

Thinking Intersectionally: Gender, Race, Class, and the Etceteras of Our Discipline

GALE A. YEE

gale.yee@gmail.com

Episcopal Divinity School

Intersectional analyses make the fundamental point that we who study and interpret the biblical text have many important facets to our identities that are impacted differently by multiple interacting systems of oppression and privilege. As a method of interpretation, intersectionality presumes that our own unique social locations, our own distinctive fusions of gender, race, class, et cetera, influence our readings of texts and our interpretations of them. It encourages us to think beyond the familiar boundaries of biblical studies to expose the diverse power relations of inequality in the text and uncover subjugated voices that were previously invisible or unheard.

It is a little daunting, as the first Asian American and the first woman of color, to be elected president of the Society of Biblical Literature. It is, however, this particular social location, as well as growing up in one of the poorest sections of Chicago's South Side, that influences the direction I will take in my 2019 Presidential Address. The triad of gender, race, and class—my Chinese American ethnicity, my lower-class origins, and my female gender—have made deep marks on my interpretation of the biblical text, whether I consciously knew it or not.¹ Particularly because of my class background, my profound concern about the rising inequality between the rich and the poor in today's neoliberal world compels me to examine inequality in its various forms in the Bible. I am disturbed by the compartmentalization of the poor and marginals into silos with little theorization on

¹I was recently able to reflect autobiographically on this triad in Gale A. Yee, "Negotiating Shifts in Life's Paradigms," in *Women and the Society of Biblical Literature*, ed. Nicole L. Tilford, BSNA 29 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019), 103–14; Yee, "The Process of Becoming for a Woman Warrior from the Slums," in *Asian and Asian American Women in Theology and Religion: Embodying Knowledge*, ed. Kwok Pui-lan, Asian Christianity in the Diaspora (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 15–30.

their unequal relationships with other institutional and economic features of society. I am acutely aware that our Annual Meeting is held here in San Diego, a border town with Mexico. In 2014, Fernando Segovia gave his own presidential address here in San Diego, describing the city as a signifier of the global divide between the haves and have-nots.² San Diego continues to be a material site where a toxic administration commits flagrant crimes against immigrants fleeing poverty and violence in their countries. Our study and interpretations of the biblical text cannot be unaware of or disinterested in the evil perpetrated at the border here so close to this convention site.

Poverty and inequality are not the same thing. While poverty focuses on the condition of the poor, inequality focuses on both the rich and the poor.³ Inequality is embedded in power relations, forcing us to confront a question that is often avoided: How can the ways in which the rich obtain their wealth generate poverty, as evidenced in the biblical text⁴ and in today's world? Poverty is primarily the result of the unequal distribution of society's goods and resources and the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. Inequality asks us to focus on particular relations of power, whether it be economic, legal, social, ideological, et cetera—on how wealth is distributed. Power relations are secured and maintained not only among the classes (rich and poor), but also among genders, races, and the etceteras. In what specific ways do power relations among these diverse categories create poverty among the marginalized?

In wrestling theoretically with the problem of inequality and poverty, I found that the most helpful analytical tool to help me avoid compartmentalizing gender, race, class, et cetera was “intersectionality.” Intersectionality has been used as a hermeneutical prism for many years in a number of disciplines to study inequality by examining power dynamics in their multiplicity, complexity, and interrelations.⁵ Although there have been some recent attempts at intersectional analyses, primarily in the New Testament,⁶ intersectionality has not made a significant dent

²Fernando F. Segovia, “Criticism in Critical Times: Reflections on Vision and Task,” *JBL* 134 (2015): 6–29, here 9, <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1341.2015.0002>.

³I am defining inequality as institutionalized patterns and structures of unequal control over and distribution of a society's valued goods and resources such as land, property, money, food, employment, education, healthcare, and housing.

⁴I made a modest attempt to address this in the Hebrew Bible in Gale A. Yee, “‘He Will Take the Best of Your Fields’: Royal Feasts and Rural Extraction,” *JBL* 136 (2017): 821–38, <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1364.2017.310569>.

⁵Bonnie Thornton Dill and Ruth Enid Zambrana, “Critical Thinking about Inequality: An Emerging Lens,” in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, ed. Carol R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 182–93.

⁶Especially, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Democratizing Biblical Studies: Toward an Emancipatory Educational Space* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 106–25; Lawrence M. Wills, *Not God's People: Insiders and Outsiders in the Biblical World*, Religion in the Modern World (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008). See the essays in L. Juliana M. Claassens and

as a conceptual framework in biblical studies, except, not surprisingly, among scholars of color.⁷ Because of the vastness of the literature, I will be able only to introduce you to this field of study in this address.⁸ I will first discuss intersectionality in the

Carolyn J. Sharp, eds., *Feminist Frameworks: Celebrating Intersectionality, Interrogating Power, Embracing Ambiguity*, LHBOTS 621 (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017); and, in the special issue *BibInt* 18.4/5 (2010): Denise Buell, Jennifer Glancy, Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, and Halvor Moxnes, "Introduction: Cultural Complexity and Intersectionality in the Study of the Jesus Movement," 309–12; Kartzow, "Asking the Other Question: An Intersectional Approach to Galatians 3:28 and the Colossian Household Codes," 364–89. See also Joseph A. Marchal, "Pinkwashing Paul, Excepting Jesus: The Politics of Intersectionality, Identification, and Respectability," in *The Bible and Feminism: Remapping the Field*, ed. Yvonne Sherwood and Anna Fisk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 433–53.

⁷ Among US feminist scholars of color, see Delores S. Williams, "Hagar in African American Biblical Appropriation," in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 171–84; Renita J. Weems, "The Hebrew Women Are Not like the Egyptian Women: The Ideology of Race, Gender and Sexual Reproduction in Exodus 1," *Semeia* 59 (1992): 25–34; Ahida Calderón Pilarski, "A Latina Biblical Critic and Intellectual: At the Intersection of Ethnicity, Gender, Hermeneutics, and Faith," in *Latino/a Biblical Hermeneutics: Problematics, Objectives, Strategies*, ed. Francisco Lozada and Fernando F. Segovia, *Semeia*St 68 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 231–42; M. I. Rey, "Reexamination of the Foreign Female Captive: Deuteronomy 21:10–14 as a Case of Genocidal Rape," *JFSR* 32 (2016): 37–53. See the essays in the following collections: Randall C. Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia, eds., *They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*, *Semeia*St 57 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009); Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace, eds., *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, *Semeia*St 85 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016); Gale A. Yee, ed., *The Hebrew Bible: Feminist and Intersectional Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018); Jin Young Choi and Mitzi J. Smith, eds., *Minoritized Women Reading Race and Ethnicity: Intersectional Approaches to Constructed Identity and Early Christian Texts*, *Feminist Studies and Sacred Texts* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2020).

Concepts of intersectionality have been well established in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific even if the terminology is American. Dalit women in India have been researched for many years, bringing caste into the picture. See, e.g., Anne Pattel-Gray, "Not Yet Tiddas: An Aboriginal Womanist Critique of Australian Church Feminism," in *Freedom and Entrapment: Women Thinking Theology*, ed. Maryanne Confoy, Dorothy Lee, and Joan Nowotny (Melbourne: Dove, 1995), 165–92; Monica Melanchthon, "Indian Dalit Women and the Bible," in *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Ursula King and Tina Beattie (London: Continuum, 2004), 212–24; Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon, "Toward Mapping Feminist Biblical Interpretations in Asia," in *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bible and Woman* 9.1 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 205–19; Madipoane Masenya, "The Bible, HIV/AIDS and African/South African Women: A Bosadi Approach," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 31 (2005): 187–201.

⁸ See the bibliographies in Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis," *Signs* 38 (2013): 785–810; Vivian M. May, *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries*, *Contemporary Sociological Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality, Key Concepts* (Oxford: Polity, 2016); Ange-Marie Hancock, *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Ashley J. Bohrer,

legal field where the term was first used, consider its assumptions as an analytical tool, and finally apply it to a particular text for its potential contributions to biblical studies.

The term *intersectionality* was coined by African American lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989.⁹ However, the interconnections among gender, race, and class had been explored by African American theorists and other women of color long before the term became fashionable.¹⁰ In the case of *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors*, involving five black women who unsuccessfully sued General Motors for race discrimination, Crenshaw argued that the single-axis framework that dominated antidiscrimination law erased the experiences of black women. Because General Motors did hire black men and did hire women—albeit *white* women, the company maintained that it did not discriminate against these black women. The company therefore saw no need to recognize black women as a distinct social group.

Crenshaw argued that both feminist theory and antiracism politics fell into single-axis thinking by equating racism with what happened to black men and by equating sexism with what happened to white women. Neither of these positions was able “to respond to the very visible invisibility of women who were not white and blacks who were not men.”¹¹ White feminist theory in particular tended to approach multiple oppressions by ranking them hierarchically, treating one form of oppression as earlier or more significant than others. For example, Andrea Dworkin claimed that “sexism is the foundation on which all tyranny is built.”¹² Another way of dealing with multiple oppressions, variously known as the “pop-bead” or “Tootsie Roll” approach, was simply adding gender, race, and class oppressions together and describing people as doubly or triply oppressed.¹³ To advance

“Intersectionality and Marxism: A Critical Historiography,” *Historical Materialism* 26 (2018): 46–74; Jennifer C. Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality*, Next Wave New Directions in Women’s Studies (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

⁹Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 41 (1989): 139–67.

¹⁰See Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage, 1981); Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Crossing Press Feminist Series (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984); bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End, 1984).

¹¹Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Postscript,” in *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies*, ed. Helma Lutz, Maria Teresa Herrera Vivar, and Linda Supik, *Feminist Imagination: Europe and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2016), 221–33, here 225.

¹²Andrea Dworkin, *Our Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics* (New York: Perigee, 1981), 67–68. Originally published 1976.

¹³Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon, 1988), 114–32; Deborah King, “Multiple Jeopardy: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology,” in *Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of Relations between Women and Men*, ed. Alison M. Jaggar and Paula S. Rothenberg, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 220–36; Nira Yuval-Davis, “Intersectionality and Feminist Politics,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 13 (2006): 193–209, here 194–96.

beyond such thinking, Crenshaw used the concept of intersectionality to denote the various ways in which race and gender interacted to shape multiple dimensions of black women's experiences.¹⁴

Intersectional analyses make the fundamental point that we all have many important facets to our identities that are impacted differently by multiple interacting systems of oppression and privilege depending on the various aspects of our identities.¹⁵ Scholars have extended intersectionality beyond race and gender to include class, sexual orientation, nation, citizenship, immigration status, disability, and religion. They have also enlisted intersectionality to investigate the various oppressions associated with these aspects: classicism, homophobia, xenophobia, nativism, ageism, ableism, and Islamophobia.¹⁶ Intersectionality has been recognized as a productive model in a number of disciplinary fields such as history, sociology, literature, philosophy, and anthropology, in addition to feminist studies, ethnic studies, queer studies, as well as legal studies, where the term was coined.

I. ASSUMPTIONS

Given the wide range of disciplines adopting intersectional thinking into their methodologies, African American sociologist Patricia Hill Collins provides a helpful provisional list of the assumptions guiding different intersectional analyses.¹⁷ You will note how these assumptions build on each other regarding their analyses of power.

- Race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, nation, ethnicity, and similar categories of analysis are best understood in relational terms rather than in isolation from one another.
- These mutually constructing categories underlie and shape intersecting systems of power; the power relations of racism and sexism, for example, are interrelated.
- Intersecting systems of power, such as racism and sexism, catalyze social formations of complex social inequalities. These social formations are organized by means of unequal material realities and the distinctive social experiences for people who live within them.
- Because social formations of complex social inequalities are historically

¹⁴Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. (New York: New Press, 1995), 357–83.

¹⁵Ann Garry, "Intersectionality, Metaphors, and the Multiplicity of Gender," *Hypatia* 26 (2011): 826–50, here 827.

¹⁶Devon W. Carbado, "Colorblind Intersectionality," *Signs* 38 (2013): 811–45, here 814–15.

¹⁷Patricia Hill Collins, "Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas," *Annual Review of Sociology* 41 (2015): 1–20, here 14.

contingent and cross-culturally specific, unequal material realities and social experiences vary across time and space.

- Individuals and groups who are placed differently within intersecting systems of power have diverse points of view on their own and others' experiences with complex social inequalities, typically advancing projects that reflect their social locations within power relations.
- The complex social inequalities fostered by intersecting systems of power are fundamentally unjust, shaping projects and/or political engagements that uphold or contest the status quo.¹⁸

Individual endeavors will embody one, some, or all of these assumptions in their intersectional analyses. I especially draw your attention to the last assumption: that the complex social inequalities fostered by intersecting systems of power are fundamentally unjust. Intersectionality has deep activist roots to combat these unjust systems of power.¹⁹ Vivian May is quite explicit about intersectionality as being a “justice-oriented approach” for social analysis and critique and for political strategizing and organizing.²⁰ Intersectionality grew out of movements with a social justice agenda such as those focused on civil rights and women's rights.²¹ It should not be depoliticized simply as a general abstract theory, as it has been in some learned sectors, neutralizing its political edge and its potential for social justice-oriented change.²² It is this activist element of intersectionality that impels my work toward disrupting dominance and challenging systemic inequality in today's world.

¹⁸ We can see some of these assumptions at work in the opening statement of the Declaration of the NGO (Nongovernmental Organization) Forum of the UN Conference on Racism in 2001 under the topic of gender:

119. An intersectional approach to discrimination acknowledges that every person be it man or woman exists in a framework of multiple identities, with factors such as race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability, citizenship, national identity, geopolitical context, health, including HIV/AIDS status and any other status are all determinants in one's experiences of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerances. An intersectional approach highlights the way in which there is a simultaneous interaction of discrimination as a result of multiple identities. (Quoted in Dill and Zambrana, “Critical Thinking about Inequality,” 191)

¹⁹ Hancock, *Intersectionality*, 37–72.

²⁰ May, *Pursuing Intersectionality*, 228; also Sirma Bilge, “Intersectionality Undone: Saving Intersectionality from Feminist Intersectionality Studies,” *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 10 (2013): 405–24, here 407.

²¹ Dill and Zambrana, “Critical Thinking about Inequality,” 183–84.

²² Bilge, “Intersectionality Undone,” 405–6; Gail Lewis, “Unsafe Travel: Experiencing Intersectionality and Feminist Displacements,” *Signs* 38 (2013): 869–92. However, see Jennifer Nash's critique of the “intersectionality wars,” in which black feminists develop a defensive proprietary attachment to intersectionality, because of its origins in African American feminism (*Black Feminism Reimagined*, 33–58).

II. NO ESCAPING INTERSECTIONALITY

In a 2006 essay, I maintained that one of the challenges in counteracting the racism against and the internalized oppression of Asian Americans was making “whiteness” visible as a culturally constructed ethnic identity. Many white people do not consciously see themselves or their conceptual frameworks as raced. Instead of acknowledging its own sociohistorical production, whiteness sets itself up as *the* universal norm, disparaging all others as aberrations. Those who are white often fail to see how their racial position (pre)determines the social realities of which they are a part. Because whiteness functions incognito in our society, the burden of explaining and justifying racial differences is placed upon the hyphenated, racialized individuals themselves. I concluded this essay by stating that because Asian American biblical hermeneutics does not develop in a vacuum but is conducted within larger white institutional—and often racist—contexts, it is vital that Asian American biblical scholars make whiteness visible as a culturally constructed and racialized category.²³

African American professor of law Devon Carbado employs the term “color-blind intersectionality” to describe any analysis that leaves whiteness as intersectionally unmarked or overlooked. Its invisibility anchors whiteness as the default and normative racial category through which gender, race, class, et cetera are expressed. In so doing, color-blind intersectionality also externalizes nonwhiteness as the racial modifier of gender, sexuality, class, and so forth. When whiteness is framed outside of intersectionality, those who are black, Asian, Latinx, et cetera are the only ones who are raced.²⁴

The emphasis on interlocking relations among systems of domination therefore underscores the necessity of investigating the privileged as well as the disadvantaged, in order to attend fully to the complex and multifaceted dynamics of inequality.²⁵ This especially involves investigating the ideologies of white privilege and white supremacy and the structures that legitimate and sustain them.²⁶ The

²³ Gale A. Yee, “Yin/Yang Is Not Me: An Exploration into an Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics,” in *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian-American Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Mary F. Foskett and Jeffrey K. Kuan (St. Louis: Chalice, 2006), 152–63, here 161–62.

²⁴ Carbado, “Colorblind Intersectionality,” 823–24.

²⁵ Patricia Hill Collins and Valerie Chepp, “Intersectionality,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics*, ed. Georgina Waylen et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 57–87, here 65, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199751457.013.0002>; Hae Yeon Choo and Myra Marx Ferree, “Practicing Intersectionality in Sociological Research: A Critical Analysis of Inclusions, Interactions, and Institutions in the Study of Inequalities,” *Sociological Theory* 28 (2010): 129–49, here 139–42.

²⁶ Angelina E. Castagno coined the term *powerblindness* to refer to the reluctance and avoidance of race, social class, language, gender, sexuality, and other politicized aspects of identity that are linked to power and the distribution of resources in the United States. “The notion of power and the distribution of resources are crucial in that some aspects of identity are minimally (if at

inclusion of both privilege and oppression in intersectionality demands that white members of dominant groups must consider the factors of privilege in their own identity and positionality. Intersectionality applies to *everyone*, not only to members of subordinated and marginalized groups.²⁷ “Addressing underprivilege requires identifying and dismantling overprivilege, within and between groups.”²⁸ This insight is critical in approaching the initial question on inequality in the Bible that I posed at the beginning of this essay: How can the ways in which the rich obtain their wealth generate poverty, as evidenced in the biblical text and today’s world?

III. THE DOMAINS OF POWER

According to Collins, power was basically a taken-for-granted concept in prior sociological analyses. One either had or did not have power. Intersectional sociological investigations, however, have located power relationally and complexly across multiple intersecting categories, such as race, class, and gender, which operate within different domains of social organization.²⁹ Investigating the different interlocking domains of power, Collins developed Crenshaw’s intersectionality with her own theory of “the matrix of domination,” which delineates how these intersecting oppressions are actually organized.³⁰

As its name implies, the *structural* domain of power involves the institutional structures of society in arenas such as the legal, economic, and educational, and how they reproduce the subordination of peoples over time. For ancient Israelite women, it would include the patriarchal family, the state, the priesthood, and the scribal schools, along with the particular economic institutional forms in which these structures were situated (subsistence survival, kinship household, patronage, the [e]states, and tribute exchange).³¹

The *disciplinary* domain of power involves the ideas and practices that characterize and sustain hierarchies, the most obvious of these today are legal systems,

all) linked to one’s access to public goods and power structures. By using the term ‘powerblindness,’ I mean to reference those identity categories that are intimately linked to access and the distribution of power” (“Multicultural Education and the Protection of Whiteness,” *American Journal of Education* 120 [2013]: 101–28, here 108).

²⁷Garry, “Intersectionality, Metaphors,” 829; Sylvia Walby, Jo Armstrong, and Sofia Strid, “Intersectionality: Multiple Inequalities in Social Theory,” *Sociology* 46 (2012): 224–40, here 230.

²⁸May, *Pursuing Intersectionality*, 23; See also Mary E. Hobgood, *Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 2000).

²⁹Collins and Chepp, “Intersectionality,” 8.

³⁰Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 21.

³¹See Roland Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, LAI (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015).

the criminal justice system, and the police and military. As a way of governing that relies on bureaucratic hierarchies and techniques of surveillance, the disciplinary domain *manages* power relations, the goal of which is to create quiet, orderly, docile, and disciplined populations.³² Ancient Israelite society provided its own mechanisms of surveilling its population, particularly through its religious laws that regulated women's behavior.³³ Moreover, in the separate world of Israelite women, women had their own ways to surveil and deal with their own members.³⁴

The *hegemonic* domain consists of the ideas, symbols, and ideologies that shape consciousness. In order to sustain their power, dominant groups produce and disseminate a system of "reasonable" and consistent mindsets that uphold and legitimate their status and leadership.³⁵ These mindsets circulate in families, religious teachings, and community cultures, so much so that they become deeply entrenched and difficult to dislodge. The hegemonic domain has an important function in linking the domains of power. "By manipulating ideology and culture, the hegemonic domain acts as a link between social institutions (structural domain), their organizational practice (disciplinary domain), and the level of everyday social interaction (interpersonal domain)."³⁶ My work on the symbolization of woman as evil, embedded in ideologies of kinship and honor/shame, was an attempt to analyze how this gendered and racialized abstraction was utilized in different socio-political arenas of power at different periods of Israelite history.³⁷

The *interpersonal* domain of power refers to the interactions of people at the day-to-day microlevels of social organization. While the structural domain organizes the macrolevel with the disciplinary domain managing its operations, the interpersonal domain functions through the routine practices of how people habitually treat each other. Because of the pervasiveness of racist or sexist ideologies in the other domains, these ideologies might be so familiar and common that they are undetected in daily interactions.³⁸ At the interpersonal level, individual

³² Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 299–302.

³³ Carolyn Pressler, *The View of Women Found in the Deuteronomistic Family Laws*, BZAW 216 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993); Cynthia Edenburg, "Ideology and Social Context of the Deuteronomistic Women's Sex Laws (Deuteronomy 22:13–29)," *JBL* 128 (2009): 43–60, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25610164>.

³⁴ Gale A. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 36–56.

³⁵ These mindsets have been described as the public transcript. See esp. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 45–69; See also Gale A. Yee, "Recovering Marginalized Groups in Ancient Israel: Methodological Considerations," in *To Break Every Yoke: Essays in Honor of Marvin L. Chaney*, ed. Robert B. Coote and Norman K. Gottwald, SWBA 2/3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007), 15–18.

³⁶ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 302.

³⁷ Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*.

³⁸ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 306–7.

biographies are located in all domains of power, reflecting their interconnections and contradictions, and therefore they vary tremendously.

In sum, then, any particular matrix of domination was organized through four interrelated domains of power: the *structural*, the *disciplinary*, the *hegemonic*, and the *interpersonal*. “Each domain serves a particular purpose. The structural domain organizes oppression, whereas the disciplinary domain manages it. The hegemonic domain justifies oppression, and the interpersonal domain influences everyday lived experience and the individual consciousness that ensues.”³⁹ Depending on one’s social location as a gendered, raced, classed and etcetera’d individual, one must recognize that she could simultaneously be both oppressor and oppressed, powerful and powerless, because of her different and shifting locations in a matrix of domination. In a personal reflection, for example, June Jordan had different experiences of being a raced woman in the United States and then attending a resort serviced by lower-class Afro-Caribbeans in the Bahamas.⁴⁰ Collins maintains that, “once we realize that there are few pure victims or oppressors, and that each one of us derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression that frame our lives, then we will be in a position to see the need for new ways of thought and action.”⁴¹ The simplistic model of oppressors and oppressed does not adequately deal with the complexity of the matrix of domination, which works not only along certain axes—race, gender, class, sexuality—but also through the four interconnected domains of power. Just as oppression is complex, so must resistance aimed at fostering empowerment demonstrate a similar complexity.⁴² This also means that one’s political activism to end oppression depends on the honest acknowledgment and exercise of one’s privilege within and along these axes. Intersectionality thus not only becomes a tool to analyze oppressive domains of power but can provide the means of defying and nullifying them.

IV. APPLICATION

Using 2 Kgs 4:1–7 as a springboard, I would now like to demonstrate an intersectional exploration of widows in ancient Israel by analyzing this marginal population within two of these domains of power. Because men were usually older than their wives when they married, marriages were shorter, and widowhood was

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁴⁰ June Jordan, “Report from the Bahamas,” in McCann and Kim, *Feminist Theory Reader*, 304–12.

⁴¹ Patricia Hill Collins, “Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection,” in *Social Class and Stratification: Classic Statements and Theoretical Debates*, ed. Rhonda F. Levine, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2006), 232.

⁴² Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 308–9.

commonplace.⁴³ I have a particular affinity for widows, because my mother became a widow upon the death of my father, leaving her a single mom with twelve children. I was twenty-four at the time, in the second year of my master's program. My youngest brother was only two years old.

In the 2 Kings narrative, a woman from the wives of Elisha's sons (or company) of prophets (בני הנביאים) appeals to Elisha, because her husband has died, and a creditor of her husband threatens to take her two children as slaves to repay her husband's debt. After learning that she only has a jar of oil in her house, Elisha instructs her to borrow many empty vessels from all her neighbors and begin filling them with the oil. The widow shuts herself and her children inside her house and begins pouring. Her son informs her that there are no more vessels, so she returns to Elisha, who tells her to sell the oil to pay her debts and live on the rest of the proceeds.

Intersectionality is concerned with relations of power, and the ways that systems of power are implicated in the development, organization, and maintenance of social inequalities. So, let us begin at the *interpersonal* domain of power in this story, which deals with the day-to-day interactions between individuals and groups. Unlike Elijah's widow in 1 Kgs 17, who is a foreigner, we do not know the ethnicity of the widow of 2 Kgs 4. We will therefore assume she is Israelite and just focus on gender and class relations here. With respect to gender, the widow in ancient Israel is not a fixed identity. She was not born a widow but was created one by the death of her husband. How she negotiates this transition will depend deeply on the ways in which structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power have intersectedly affected, and continue to impinge upon, her life.

Let us lay out the power configurations of dominance and subordination among these characters just within the interpersonal domain of this little story. We have relations of power between the widow and her now deceased husband, with her two children, with the creditor who wants to confiscate them, with the company of prophets,⁴⁴ with Elisha himself, with her neighbors who donate their vessels, and with the buyers who will purchase her oil and provide enough for her to repay her debt and support her and her children. We have the dead husband's relations with his creditor. A debtor, we know, works for the creditor to pay off his debt, but with the husband's death, his debt adversely affects his wife and children. We have the connections between the husband and the company of prophets to which he belonged, and the husband's relationship with Elisha and with God himself, as

⁴³Marten Stol, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, trans. Helen Richardson and Mervyn Richardson (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 277; Martha T. Roth, "The Neo-Babylonian Widow," *JCS* 43–45 (1991–1993): 1–26, here 4–5.

⁴⁴Wilda Gafney speculates that the wife of the dead man herself may have been a prophetic member of the sons/disciples of the prophet (*Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008], 39–40).

we will soon discover. We have Elisha's relationship with the widow and with his company of prophets. Finally, we have the power dealings of the creditor with the widow's deceased husband and with the widow and her children themselves. Each of these characters has specific locations within the power dynamics of this story.

You will notice that it will be difficult to isolate gender from economic class in this text. You have the widow's own desperate economic position, caused by her husband's death and his debt; his affiliation with the "sons of the prophets," who are usually located by scholars on the lower, distressed rungs of society.⁴⁵ The money-lender himself is male (הַנִּשֵּׂה, *qal* ptc. masc. sg. of נִשֵּׂה II). At least one of the widow's children is male (2 Kgs 4:6), who would be in a position to support her economically later in life but is now able to assist her only in bringing the vessels. The deity whom the dead husband feared is male. The gender of the charitable neighbors is not specified, but one may assume that they are female by the fact that household vessels usually appear in the domain of the female.⁴⁶ We do not know the gender or the economic context of the buyers of the widow's sale of oil.⁴⁷ It is the male prophet Elisha who holds the highest socioeconomic position of power in this text, as the one to whom the widow appeals in her predicament, and who seems to be a patron supporting his clients: the company of prophets.⁴⁸

While the ties connecting male gender and economic status are fluid in this story, it is clear that the widow is disadvantaged with respect to her gender and class within the interpersonal domain of power. Exceptions could perhaps be in her relations with her charitable neighbors and the purchasers of her oil. The widow is able to negotiate the disruptive events of her husband's death and her children's

⁴⁵Roy L. Heller, *The Characters of Elijah and Elisha and the Deuteronomic Evaluation of Prophecy: Miracles and Manipulation*, LHBOTS 671 [London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018], 115; Wesley J. Bergen, *Elisha and the End of Prophetism*, JSOTSup 286 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 57–62; Norman K. Gottwald, "The Plot Structure of Marvel or Problem Resolution Stories in the Elijah-Elisha Narratives and Some Musings on *Sitz Im Leben*," in *The Hebrew Bible in Its Social World and in Ours*, SemeiaSt (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 119–30; Tamis Hoover Rentería, "The Elijah/Elisha Stories: A Socio-Cultural Analysis of Prophets and People in Ninth-Century B.C.E. Israel," in *Elijah and Elisha in Socioliterary Perspective*, ed. Robert B. Coote, SemeiaSt (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 75–126, here 114–16.

⁴⁶Thus Carol L. Meyers, "Guilds and Gatherings: Women's Groups in Ancient Israel," in *Realia Dei: Essays in Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Edward F. Campbell, Jr. at His Retirement*, ed. Prescott H. Williams Jr. and Theodore Hiebert, Scholars Press Homage Series 23 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 154–84, here 175.

⁴⁷Roger S. Nam, *Portrayals of Economic Exchange in the Book of Kings*, BibInt 112 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 16.

⁴⁸Gale A. Yee, "The Elijah and Elisha Narratives: An Economic Investigation," in *Honouring the Past, Looking to the Future: Essays from the 2014 International Congress of Ethnic Chinese Biblical Scholars*, ed. Gale A. Yee and John Y. H. Yieh, Chuen King Lectures Series 12 (Shatin N. T., Hong Kong: Divinity School of Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2016), 21–50, here 40.

near confiscation by recognizing her best hope, namely, appealing to her husband's male economic patron. She does this by cleverly working to her advantage the inequitable relations of the patron/client system⁴⁹ and religious ideologies of her time. To remind Elisha of his responsibilities for her husband as patron, she informs Elisha that her husband, "your servant," has died, and that Elisha *knows* "that your servant feared the Lord." She then galvanizes Elisha's conscience as a "man of God" (4:7) by informing him that a creditor "has come to take my two children as slaves" (4:1). As was previously mentioned, individual biographies vary considerably at the interpersonal domain of power. Because of interconnections with her husband's membership in the company of prophets, the widow is able to secure Elisha's patronage through her rhetorical dexterity. Under his direction, she finds resources among her neighbors, is able to sell her oil, and ultimately resolves her impoverishment and the threat of losing her children.

Not all narratives about widows end positively, however. The widow's story in 2 Kgs 4:1–7 was added primarily to exalt Elisha's wondrous power as Elijah's prophetic successor.⁵⁰ When one moves to the three other domains of power—the structural, disciplinary,⁵¹ and hegemonic⁵²—the social disadvantages of the Israelite widow become more complex and multidimensional. Let us discuss her positionality within the *structural* domains of power. Fortunately, much research has already been done on the structural location of the widow in the institutions of the

⁴⁹Ronald A. Simkins, "Patronage and the Political Economy of Monarchic Israel," *Semeia* 87 (1999): 123–44; Boer, *Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, 105–8; James Scott, "Patronage or Exploitation?," in *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies*, ed. Ernest Gellner and John Waterbury (London: Duckworth, 1977), 21–39.

⁵⁰Steven L. McKenzie, *1 Kings 16–2 Kings 16*, IECOT (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2019), 281–83; Walter Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 319.

⁵¹Regarding the disciplinary domain, see the laws about the widow in Ronald A. Simkins, "The Widow and Orphan in the Political Economy of Ancient Israel," *Journal of Religion and Society* 10 (2014): 20–33; Roy L. Heller, "'The Widow' in Deuteronomy: Beneficiary of Compassion and Co-Option," in *The Impartial God: Essays in Biblical Studies in Honor of Jouette M. Bassler*, ed. Calvin J. Roetzel and Robert L. Foster, New Testament Monographs (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007), 1–11; Harold V. Bennett, *Injustice Made Legal: Deuteronomic Law and the Plight of Widows, Strangers, and Orphans in Ancient Israel*, Bible in Its World (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Mark Sneed, "Israelite Concern for the Alien, Orphan, and Widow: Altruism or Ideology?," *ZAW* 111 (1999): 498–507.

⁵²Regarding the ideologies about widows in the hegemonic domain, see Marjo Buitelaar, "Widows' Worlds: Representations and Realities," in *Between Poverty and the Pyre: Moments in the History of Widowhood*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Lourens van den Bosch (London: Routledge, 1995), 1–18; and, in the same volume, Karel van der Toorn, "The Public Image of the Widow in Ancient Israel," 19–30. See also Karel van der Toorn, "Torn between Vice and Virtue: Stereotypes of the Widow in Israel and Mesopotamia," in *Female Stereotypes in Religious Traditions*, ed. Ria Kloppenborg and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, SHR 66 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 1–13.

patriarchal family in ancient Israel⁵³ and Southwest Asia.⁵⁴ Instead, let us contextualize the widow within the power structures of the Israelite state that is implied in this story. Because 2 Kgs 4:1–7 was set during the time of Elisha, let us for the sake of argument situate the ancient Israelite widow in the socioeconomic conditions during the preexilic monarchy.⁵⁵

During this period, two economic systems conflicted with each other, the allocative subsistence survival and the extractive state.⁵⁶ The state extracted a significant portion of goods from the villages and the agricultural estates, which were then redistributed upward to the rich and powerful of the court, temple, army, and other state institutions.⁵⁷ The royal estates were farmed by tenants or indentured servants, many of whom were debt slaves unable to keep up with tax payments, which forced them to lose their land.⁵⁸ The husband of the widow in 2 Kgs 4:1–7 was probably one of these. Besides the extraction of material goods, state economics would also be based on the extraction of male labor from the villages as farmers for the royal plantations, as workers for the king's building projects, as soldiers for his military campaigns, and other ventures of the court (see 1 Sam 8:11–18).⁵⁹ Along with the natural vagaries of farming, such as drought, blight, and the like, the diversion of labor from the villages to service the royal farms, the king's building ventures, their wars, and so on, put a significant strain on the rural sectors

⁵³ Pnina Galpaz-Feller, "The Widow in the Bible and in Ancient Egypt," *ZAW* 120 (2008): 232–40; Naomi Steinberg, "Romancing the Widow: The Economic Distinctions between the 'Almānā, the 'Iššā-'ālmānā and the 'Ēšet-Hammēt," in *God's Word for Our World*, ed. J. Harold Ellens et al., 2 vols., JSOTSup 388, 389 (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 327–46; Carolyn S. Leeb, "The Widow: Homeless and Post-Menopausal," *BTB* 32 (2002): 160–62; John Rook, "When Is a Widow Not a Widow? Guardianship Provides an Answer," *BTB* 28 (1998): 4–6; Rook, "Making Widows: The Patriarchal Guardian at Work," *BTB* 27 (1997): 10–15; Paula S. Hiebert, "Whence Shall Help Come to Me? The Biblical Widow," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 125–41.

⁵⁴ Stol, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 275–95; Jonathan S. Tenney, *Life at the Bottom of Babylonian Society: Servile Labour at Nippur in the 14th and 13th Centuries BC*, CHANE 51 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 78–79, 90–91; Galpaz-Feller, "Widow in the Bible," 240–50; Hennie J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East*, OtSt 49 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 299–320; Roth, "Neo-Babylonian Widow," 1–26.

⁵⁵ See Rentería, "Elijah/Elisha Stories," 114–15.

⁵⁶ See Boer, *Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, 110–45.

⁵⁷ Regarding the royal estates, see Izabela Jaruzelska, *Amos and the Officialdom in the Kingdom of Israel: The Socio-Economic Position of the Officials in the Light of the Biblical, the Epigraphic and Archaeological Evidence*, *Seria Socjologia* 25 (Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University, 1998), 169–75; see also Yigal Moyal and Avraham Faust, "Jerusalem's Hinterland in the Eighth-Seventh Centuries BCE: Towns, Villages, Farmsteads, and Royal Estates," *PEQ* 147 (2015): 283–98.

⁵⁸ Gregory C. Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, JSOTSup 141 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 142–44.

⁵⁹ Boer, *Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, 118–21; Jaruzelska, *Amos and the Officialdom*, 166–69.

of the nation. This strain intensified when the state had to increase the taxation of the people in order to meet the tribute demands of Assyrian imperialism (2 Kgs 15:19–20, 18:13–16).⁶⁰ The tax collectors and other officials functioning in the disciplinary domain often used coercive and violent means to keep up the extraction.⁶¹

The narratives were usually silent about how women became widows, but we can speculate on the socioeconomic conditions that created and oppressed them during this period. In the case of the foreign widow of 1 Kgs 17, her husband might have died of illness or malnutrition from the famine in the Levant that threatened her son. That particular drought lasted three years (1 Kgs 18:1; cf. Luke 4:25). Although we know that famine can be the result of environmental factors, it is often the result of human political strife, such as war.⁶² The narratives of Elijah and Elisha were full of accounts of Israel's battles with its neighbors, some of which can be confirmed archaeologically.⁶³ Such wars wreaked havoc on Israel's fragile ecosystem, causing famine and starvation, especially when springs of water were stopped, fruitful trees cut down, and the land despoiled (2 Kgs 3:18–19, 25). During these wars, husbands might have perished as soldiers or as victims of the numerous military conflicts that swept through the land (1 Kgs 20; 22; 2 Kgs 6:24–7:20). The cannibal women of 2 Kgs 6:24–30 could very well have been widows who lost their husbands to the siege, famine, and disease of Samaria.

On the other hand, husbands might have died in the *corvée* (unpaid) labor camps of the state. Building the palaces, fortresses, and cities of kings required an enormous investment of male labor in particular (1 Kgs 16:24, 32; 22:39).⁶⁴ According to 1 Kgs 5:13–18, Solomon conscripted thirty thousand men for his building projects, sending them to Lebanon in shifts of ten thousand to cut cedar, spending one month in Lebanon and two months at home.⁶⁵ He also had seventy thousand

⁶⁰Boer, *Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, 146–56.

⁶¹Jaruzelska, *Amos and the Officialdom*, 146–52.

⁶²Carlo Zaccagnini, “War and Famine at Emar,” *Or* 64 (1995): 92–109; Peter Garnsey, “Responses to Food Crisis in the Ancient Mediterranean World,” in *Hunger in History: Food Shortage, Poverty, and Deprivation*, ed. Lucile F. Newman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 1–2.

⁶³Amihai Mazar, “The Divided Monarchy: Comments on Some Archaeological Issues,” in *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel; Invited Lectures Delivered at the Sixth Biennial Colloquium of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism, Detroit, 2005*, by Israel Finkelstein, Amihai Mazar, and Brian B. Schmidt, ABS 17 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 159–80, here 169–74.

⁶⁴Regarding the building projects of the Omrides, see Israel Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom: The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel*, ANEM 5 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 85–105.

⁶⁵J. Alberto Soggin, “Compulsory Labor under David and Solomon,” in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays: Papers Read at the International Symposium for Biblical Studies, Tokyo, 5–7 December, 1979*, ed. Tomoo Ishida (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1982), 259–67; Serge Frolov, “‘They Will Be Yours for Corvée and Serve You’: Forced Labor in the Hebrew Bible, Modern America, and Twentieth-Century Communist States,” in *La Violencia and the Hebrew Bible: The Politics and Histories of Biblical Hermeneutics on the American Continent*,

laborers and eight thousand stonecutters, with three thousand three hundred overseeing their work.

One could infer from the texts that a considerable portion of the male population was diverted from food production to the king's military campaigns and building projects, putting a significant stress on the agrarian basis of Israel's economy. Men's untimely deaths resulting from famine, war, backbreaking labor in foreign lands or in domestic building ventures, and other demands of male state power undoubtedly increased the number of destitute widows in ancient Israel.⁶⁶ Moreover, if the *corvée* labor was composed of ethnically diverse populations in the north who were subjected to discriminatory treatment, the "foreignness" of the widows must be considered in the power relations of the state, along with her gender and class.⁶⁷

The *אלמנה* was a woman who had sunk to the lowest economic level of widows in ancient Israel.⁶⁸ She might have had living male relatives, but they were either too poor to help or unwilling to offer her financial support.⁶⁹ Holding no family plots, she could not subsist off the land. Within the structural domain of male state power, how did the landless *אלמנה* support herself economically? How could the *אלמנה* negotiate the power structures that engendered widowhood and her vulnerable status?

If she was childless, she could return to her paternal kin (cf. Gen 38:11), who really had no legal obligations to support her.⁷⁰ The same is true if she had children. Her parents may not see themselves accountable for the offspring of another man's patriline.⁷¹ An *אלמנה* could beg (Job 22:9, 31:16–17). She could try to remarry⁷² or maybe find a man to live with.⁷³ If it happened to be harvest time, she could go out

ed. Susanne Scholz and Pablo R. Andiñach, *SemeiaSt 82* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 163–84, on Deut 20:10–14 in particular.

⁶⁶ See Zaccagnini, "War and Famine at Emar," 100–101.

⁶⁷ Walter J. Houston, "Corvée in the Kingdom of Israel: Israelites, 'Canaanites,' and Cultural Memory," *JOT* 43 (2018): 29–44.

⁶⁸ Steinberg, "Romancing the Widow," 1–2. The widow of 2 Kgs 4:1–8 would have been designated an *אלמנה אשה*, a widow who has redemption rights in her husband's ancestral estate which she exercises through her son. However, the husband seems to have forfeited his land to his creditor and was trying to pay off his debt. One hopes that the oil that the widow sells not only pays off the debt but secures the land again for her son.

⁶⁹ Regarding the unwillingness of a *levir* to marry the widow of his male relative, see Dvora E. Weisberg, "The Widow of Our Discontent: Levirate Marriage in the Bible and Ancient Israel," *JOT* 28 (2004): 403–29; Ayelet Seidler, "The Law of Levirate and Forced Marriage—Widow vs. Levir in Deuteronomy 25.5–10," *JOT* 42 (2018): 435–56.

⁷⁰ In contrast to a priest's daughter or a divorced woman, who may return to her father's house and eat of her father's food, "as in her youth" (Lev 22:13).

⁷¹ Galpaz-Feller, "Widow in the Bible," 237.

⁷² Cf. Abigail (2 Sam 25:39–42) and Ruth (Ruth 4). If she was a widow of a layman, she was out of luck if she wanted to marry a priest (Lev 21:14).

⁷³ In a Middle Assyrian law book §34: "If a man has taken a widow, but no binding agreement

to glean in the fields, or into the vineyards, or gather from the olive trees (Deut 24:19–21, Lev 19:9–10). Along with the Levites, resident aliens, and orphans, widows were entitled to a tithe of all produce and could eat their fill every three years (Deut 14:28–29, 26:12–15). Even if these laws of the disciplinary domain sought to protect and provide for the widow, they did not address the socioeconomic conditions of the state that created the widow in the first place. The laws sought only to maintain the existing socioeconomic order rather than transform it.⁷⁴ Moreover, what if it was not harvest time or what if the land was going through a drought, plague, or famine, and gleaning in the field was not an option? Or what if the third year of tithe was two years in the offing? Instead of waiting two years, what else could an אֵלְמִנָּה do to feed herself and her children? In the intersectional economics of widowhood, what manner of work was open to her?

I am sure that, for many of you, the world's oldest profession sprang to mind. Prostitution did indeed exist particularly in societies, like ancient Israel's, in which marriage was central and women's premarital chastity and marital fidelity were mandated.⁷⁵ It was a common resort of women in economic straits, normally associated with widowhood or loss of family support, through the death of a responsible male or separation from the household.⁷⁶ Prostitution was thus interconnected with structural conditions of economic and gender inequality, which were reinforced in the hegemonic domain by various ideologies.⁷⁷ When most women were sexually unavailable, the demand by men for extramarital sex was there. "On the supply side, there were destitute vulnerable women—the widows and orphan girls whom rulers traditionally claimed to protect—as well, no doubt, as wives and daughters from impoverished families who saw no other alternative, and dependent women whose parents or owners might earn income from their sale of sexual favors."⁷⁸ Gerhard Lenski included prostitutes in the degraded class of persons in

has been made, and she has lived for two years in his house, then she is his wife. She shall not leave." Cited in Stol, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 290. There is no comparable law in the Hebrew Bible.

⁷⁴ Simkins, "Widow and Orphan," 28–29.

⁷⁵ Phyllis A. Bird, "Prostitution in the Social World and Religious Rhetoric of Ancient Israel," in *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Laura K. McClure, *Wisconsin Studies in Classics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 40–58; Bird, "The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts," *Semeia* 46 (1989): 119–39; Bird, "To Play the Harlot: An Inquiry into an Old Testament Metaphor," in Day, *Gender and Difference*, 75–94.

⁷⁶ Phyllis Bird, "Of Whores and Hounds: A New Interpretation of the Subject of Deuteronomy 23:19," *VT* 65 (2015): 352–64, here 356–57.

⁷⁷ Van der Toorn, "Torn between Vice and Virtue," 1–13.

⁷⁸ Jerrold S. Cooper, "The Job of Sex: The Social and Economic Role of Prostitutes in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *The Role of Women in Work and Society in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Brigitte Lion and Cécile Michel, *Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records* 13 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 209–27, here 210–11.

agrarian societies who had only their bodies to sell and were forced to accept occupations that quickly destroyed them.⁷⁹

Besides prostitution, there were other forms of labor open to the אִלְמָנָה trying to survive in an extractive state and having no recourse to the resources of the kinship household. The administrative records of the palace, temple, and estates in Mesopotamia detailed the numerous jobs and activities of female labor needed to keep the institutions running and the number of rations that kept these women at subsistence level.⁸⁰ Unfortunately, we do not have similar records for ancient Israel. We have only clues in the biblical texts. The prophet Samuel warned the people that a king would seize their sons for his military machine and to farm his estates. Their daughters would staff the royal kitchens as “flavorers,⁸¹ cooks, and bakers” (1 Sam 8:11–13). I have already detailed the backbreaking labor of female grain grinders for these kitchens.⁸² According to Karel van der Toorn, many destitute widows found work in mill houses grinding flour for the Mesopotamian temple and palace, but “life there was hardly pleasant.”⁸³ Commenting on the picture of the large grain-grinding installation at Ebla, Jerrold Cooper remarks that it exhibited one of the most depressing glimpses of the life of ancient women, who spent their days at hard, monotonous labor turning grain into flour.⁸⁴ Although there is no archaeological evidence for them, milling houses may have operated in Judah. Judean prisoners of war were sent to work in such mills in Babylonia (Isa 42:7, Ps 107:10–16, Lam 5:13). Samson was sent to grind in such a prison in Gaza (Judg 16:21).⁸⁵

The temple played a social role in sixth-century Babylonia, where dependent elderly persons could finish out their lives.⁸⁶ Van der Toorn thinks that the

⁷⁹ Gerhard Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 281.

⁸⁰ See the various essays in Lion and Michel, *Role of Women in Work and Society in the Ancient Near East*, and note the thirteen-page Index of Professions and Activities (366–78). Stol, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 339–90; Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 404–37.

⁸¹ See Nathan MacDonald, “Feasting Fit for a King,” in *Not Bread Alone: The Uses of Food in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 134–65, here 164.

⁸² Yee, “He Will Take the Best,” 834–37.

⁸³ Van der Toorn, “Torn between Vice and Virtue,” 3–4; See also Robert K. Englund, “Hard Work—Where Will It Get You? Labor Management in Ur III Mesopotamia,” *JNES* 50 (1991): 270–73; Francis Joannès, “Historiography on Studies Dedicated to Women and Economy during the Neo-Babylonian Period,” in Lion and Michel, *Role of Women in Work and Society in the Ancient Near East*, 459–72, here 466–67.

⁸⁴ Cooper, “Job of Sex,” 210. The picture of the Ebla grinding room can also be viewed in Stol, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 350.

⁸⁵ Jennie R. Ebeling and Yorke M. Rowan, “The Archaeology of the Daily Grind: Ground Stone Tools and Food Production in the Southern Levant,” *NEA* 672 (2004): 108–17, here 109.

⁸⁶ Joannès, “Historiography on Studies Dedicated to Women,” 466; Martha Roth has suggested that widows could be sheltered in a social institution called *bīt mār banī* (Martha T. Roth, “Women in Transition and the *Bīt Mār Banī*,” *RA* 82 (1988): 131–38; Roth, “Neo-Babylonian Widow,” 24–26.

Jerusalem temple could have provided similar shelter for widows. The prophet Anna in Luke 2:36–38 was a widow who supposedly “never left the temple.”⁸⁷ According to 1 Chr 9:28–32, 23:29, Levitical gatekeepers⁸⁸ were responsible for the choice flour (סֶלֶת; cf. 1 Kgs 3:22), flat-cakes (חֲבֵתִים), unleavened bread (מִצּוֹת) and rows of bread (לֶחֶם) for the temple services. As we saw in our discussion of how women become widows, intersectionality involves a creative imagination to recognize how gender, race, class, et cetera are interwoven within the interpersonal and structural domains of power. Imagination can be a critical skill for seeing the possibility of certain experiences even if we cannot know the specificity of them.⁸⁹ Might we then imagine many widows included in the hundreds of women deployed in milling grain into choice flour, and in the kitchens baking the cakes and bread daily used in the Jerusalem temple? Might we then imagine widows with other women grinding grain for bread sold in the city on Baker’s Street (Jer 37:21)? In my speculations, I was able only to touch on three types of labor available for the אֵלְמִנָה—prostitution, grain grinding, and baking. Much more intersectional work still needs to be done on widows and lower-class women in their specificities as they try to survive and live in the extractive state.

V. CONCLUSION

I asserted at the beginning of this address that, because inequality is embedded in intertwined relations of power, intersectionality provided me with the most useful analytical frame to investigate those complex relations of power and the inequities that arise from them. Intersectionality arose in the theorizing of black feminist intellectuals and activists on the multiple oppressions that beset black women’s lives. It argued against single-axis or siloed thinking regarding gender, race, and class and other oppressions by insisting on their interconnections and mutual reinforcements. Intersectionality locates these oppressions within different domains of power: the structural, the disciplinary, the hegemonic, and the interpersonal. It investigates and unmaskes relations of domination and subordination,

⁸⁷ Van der Toorn, “Torn between Vice and Virtue,” 4.

⁸⁸ Regarding the “gaters,” see Marty E. Stevens, *Temples, Tithes, and Taxes: The Temple and the Economic Life of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 71–75.

⁸⁹ See Jacqueline Jones Royster, *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change among African American Women*, Pittsburgh Series in Composition, Literacy, and Culture (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 83–84: “As Erna Brodber, sociologist and novelist from Jamaica, has said: ‘We must imagine the truth until a better truth comes along.’ This strategy for inquiry claims a valuable place for imagination in research and scholarship—imagination as a term for a commitment to making connections and seeing possibility. So defined, imagination functions as a critical skill in questioning a viewpoint, an experience, an event, and so on, and in remaking interpretive frameworks based on that questioning.”

privilege and agency, the ideologies that shape social consciousness, and the ways in which we personally interact with each other.

What I am suggesting for biblical studies is that we think “intersectionally” in our own methodological approaches to the biblical text. Thinking “intersectionally” is an invitation to rethink the main assumptions and paradigms of our field to reveal the interconnections of various forms of power. It encourages us to think beyond the familiar (or perhaps more entrenched) boundaries of biblical studies to expose the diverse power relations of oppression and uncover subjugated voices that were previously invisible or unheard. In trying to comprehend how all forms of subordination are interconnected, Asian American lawyer Mari Matsuda uses a method she calls “ask the other question”:

When I see something that looks racist, I ask, “Where is the patriarchy in this?”
 When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, “Where is the heterosexism in this?”
 When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, “Where are the class interests in this?”
 Working in coalition forces us to look for both the obvious and non-obvious relationships of domination, helping us to realize that no form of subordination ever stands alone.⁹⁰

Asking the other question in our biblical interpretations will assist us in thinking intersectionally. With respect to my analysis of 2 Kgs 4:1–7, I asked the other question: Where was the male power of the state in the economics of widowhood?

An intersectional hermeneutics would interrogate the social locations of the writers and how their gender, ethnicity, class, et cetera shaped their writings, reproducing and disseminating power to preserve the status quo or, as in the case of the prophets, to resist, protest, and denounce it. As a method of interpretation, intersectionality presumes that our own unique social locations, our own distinctive amalgams of gender, race, class, religion, et cetera, influence our readings of texts and our writing. Thinking “intersectionally” compels us to reflect seriously on how these fusions influence why and in what specific ways we study the Bible. It may presume that biblical scholars, like myself, want to move beyond the “academic” study of the Bible to incorporate intersectional thinking as a tool for “justice-oriented” social action and transformation. The Bible has played a major role in legitimating matrices of power across different categories of identity. My own political commitments to help eradicate inequality in our day and the matrices of power that create it compels me to think about the Bible intersectionally. In this endeavor, I invite you to join me.

⁹⁰Mari J. Matsuda, “Beside My Sister, Facing the Enemy: Legal Theory out of Coalition,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1183–92, here 1189.