. A fundamental paradigm of this is the distinction between "universal principles" and "socio-historical manifestation" and "the manner of revelation."

Accordingly, religious texts, although carrying messages with universal claims, were revealed in specific socio-cultural contexts and requirements and have been interpreted throughout history by interpreters with their own historical presuppositions. The task of the interpreter in reconstructionist hermeneutics is not merely "understanding" the text in its historical context, but rather "reconstructing" meaning in a way that is consistent with the fundamental principles of justice, liberation, and human dignity for the current audience. This necessitates a thorough critique of traditional interpretive powers, identifying hidden ideologies in interpretations (especially patriarchal ones), and attempting to extract the liberatory capacities of the text. In this approach, understanding the details of the text, meanings, and context (vocabulary, themes, context) helps in understanding the whole text (framework, worldview, theoretical structure), and vice versa, in a "hermeneutic circle." In this circle, "reconstruction" means the adaptation of the message's meaning to the needs and questions of the present era, without negating the authenticity of the text.

#### **Fiorenza's Reconstructionist Hermeneutics**

As a reconstructionist theologian, Fiorenza, although seeking to show the patriarchy of the Bible and its causes, also introduces the retrieval and representation of the liberatory element as her main goal. She directs her attention to those New Testament texts that transcend patriarchal structures and express a new perspective of human salvation. "Divine revelation and truth in the Bible models and texts are presented only in those interpretations where they go beyond patriarchal frameworks and allow women to be active as subjects in history and theology" (Fiorenza, 1983: 30).

#### **Amina Wadud's Reconstructionist Hermeneutics**

With a new look at traditional interpretive foundations, Amina Wadud deals with the review of some "controversial" verses of the Qur'an that have been used as a pretext for the claim of male superiority. Wadud's understanding of the Qur'an is based on a progressive interpretive method that tries to see the Qur'an in the atmosphere prevailing at the time of revelation -Arabia- and with the goal of gradual reforms to negate male dominance. She is seeking an interpretive model that, while maintaining the authority of the Qur'an, achieves gender justice. Despite this strong commitment to the authority of revelation, in a relatively radical position, Wadud states that "the Qur'an itself is responsible for the violent readings created," because some words like "striking" in Verse 34 of Surah An-Nisa have the capacity for the meaning of hitting and acts of violence.

## **Definition of Concepts**

### **A. Core Concepts in Fiorenza**

#### **Biblical Criticism**

One of the most important actions of reconstructionist hermeneutics, as explained by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, is the radical critique of the biblical canonization process. Fiorenza argues that the Bible is not merely the result of divine revelation but is the result of a four-stage process of biblical formation. The entire process, from oral transmission (where women's experiences were ignored in collective memory) to written recording by male authors, and finally the compilation of the legal sacred text, has been dominated by androcentric biases. Fiorenza concludes that the criteria for selecting authoritative books were patriarchal, and texts monitoring experiences from women's perspectives were not recorded in the official list. The ultimate goal of this project is to break the historical silence, reveal women's experiences recorded in silence, and accept women's experiences of God as valid sources (Fiorenza, 1994: 65).

#### **Destabilizing Linguistic Frameworks of Meaning**

Fiorenza considers the main cause of women's absence in theology to be the linguistic system and cultural mindset of "Kyriarchy". To analyze oppression, she uses the distinction between patriarchy and the system of multi-dimensional oppression -Kyriarchy-which is a socio-political system of dominance and subordination based on power and organizes oppression based not only on gender but also on class and race. She emphasizes that the male-centered linguistic system, by using masculine generic terms to mean human, has considered women as exceptions to a rule and problematic beings and has naturalized socio-political oppression and hidden its agency in history. Therefore, the work of the feminist historian is not to prove participation, but to interrogate texts regarding what they do not say about women and to challenge methods of ideological marginalization. Schüssler wants to say if the feminist historian does not know that linguistic rules have essentially not taken women into account, they cannot find a correct understanding of women's contribution in the past, because language practically did not address their contribution and agency and its terms and words did not include them. From her view, texts have narrated women's deficiency more than women's ability and experiences; religious narrative must be criticized for what it has not narrated of women's ability and experiences, and this historical neglect is something hidden in the androcentric linguistic game and dualistic formulation, and feminists have also fallen into its game, because they think women, by virtue of this dualistic formulation, truly had no share and went to the margins of history.

Fiorenza insists that women have had active participation in specific historical periods; if the feminist historian wants to prove that women workers in a certain period did not do this work (she uses the imagination of the individual instead of the positivist method that seeks to describe the world), it is for the sake of a conscious construction of a model that knows how the status of women was formed and structured (Fiorenza, 1998: 145; Fiorenza, 1995: 243).

### **Divine Revelation in the Now**

Fiorenza portrays salvation as a situation in the *now*. She states that life with God in the bliss of heaven after death is not limited but is directed toward specific actions now on earth that embody Jesus's message of liberation. Based on this, the Bible is known by the tradition as a sacred collection taken from the Holy Spirit. Fiorenza contrasts this with the idea of "living inspiration". She believes the inspiration of the Spirit as the revealer of divine will is not limited merely to the specific collection of New Testament books that were gradually collected and compiled over centuries and canonized by male church authorities, but rather the Holy Spirit as the Spirit who gives life participates even now with communities of believers and they receive the divine message from it.

Consequently, the divinely inspired revelation is not equal only to the collection of books present in the Christian canon; for a feminist reconstruction and for valid and authentic inspiration, one must pay attention to these types of contemporary experiences that lead to liberation, i.e., bringing an end to oppression and violence against women and men under the message of Jesus. Otherwise, by limiting inspiration to limited texts as the Christian community we know, reconstruction of the Bible for a better reform will not occur. She believes it can act as a liberatory and empowering source. She believes even the primary texts in Jewish communities that have not been included in the official canon and have not been accepted as authoritative texts, if they express truth based on liberation from God, will be citeable (Fiorenza, 1995: 231).

### **Hermeneutics of Suspicion and Hermeneutics of Remembrance**

Fiorenza's main dilemma in understanding the Bible is the existence of two edges, dark and light, regarding women. Fiorenza states that the Bible is a double-edged sword with two sides; one is against women and the other clarifies women's participation and acts as a source of hope for them. In the degrading part, the creation of a gender class as a patriarchal scheme has been represented, and as a result, patterns of female subordination in socio-political and economic spheres have been strengthened based on divine will. In positive passages, women's memories consist of the message that the Spirit is the empowerer of women from God's side and the narrator of the suffering and struggle of women and men for social change for the poor and oppressed; verses that clarify the equality of women and men and praise some female characters.

To solve this dilemma, she utilizes all previous models -the process of canon formation, linguistic narrative, and the relationship of Holy Spirit revelation with the existing text- and ultimately reaches a two-stage hermeneutics; she believes a "hermeneutics of suspicion" understands the Bible where its dark edge is revealed, and a "hermeneutics of remembrance" understands where its light edge is revealed. The reconstructionist approach to the text seeks to modify and adjust these two dimensions of the text. Hermeneutics of suspicion and remembrance are in fact two sides of feminist hermeneutics and belong to each other. Suspicion is in the service of remembrance.

In this approach, hermeneutics of suspicion is an active activity that increases awareness so that based on it, attitudes and roles of gender determined by culture on the Bible are considered and a type of analytical and critical decomposition in the biblical society is performed. Its starting point is this attitude that seeks to discover the causes of these attitudes and places the Bible's texts and

interpretations under the influence of the assumption that they are deeply patriarchal (*pedar-salar*) in the Christian tradition. This includes complete neglect of women in stories and the influence of the Bible's texts on the laws of women. Therefore, hermeneutics of suspicion pays attention not only to what is said about women but also to silence (Fiorenza, 1983: 147).

Fiorenza is not satisfied with the patriarchal frame that has caused suffering and torture; through her hermeneutics of remembrance, she takes back the experiences, slavery, and discrimination that women and all individuals have been subjected to in the past. She treats it as a "dangerous memory", a memory that invites today's oppressed individuals to solidarity with all individuals in the past and present, and struggle for human dignity. This approach considers the Bible a reason for hope and a factor for liberation in the midst of crisis, although it knows its historical-patriarchal influence. It does not limit itself to the Bible. From Fiorenza's view, contemporary sources outside the Bible that help provide a rich theology for the pains and healings that free from oppression provide for the current time. Hermeneutics of remembrance seeks to investigate behind the scenes -stories related to experiences of men from God- that are told by men, and reveal women's experiences in the silence of unrecorded history (Fiorenza, 1995: 150).

Finally, from Fiorenza's view, texts monitoring women's inability and their lack of capability for divine life must be set aside, because they are the effect of the Kyriarchal look that seeks subordination and "othering," while authentic theology cannot have such an approach because its basis is the words of Jesus, the struggle against oppression, and human liberation. Passages contradictory to the concerns of Christ are due to the patriarchal process present both in the formation of the Bible and in its Kyriocentric linguistic model, and because of women's exclusion from the Holy Spirit revelation with unrecorded male memories, while Christian theology is full of unrecorded memories of women.

### **Generalized Qualities**

Fiorenza believes there are central themes in the sacred text, with regard to which the logic of the text toward women can be inferred; matters that not only adapt to the theological experiences of women and their empowerment but constitute the main spirit of the text and distinguish the revelatory tradition from oppressive traditions. The first and most central of these qualities is the concept of "salvation in the now"; meaning that God's Kyriarchy over the world in Jesus's message is not postponed to Jesus's return, but rather the message of liberation and salvation is addressed to all human beings now. This concept sets aside as a rejected part of the text any theme that confirms women's inequality in the entitlement to this worldly liberation and salvation (Fiorenza, 1982: 45). The second quality is "liberation for all humans and not just women"; this theology emphasizes the fundamental principle that authentic theology has never had the claim of subordinating any human being, and revelatory authority is not given to oppressive texts. Therefore, only those texts and passages that have critically passed through dominance structures and helped the liberation of all humans (especially women) are the criteria for divine revelation. This approach takes back theology not merely as a memory of suffering, but as a memory of change agents and struggle against male dominance (Fiorenza, 1998: 34).

The third quality is "continuous struggle"; Fiorenza considers positivist readings of Jesus's period as a "golden age" free from patriarchal oppression to be incorrect. She introduces the figure of

Jesus as a central metaphor of reconstruction, not merely as a pattern but as a "constant fighter" against any kind of oppression, and feminist hermeneutics must understand women as the main actors of this role in the Bible by adopting this metaphor (Fiorenza, 1995: 17). The fourth quality is "equal discipleship"; while accepting natural differences between humans, it does not lead to the grading of these differences. This equality does not mean modern liberal sameness, but rather equal access to Jesus's salvation and discipleship, which Fiorenza calls the "ethics of equal discipleship," where distinctions of social status (both male and female, slave and free) are not valid among those who are "in Christ" (Fiorenza, 1995: 187). Finally, the fifth quality is "living inspiration," based on which today's religious experience acts as a source for understanding the official sacred text, and any human can have experiences of God to be added to the content of the sacred text; this is linked with hope, because sacred texts act as a source of hope for women who have lived beyond the dominant patriarchy and have expanded and realized Jesus's idea (Fiorenza, 2001: 23).

## **B. Core Concepts in Amina Wadud**

### **Fazlur Rahman's "Double Movement"**

Wadud's citation of this theory represents a fundamental change in the contemporary hermeneutics of the Qur'an. This research approach is based on the assumption that the text of the Qur'an, contrary to traditional perceptions, is not a collection of rigid and static legal propositions, but a dynamic process of the encounter of the divine word with concrete historical reality. With cognitive genius, Fazlur Rahman distinguishes between "historical background" (context) and "ethical destination" (goal) to pave the way for an understanding of the text. In the first step of this double movement, the interpreter returns from the current meaning horizon toward the context of revelation in the 7th century AD. In this stage, the goal is not merely the literal understanding of verses or the limited investigation of *Asbab al-Nuzul*, but rather a precise analysis of the "situation" in response to which the Qur'an was revealed.

Rahman believes that Qur'anic rulings were a divine response to the ethical and social dilemmas of a specific society; therefore, to understand the true meaning of a verse, one must first extract the "spirit of the law" from its "historical crust." In this stage, the interpreter moves with an inductive method from specific rulings toward "universal and trans-historical principles." For example, if the Qur'an issued a ruling on inheritance shares or family rights to promote justice in the tribal structure of that time, the trans-historical principle here is not that specific number or formula, but rather the "direction toward justice." In the second step, the interpreter, holding these transcendent principles and extracted goals (like human dignity, justice, and piety), returns from the past to the horizon of the present. This stage, which has a deductive and reconstructive aspect, is responsible for adapting those general principles with the requirements, knowledge, and necessities of modern life. Here, Amina Wadud, relying on this methodology, directs her critique at classical interpretations. She argues that traditional interpreters have stopped at Fazlur Rahman's first step and equated the historical responses of the Qur'an to 7th-century issues with God's absolute and eternal will (Fazlu Rahman, 1982: 5-7).

Using the double movement, Wadud claims that the Qur'an began a path toward gender equality which, due to the limitations of the cultural context of that time, could not manifest in the form of completely egalitarian laws. But today, relying on the "trans-historical principle of justice"

extracted from the heart of the Qur'an, one can and must issue rulings that are aligned with the new human understanding of human rights and gender equality. Thus, Fazlur Rahman's double movement becomes a tool in Wadud's thought to reconcile "revelatory validity of the text" and "necessity of social changes" and opens the way for a "justice-centered reading" in which the text is no longer a tool for consolidating patriarch, but is considered a source for human liberation and transcendence (Wadud, 1999: 3).

### **Gender Neutralization of Rulings and Roles**

"Neutralization" in Amina Wadud's thought system is the logical end of her Tawhidic hermeneutics, based on which the strategy of "gender neutralization" of roles is pursued. Social roles and human duties are redefined not on the axis of gender, but on the axis of "competence" (*ahliyat*) and "dignity" (*keramat*). In this layer of analysis, Wadud engages in deconstructing traditional notions that consider certain positions inherently masculine. Introducing Bilqis (the Queen of Sheba) as the model of the desirable ruler, she rereads the typology of governance in the Qur'an. She places her rationality and consultation in contrast to Pharaoh's masculine tyranny to prove that in the logic of revelation, political competence is a gender-neutral matter and there is no theological barrier to women's leadership. In fact, with this reading, she pushes "gender" to the margin of the public sphere and replaces it with "administrative wisdom."

This process of gender neutralization continues in the analysis of legal rulings such as "testimony" (*shahadat*). Relying on contextualist methodology, Wadud considers the difference in value between the testimony of a man and a woman in Verse 282 of Surah Al-Baqarah to be the result not of a deficiency in creation, but of the social status and lived experience of women in the era of revelation. Explaining the role of the second woman as a "reminder" and not necessarily an independent witness, she argues that the ultimate goal of the Qur'an was "guaranteeing justice" in transactions. Since in modern societies women have achieved economic and specialized independence, this "cause of the ruling" has vanished; therefore, their testimony must be considered legally equal to men. Finally, Wadud extends this review to the private sphere and domestic affairs, and by negating the traditional division of labor, introduces child care and home management as a human and shared duty. By calling men to active participation in the home's life-world, she tries to turn the family institution from a hierarchical structure to a space for realizing distributive justice. Thus, gender neutralization in Wadud's thought is a path for returning the concept of "divine caliphate" to all human beings, in such a way that biological differences are no longer a barrier to the fulfillment of women's social and political rights and the realization of their human perfection (Wadud, 1999: 40-43).

### **Semantic Limitation and Restricting the Scope of Rulings**

Amina Wadud's hermeneutic approach in facing controversial concepts such as "degree" and "preference/excellence" (*fadl*) represents a contextualist and functionalist reading. In this approach, Wadud moves toward a paradigm shift from traditional interpretations that were usually used as evidence for men's ontological superiority. Using the strategy of "semantic limitation", she tries to limit the scope of the denotation of rulings. In analyzing Verse 228 of Surah Al-Baqarah, she reduces the word "degree" from an all-encompassing existential rank to a "procedural advantage" in the legal process of divorce; meaning that this superiority is not an inherent privilege

for the male class, but merely a distinction directed toward the context of the dissolution of marriage in the social structure of the era of revelation. From Wadud's perspective, linking this concept to the category of "piety" (*taqwa*) and turning it from self-sufficient superiority into a "trial" (*ibtala'*) and a responsibility-centered trial changes its nature, the goal of which is not the consolidation of male authority but the ethical measurement of the actor in facing the rights of the other (Wadud, 2006: 158).

In a deeper layer, Wadud's analysis of the concept of "preference/excellence" (*fadl*) in Verse 34 of Surah An-Nisa deconstructs the notion that *qiwamah* is a biological and eternal right. Distinguishing between "absolute superiority" and "situational preference," she argues that *fadl* here is not in the sense of human perfection but as a distribution of capacity for performing concrete human duties, especially in the field of spending and financial guardianship. Accordingly, the *qiwamah* of men is not a fixed metaphysical principle, but an effect based on two causes: "bestowed preference" and "the act of spending," and with the disappearance of these conditions, it is also negated. Wadud emphasizes that the Qur'an has never endorsed the superiority of all men over all women in all aspects. This shows that Wadud's final purpose is returning the text to the horizon of "Tawhidic justice," where patriarchal distinctions are variables in the structure of "trial" and responsibility, not tools for subordination. She points out that human equality under the transcendent and historical and legal form should not be overshadowed. She notes that the "degree" mentioned regarding divorce is mentioned only as a condition and not as a general rule in all conditions. Wadud considers the degree achievable through performing good deeds with piety as the core; but the degree that God bestows as unknown and for the trial of the people of the earth, she considers *fadl* as also granted for the test of humans. In Verse 34 of Surah An-Nisa, men are considered guardians (*qawwamun*) for women due to the preference granted and the spending of their wealth. She emphasizes that all men are not superior to all women in all aspects (Wadud, 2006: 192).

### **Priority of Ethical Objectives**

In understanding the sacred text, Wadud prioritizes the supreme ethical goals and purposes of the Qur'an, such as justice, affection (*mawaddah*), and mercy, over mere rulings. The methodological analysis of prioritizing ethical objectives in Amina Wadud's thought indicates a fundamental shift from "formalist jurisprudence" toward "teleological theology." In this paradigm, legal rulings are not considered as ends in themselves, but as time-bound tools for the realization of the ethical essence of revelation, i.e., justice, affection, and mercy. Rereading the family structure in the Qur'an, Wadud considers the principle of "affection and mercy" not as a marginal ethical recommendation, but as the "criterion of validity" for any marital relationship and a mandatory rule with which all secondary rulings must be interpreted in accordance. Accordingly, in her hermeneutics, friendly agreement and a life based on human dignity are at the main axis of transactions; so much so that even divorce is analyzed not as an authoritative right and a unilateral rupture, but as a "virtuous" (*ma'ruf*) legal option and rupture that only gains legitimacy in the case of the blockage of the path of affection and to prevent oppression.

This objective-centered approach reaches its peak in the critique of the issue of polygamy. By structurally linking Verse 3 of Surah An-Nisa to the historical context of supporting orphans, Wadud changes the nature of this ruling from a sexual permission for men to an "emergency

measure" centered on "all-encompassing justice." Emphasizing that the only owner in this verse is "justice" -which Qur'anic text itself also emphasizes, given the impossibility of achieving full justice between wives- she argues that monogamy is the only ideal family model that harmonizes with the ethical purposes of revelation. In reality, by limiting historical rulings and prioritizing transcendent goals, she deconstructs the foundation of traditional justifications for polygamy and shows that loyalty to the Qur'an in the present era lies not in repeating past rulings, but in realizing the essence of justice and mercy that the Qur'an has opened the way for. Thus, Wadud's research frees the Qur'an from the bond of static interpretations and redefines it as a dynamic source for the establishment of gender justice in the contemporary world (Wadud, 1999: 83-84).

### **Historical Understanding of the Text - Social Reforms**

In Wadud's view, Qur'anic reforms in cases like negating male dominance in the patriarchal atmosphere prevailing over Arabia at the time of revelation took place gradually. Her hermeneutic analysis of Qur'anic reforms is based on the fundamental assumption that revelation was not revealed in a vacuum, but rather sought to change existing patriarchal structures by adopting a "gradual reform" strategy. In this view, the Qur'an is analyzed not as a solid fixation of the status quo in the era of revelation's Arabia, but as a forward-looking force that has taken strategic steps to limit male dominance. Analyzing the institution of divorce, Wadud argues that although executive power in that context was entrusted to men, the legal provision of the possibility of separation for women was a conscious effort to break the absolute hegemony of male decision-making and increase the woman's agency and satisfaction in the family space. From her perspective, loyalty to this liberatory direction of the text necessitates that in the present era, we move toward full equality in rights relying on the spirit of reform (Shadaab, 2017: 134).

This contextualist approach reaches its peak in the analysis of the concept of *nushuz* and striking; where Wadud, through deconstructing traditional interpretations, defines *nushuz* not as a woman's gender rebellion, but as a behavioral abnormality and a disturbance in family peace that can occur from both sides. She considers the three-stage process proposed in Verse 34 of Surah An-Nisa (admonition, separation in bed, and striking) not as a tool for suppression, but as a crisis management system for bridling unbridled violence in a primitive society. Meanwhile, by limiting the meaning of "striking" to a final and symbolic measure in the historical context, Wadud argues that the Qur'an's main purpose was the transition from physical violence toward a linguistic and ethical order. Therefore, in her research paradigm, accepting any violence against women in today's world is an explicit violation of the principle of human dignity and standing against the evolutionary and reformist path that the Qur'an started. Thus, by linking the "prior text" to the "necessities of the present," Wadud provides an interpretation in which revelation becomes a tool for the continuous liberation of humans from historical bonds (Wadud, 2006: 211).

### **Research Method and Analysis**

In order to comparatively analyze hermeneutic approaches and explain the status of women, this research utilizes the "reconstructionist hermeneutics" in the methodological context of "thematic analysis." The nature of this research, which relies on the rereading of the sacred text and the critique of interpretive structures, necessitates that the analysis process move from mere description toward deep interpretation. In this direction, the present research uses an interpretive-

reconstructionist hermeneutic approach as a theoretical framework. This approach emphasizes the distinction between "universal principles" (core message) and the "historical context of revelation" (time-boundness of texts), adopting an epistemological critique toward the patriarchal interpretive tradition. The basis of analysis in this research is the critical encounter with texts; in such a way that "gender" is not just a fixed variable, but rather is studied as a historical, social, and fluid constructed concept so that the possibility of rereading and extracting justice-centered denotations in the framework of Tawhidic hermeneutics is provided.

The process of achieving the core themes of the interpretations under study has been performed by adopting the thematic analysis method. This approach seeks to discover deep and hidden semantic structures in the heart of texts. The research process in this study was carried out in four steps: First, by studying the entire texts and extracting semantic units, "primary codes" were formed. Then, these codes were categorized based on semantic similarity into "related semantic categories" and "primary themes" were extracted. In the third step, the primary themes were subjected to precise review, refinement, and merging to ensure their internal coherence and distinction. Finally, each theme was precisely defined and titled, an appropriate title was chosen for it, and the relationship between different themes was analyzed in the direction of the formation of macro-interpretive discourses (such as the Tawhidic hermeneutic discourse versus traditional interpretations). To ensure validity and reliability in this qualitative research, the "peer review" technique was used; meaning that extracted themes were compared with interpretation frameworks and reconstructionist hermeneutic theoretical frameworks, especially in the distinction between universal principles and the historical context of revelation, to ensure the validity of interpretations. This process of returning between text, context, and theoretical framework has enhanced the interpretive richness and scientific solidity of research findings, especially in the comparative aspect. The combination of these two stages allows this research to move beyond a superficial description of interpretations, providing the possibility of critical analysis of discourses and revealing the hermeneutic capacity of the text for reconstruction hidden within it.

## Research Background

Articles have been written regarding this topic; "Feminist Analysis of Biblical Interpretation Using the Hermeneutic Pattern of Schüssler Fiorenza," published in the *Journal of Religious Research*, written by Nazanin Kianifar and Mehdi Lak-Zayi. "Gender and Method of Text Understanding: Reflections on the Hermeneutic Strategies of Schüssler Fiorenza in Rereading the Sacred Text," written by Ma'sumeh Zare'i, published in the *Women's Research Journal*. "Examining the Possibility of Applying the Hermeneutics of Doubt in Understanding Verses Related to Women," written by Fatemeh Towfiqi, Muhammad Haqqani Fazl, and Zahra Zanganeh, published in the journal *Naqd va Nazar*. "Rereading the Sacred Text from Women's Perspective: Amina Wadud's Interpretation of the Qur'an," written by Matineh Sadat Musavi, Mehrdad Abbasi, and Asma Barlas, in the journal *Ayeneh-ye Pazhuhesh*. And finally, "From Tawhidic Hermeneutics to Tawhidic Paradigm: Examining the Evolution of Amina Wadud's Method in Understanding the Qur'an," written by Mahmoud Karimi Banadkuhi, Pour-Muhammad-Hassan Sane'i, Ruqayyah Beyrami, and Leila-al-Sadat Morovveji in the *Journal of Qur'anic Interpretation and Language*. In these articles, a comparative approach between the two Muslim and Christian thinkers was not observed, and also reference to the main foundations and concepts of reconstructionist hermeneutics as an important approach in feminist theology was not elaborated.

## Findings

According to what has passed, Fiorenza's reconstructionist hermeneutics includes changing patterns, metaphors, and traditional images of theology to become forms of theological thought supporting the authentic form of humanity and liberation from historical patterns of oppression. The ultimate goal is to retrieve the liberatory core of religion and turn it into a theological tool for the practical realization of justice and equality in the present. Fiorenza's reconstructionist solution believes the sacred text has two sides: one against women and the other clarifies women's participation and acts as a source of hope for them. In a sense, it is a double-edged sword; hermeneutics of suspicion reveals its dark edge and feminist hermeneutics of remembrance reveals its light edge by clarifying the passages and patriarchal structures of the sacred text. Reconstruction seeks to modify and adjust this text, considering it a product of the culture of that time; and with this criterion that if something was against women's dignity, it should be set aside, it passes through that dark part of the sacred text and formulates general and universal principles for this transition, seeking to obtain the main logic of the sacred text. Schüssler seeks the basis of a liberatory reality and the struggle against oppression in early Christian history and in the sacred text. By inventing her Kyriocentric method -which believes the system of dominance is multifaceted and the documents of its oppression are not visible through vulgar positivism- she counters both modern positivism and post-positivism. She is not seeking to prove women's superiority, but rather seeking to reform the pattern of dominance over all individuals who have had agency in some way. Based on this, to prove women's contribution, she seeks to negate nothing else. She considers the retrieval of liberatory elements in the Jesus tradition as retrieving active, free, and liberatory elements in the Israelite tradition, which she believes is a tradition of an egalitarian and ethical-social movement. Her reconstruction of early Christianity moves toward a process that provides for equal responsibility and social relations free from dominance, in which she also recognizes the contribution of men. Fiorenza draws attention to those biblical texts that have received little attention in the long history of Christian tradition and searches for equal and extraordinary roles for women in ancient Near Eastern culture. She searches for a type of "usable past" for women; those traces and fragments of stories of women in the sacred text who were ignored in the first Christian movement and searched for the voices of women from the historical silence and shadows that silenced them. In her view, the remembrance of these women and their stories empowers women for their liberation in the present.

From Fiorenza's perspective, the spirit of the sacred text consists of liberation for all humans, equality, hope, and salvation that is achievable in the now, and a continuous struggle against oppression. In her view, the result of all these matters is the inherent dignity of women, something not recognized in the dark aspect of the existing sacred text and which, from Fiorenza's perspective, must be rejected. She tries to show that the woman of the sacred text is not the deceived Eve, but a human who can embody God and possesses inherent dignity, someone who can even now connect with the Spirit of Life and receive divine inspiration from it, and based on her experience, understand the religious text. She believes whatever is contrary to this human dignity and divine status of women cannot be the divine will and revelation issued from the Holy Spirit and an action by Jesus. She considers her limited knowledge of women and divine women to result from the patriarchal system. Overall, based on the model of understanding the text and its main themes, Fiorenza grants women an inherent dignity. She considers it the main goal of Jesus from prophecy and theology. Compared to other new approaches that try a type of superficial effort in providing

new understandings of the text with the strategy of separating divine revelation and human interpretation, she seeks activity on the sacred text itself and analyzing points of departure for the liberation of the marginalized and oppressed class. On this basis, she seeks to design an intra-textual epistemological system. She considers all human salvation as the basis, for which many individuals in the past who referred to this very Bible are witnesses to the existence of those truths embedded in the sacred text. Fiorenza considers this rich literature present in the sacred text a pathfinder for liberation and salvation for the life of today's women and all humans. In this process, she places women as subjects and agents of meaning construction; secondly, regarding the subject of interpretation, she does not merely pay attention to data and expressions of the sacred text and establishing a balance between its passages and minor reform of teachings, but seeks to understand the pattern of patriarchy and design the correct pattern of reconstruction. She believes this pattern exists in the sacred text and Jesus used it to explain theology and reform society. She believes that by multiplying her "generalized qualities" into her intended model, the text can be understood correctly (Fiorenza, 1995: 143).

Amina Wadud's understanding of the sacred text is also a new, critical, and structured interpretive paradigm that deals with rereading the Qur'an with the main goal of realizing gender justice in Islamic culture. This methodical model is based on a multifaceted intellectual logic and tries to go beyond traditional biases and discover the Qur'an's main message. The summary of Amina Wadud's view indicates a cohesive schema of "liberatory theology" which is based on a Tawhidic rereading and justice-centered axis of the sacred text. At the center of her thought, the Qur'an is understood not as a collection of static and historical rulings, but as a path toward perfection, ethicality, and human equality. Using Fazlur Rahman's "double movement" theory, she distinguishes between the appearance of rulings -which is affected by the patriarchal context of the era of revelation- and the transcendent and trans-historical purposes of revelation. In her view, concepts such as "degree" or "preference/excellence," which in traditional interpretations were interpreted as the inherent superiority of men, are in fact restricted and conditional legal tools for managing responsibilities in a specific social structure and should not be considered as eternal ontological hierarchies.

Wadud's hermeneutics is based on the "gender neutralization of roles"; where, citing models like Bilqis, she frees political and social competence from the bond of gender and links it to "piety" (*taqwa*) and "competence" (*ahliyat*). Facing challenging rulings such as polygamy or *nushuz*, by prioritizing ethical goals such as affection and mercy, she argues that the reformist direction of the Qur'an has always been toward the abolition of dominance and the establishment of justice. In this paradigm, the family is not an institution under male management, but a space for bilateral participation and the realization of human dignity. Ultimately, Wadud's intellectual project can be considered an effort for the "de-genderization of theology," in which metaphors and masculine theology are freed and the Qur'an, as a dynamic text, finds the mission to reproduce and establish Tawhidic equality in all spheres of life, from domestic affairs to the highest levels of governance, in every era.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The project of reconstructionist hermeneutics in feminist theology, initiated by pioneers like Letty Russell and developed by thinkers such as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in the Christian tradition

and Amina Wadud in the Islamic tradition, is a constructive project whose common goal is going beyond mere revisionism to retrieve the core of liberatory theology and religion for the realization of human justice and dignity. These two approaches in Islam and Christianity have points of commonality and divergence. In feminist theology, reconstructionist hermeneutics starts with this basic assumption that the patriarchal framework dominant in religious tradition is the product of historical manifestations of power and is therefore a revisable and fundamentally reformable tradition. Sacred Text must be liberated from patriarchal interpretations that have frozen rulings at a historical level. This approach seeks "home-making" that is, creating a new, safe, and supportive theological framework to support the liberatory practices and experiences of women. This goal is pursued through the fundamental reinterpretation of the central concepts of religion. In the Christian tradition, this focuses on the "Kingdom of God," which is interpreted not as a merely future divine promise but as the believer's mission and duty in the current world for the realization of "human liberation" in the *now*.

This analysis considers the reign of God to necessitate a continuous struggle against patriarchal dominance and the realization of the true meaning of salvation and shared and equal redemption, because it acknowledges that social structures and historical context have always been subject to oppression and religious mission (like that of Jesus has been a continuous struggle in favor of marginalized groups (Ruether, 1983: 216). In the field of Islamic studies, a similar approach has been followed by Amina Wadud in the form of "Tawhidic hermeneutics." With this method, which is influenced by Fazlur Rahman's double movement theory, Wadud distinguishes the transcendent and trans-historical principles of the Qur'an -like equality in creation and piety as the sole factor of superiority- from patriarchal interpretations that have frozen rulings at a historical level. Accordingly, it can be said that feminist interpretations of the Qur'an seek not only to critique but to reconstruct gender and provide a new intellectual framework for understanding and interpreting the Qur'an from the text of the Qur'an; meanwhile, traditional interpretation undergoes transformations in the modern era.

### **Similarities between the Two Views**

1. **Critique of Patriarchal Presuppositions:** Both thinkers agree on this theological principle that the patriarchal framework dominant in religious tradition is a historical deviation and not a theological one, and is the result of historical manifestations of power; therefore, the sacred text is capable of fundamental reform and review.
2. **Now-Liberatory Approach:** The approach of both thinkers is a defensive theology whose goal is finding the liberatory element in the sacred text and turning it into a tool for continuous struggle against oppression. This liberation means "salvation in the now" for all humans in the present world, and any theme confirming inequality in the entitlement to this salvation must be rejected.
3. **Theological Equality and Human Agency:** Both emphasize the fundamental equality of humans before God. Wadud defines this equality based on the principle of Tawhid and piety being the criterion, and Fiorenza considers it in the form of "equal discipleship" where distinctions of social status (female and male, slave and free) are not valid in theological matters. Both emphasize the retrieval of women's agency and their liberatory experience.

4. **Distinction between Principles and Interpretations:** Both seek to distinguish the trans-historical and transcendent principles of the sacred text from patriarchal interpretations that have frozen rulings at a historical level.

### Differences between the Two Views

Despite these similarities, precise differences are observed in the focus of critique and their methodology:

1. **Main Focus of Critique:** Amina Wadud focuses the core of her criticism on the Islamic interpretive tradition; she believes the text of the Qur'an is complete and egalitarian in its essence, but patriarchal interpretations have distorted it. Therefore, her project is a textual-interpretive cleanup focused on structures. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza focuses the core of her critique on the four-stage process of the formation of the legal sacred text as well as male-centered linguistic patterns, believing that the process itself structurally excluded women; therefore, her project goes beyond interpretation and also deals with the authenticity and manner of the text's compilation.
2. **Methodological Tool:** Wadud utilizes Fazlur Rahman's double movement theory to reconstruct the meaning of the text, to distinguish the trans-historical and transcendent principles of the Qur'an (spirit of the text) from historical rulings (context of revelation) and prove gender-neutral principles. Fiorenza uses tools of "hermeneutics of suspicion" and "hermeneutics of remembrance" to reveal hidden biases, break women's historical silence, and reconstruct women's experiences of God's revelation as valid citeable sources.
3. **Analysis of the Oppression System and Scope of Liberation:** Wadud considers the system of oppression based on deviation from the principles of Tawhid and gender justice. Fiorenza sees the system of dominance as more complex and multifaceted and defines it with the term "Kyriarchy", which has organized oppression beyond gender in class and race as well; thus her final goal is liberation for all humans from the Kyriarchal system of oppression, not just women's liberation. She also emphasizes adding to the text through "living inspiration" and women's excluded experiences.

In conclusion, while both thinkers share the ultimate goal and theological basis, Wadud proceeds with her reconstructionist project by relying on the reform of interpretive and textual foundations, and Fiorenza by focusing on the critique of structure, production, and language of the sacred text and the analysis of the multifaceted Kyriarchal system of oppression within their respective traditions.

### Critique

Regarding the critique of Fiorenza's approach, it must be noted that Fiorenza has an arbitrary position toward revelation. She almost simplistically considers "revelatory" synonymous with "authoritative"; meaning she rejects anything that does not match her own limited criteria as non-revelatory. This method causes her to praise prophets such as Jesus and sometimes Paul, while deleting those who do not fulfill her criteria. Her own statements based on the influence of culture and mind on understanding and interpreting the text, human understanding of reality, and personal experiences which are under the influence of cultural attitudes, affect the understanding of any text

and show that no biblical interpretation can be completely unbiased. Feminist hermeneutics of suspicion recognizes that biblical interpretation is inevitably under the influence of the human mind. Individuals involved in biblical interpretation bring their conscious and unconscious biases to the activity of biblical interpretation, and both in the questions feminists raise for biblical expressions and in the result of their orientation, it is evident from the available information in their use of imagination.

Regarding the critique of Amina Wadud's approach, the following points should be noted:

1. **Excessive Fluidity of Ethical Objectives:** Critics believe that Wadud, by giving absolute priority to concepts such as "justice" and "mercy" over explicit rulings (*nusus*), introduces a type of "subjectivism" into interpretation. Justice is not a concept independent of revelation; rather, it is revelation and *Sharia* itself that define justice. When Wadud defines justice based on modern criteria such as full gender equality and then presents the text to it, she actually falls into a type of "interpretation by opinion" and transfers the measuring scale from inside religion to outside it, the result of which is a break from authentic Islamic hermeneutic discipline.
2. **Extreme Historicism:** Reducing the emendatory or foundational rulings of the Qur'an to "temporary measures for the ignorant Arab" practically strips a large part of the Qur'an of authority and validity for today's life. If all gender rulings, from inheritance and testimony to family structure, are merely "historical directions," the boundary between the "fixed divine matter" and the "variable human matter" becomes blurred. Essentialists believe the Qur'an has introduced itself as "guidance for all eras"; therefore, the permanence of explicit rulings is part of the sacred nature of revelation, and one cannot, by citing the change of context, abrogate a stated ruling in favor of the "spirit of the text," because this work opens the way for the suspension of all *Sharia* rulings.
3. **Break from Interpretive Tradition and Consensus:** By accusing all previous interpreters of "patriarchy", Wadud practically sets aside 1,400 years of accumulated interpretive and jurisprudential knowledge. Critics believe this approach leads to a type of "disconnected interpretation" in which the link between verses and Prophetic traditions as the explainer of revelation is ignored. For example, in the discussion of "striking" or "*qiwamah*," critics believe Wadud, by ignoring the precise limitations mentioned in the Prophetic tradition and jurisprudence for these concepts, first builds a radical reading of the tradition and then proceeds to critique it, while the authentic Islamic tradition itself has been the refiner and limiter of these rulings. Therefore, Wadud's approach, rather than being an "intra-religious interpretation," is considered an "ideological imposition" on the sacred text that threatens the internal coherence of the *Sharia* system.

Aysha Hidayatullah, who as a Muslim feminist also seeks the idea of equality in the Qur'an, believes that Amina Wadud and other Muslim feminists have provided a selective presentation of verses to prove the idea of gender equality in sacred text, and this equality has not been the text's concern; and in cases like the assumption of male agency in sexual matters or the verse on striking, this lack of equality is undeniable and cannot be made compatible with the idea of equality. Aysha says Muslim feminists consider gender equality a formed norm in the Qur'an to the point that it has become a blinding bias. Also, the principle of the historicity of the concept of feminist interpretation in gender equality is not fully compatible with Qur'anic texts. Hidayatullah believes

justice and equality might not be fully compatible with the Qur'anic text. She considers Wadud's idea a raw version of the liberal idea and the referral of the modern concept of equality to the text of the Qur'an 14 centuries ago.

Finally, it must be noted that this group, at the end of their interpretive path, has reached an impasse in the thought of the Qur'an's egalitarianism, and Hidayatullah believes that the use of symbolic language of the Qur'an is a sign of complete guidance in these conditions and makes the understanding of gender-neutrality and a genderless space of transcendent concepts difficult. Wadud says one must distinguish between the Qur'an and the divine message; meaning that the divine message is much more complex than can be offered in humanly accessible and understandable forms, and therefore the Qur'an is a reflection of a higher celestial word that shows only a part of it (Wadud, 1999: 67). Barlas also states that the real or authentic Qur'an remains with God (Barlas, 2002: 17). This means that in their view, the Qur'an and the divine message are not one and the same. Muslim feminists, by distinguishing the non-material word of God from the spoken Qur'an, seek to negate the linguistic content of the Qur'an which is problematic from a feminist perspective, because with this approach they can easily say the Qur'an does not fully include all divine meanings, and they can blame human language instead of God's message in parts of the Qur'anic text that contradict feminist interpretations. They do not negate the divine source of the Qur'an and its sanctity, but they consider it merely a window toward transcendence, not full transcendence. Consequently, in this view, the Qur'an is not a complete book of salvation and a type of human understanding will also interfere in it. Both of these issues are in explicit contradiction with the verses of the Qur'an.

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