"You Gotta Have a Con in This Land of Milk and Honey": Exodus, Race, and Liberative Performance in Rap, Hip-Hop, and R&B Music.

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Abstract:

Despite the secular positioning of much rap/hip-hop/R&B music, the book of Exodus has remained a significant cultural reference point for many black and African American artists to connect with their history and heritage in the quest for liberation. Indeed, this historically liberative relationship has been the much-considered subject of recent interdisplinary scholarship between the two texts, with particular emphasis made on the biblically inspired language of such music. Yet there remains little extensive research conducted on the allegorical relationship between those liberative themes of the Exodus text and the narratives of rap/hip-hop/R&B music. In this thesis, therefore, I will acknowledge this relationship under the rubric of critical race and gender theory and do so across four distinct musical case studies: C-Murder's "Lord Help Us" (1999), Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message" (1982), Beyoncé's "Freedom" (2016), and Lauryn Hill's "To Zion" (1998). In each study, I will identify the circumstances of oppression as informed by a patriarchal status quo, which is also coded white in modern American society, before demonstrating how the liberative performances in each text subvert the ideals of their respective genres.

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Acknowledgements

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Finally, to my sweet husband, Tom: thank you for always believing in me, for recognising my drive and determination, and for the endless caffeinated beverages that you have set upon my office desk. I am just as proud of you, as you are of me.

I
An introduction: Exodus within African American Rap, Hip-Hop, and R&B Music

Introduction to the Thesis & Motivations

Amidst the covid-19 lockdowns, the murder of black man George Floyd by white police officer Derick Chauvin in May 2020 sparked a widespread wave of support for the Black Lives Matter (also known as BLM) movement.[1] Enabled by social media, outrage spread across America to the UK and beyond, calling for collective protests and institutional reform against that same violent racism and police brutality that led (and continues to lead) to the unjust death of many black and African American citizens. In a report issued by the movement, the website "BLMGNF [Black Lives Matter, Global Network Foundation] was again looked to as a resource during the summer's protest … The single most active day [of the website] was June 2nd, 2020, with 1.9 million visitors. This is an almost 5,000% increase compared to our most trafficked day in March 2020."[2]

Certainly, it is the hard work of this movement over 2020 to which I owe the initial inspiration behind this thesis, which commenced later that same year. This thesis will draw upon critical race theory to identify the situations of oppression and black liberative practice within rap, hip-hop, and R&B music. Whilst my work will not centralise the BLM movement within these forthcoming chapters, I am motivated by those influencers and activists engaged with "Black Lives Matter" who have highlighted the idleness of white individuals within racial justice action. For too long, many of us have supposed allyship, and yet benefitted from

[1] #BlackLivesMatter movement founded by Opal Tometi, Patrisse Cullors, and Alicia Garza via Twitter 2013, in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman after he shot and killed black man, Trayvon Martin. Data obtained from Ellen E. Jones, "Opal Tometi, Co-Founder of Black Lives Matter: 'I do this because we deserve to live,'" *The Guardian*, September 24, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/sep/24/opal-tometi-co-founder-of-black-lives-matter-i-do-this-because-we-deserve-to-live.

[2] Black Lives Matter, *Black Lives Matter: 2020 Impact Report*, February 2021, p.6, https://blacklivesmatter.com/2020-impact-report/.

the labour of anti-racism educational resources provided by black people without then using our white privilege to amplify those voices. This can be noticed particularly across scholarship, where white scholars who seek to promote liberative practice within a given field may neglect to approach topics of race. Perhaps this is because, in one sense, it feels more comfortable for those scholars to address that which is familiar and that which liberates oneself (for example, white women who write feminist scholarship often neglect to consider the racially marginalised female experience). White scholars may also feel underqualified to talk about such experiences of race, or fear that our contribution may unintentionally speak over those who have the real-lived experiences to qualify their work. This is certainly a predicament to be mindful of, and yet even still our silence—which may stem from our own fears of criticism (popularly known as white-fragility)—is deafening. Black academics, amongst other racial minority academics, have clearly acknowledged "white silence as a form of racism,"[3] and particularly so in reference to "the lack of acknowledgement of the racial inequities that black scholars have endured within the walls of academia."[4] Thus, white scholars should not underestimate the impact of our privilege within academic circles and should refrain from participating in white silence, but also from dominating discourses surrounding race. Instead, Lisa Spanierman and Laura Smith advise that:

> "White individuals can work in solidarity with people of color, but only when they are informed by the insights of people of color. Thus, if White people are going to engage in ally work, they must engage in self-reflexivity to avoid acting in paternalistic or other harmful ways."[5]

[3] Sheena Erete, Yolanda A. Rankin, and Jakita O. Thomas, "I Can't Breathe: Reflections from Black Women in CSCW and HCI," *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 4, (2021): 17.
[4] Erete *et al*, "Reflections," 17.
[5] Lisa B. Spanierman, and Laura Smith, "Roles and Responsibilities of White Allies: Implications for Research, Teaching, and Practice," *The Counseling Psychologist* 45, no. 5 (2017): 612.

With this in mind, I shall now turn to clarify the matter of my thesis further. Concerning the matters of Exodus, race, and rap/hip-hop/R&B (as suggested by my thesis title) this work is considerably interdisciplinary. And whilst the relationships between racial studies and rap/hip-hop/R&B studies are obvious—such music is widely recognised as "black American music,"[6]—my reasons for situating this paper within the discipline of biblical studies also, is motivated by four primary reasons. Firstly, —and quite simply—my academic interests lie within a racialised reception history of the bible. While such interests have often led me to engage with musical case studies from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, this paper will allow me to explore those same interests within the framework of a contemporary musical and racial discourse—an era that I have not yet had the opportunity to study in detail. Secondly, there exists a long historical relationship between black liberative expression and the biblical text of Exodus (a matter that I shall come to shortly), and therefore, my choice disciplines of study are not entirely unrelated. Thirdly, this heavily interdisciplinary approach fulfils a niche area of research within biblical studies. In recent 'religion' scholarship, there has been emphasis placed on the biblical-inspired language of African American music[7] and the relationships between this music and the black church.[8] Within biblical scholarship, however, there has been little extensive research conducted on the *allegorical relationship* between those liberative themes of the Bible and rap/hip-hop/R&B music, and even less

[6] Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 10. I owe much of this thesis's understanding of rap/hip-hop music to this book.
[7] For example: Emmett George Price, *The Black Church and Hip Hop Culture: Toward Bridging the Generational Divide* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012); David L. Moody, *Political Melodies in the Pews?: The Voice of the Black Christian Rapper in the Twenty-First-Century Church* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012); and, Andre E. Johnson, *Urban God Talk: Constructing a Hip Hop Spirituality* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013).
[8] For example, Robert Tinajero, "Hip Hop and Religion: Gangsta Rap's Christian Rhetoric," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 25, no. 3 (2013): 315–332; and, Tope Omoniyi, "Holy Hip-Hop, Language and Social Change," *The Sociology of Language and Religion*, ed. Tope Omoniyi (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2010), 205–234.

research located within Old Testament / Hebrew Bible studies.[9] Finally, coming now to my fourth and final point, I have found that, in spite of this research gap, biblical scholarship is enhanced through its applications of intersectionality.[10] Biblical scholar Gale Yee states how intersectional methodologies may be used to highlight the multifaceted, *intersecting* powers, or "systems of oppression and privilege depending on the various aspects of our identities,"[11] and have therefore, "been recognised as a productive model in a number of disciplinary fields."[12] In the case of biblical studies scholarship, this has been particularly significant in recognising the Hebrew Bible's concern with identity politics, and particularly so when the plot-narrative is located within a situation of exile (which it often is). More specifically, however, within Exodus these approaches to the matter of exile often concern themselves with the matters of gender and race; matters that are very significant to the broader arguments of this thesis, which I shall now attend to.

The Thesis Argument: Structure and Aims

My use of intertextuality will be supported throughout the thesis by the method of allegory, which is polysemous by nature. That is, allegory "purposefully obfuscates the relationship between the symbol and the referent" thus functioning as what Mike Milford calls, "the perfect postmodern rhetorical device [which] allows the audience a stronger sense of freedom of interpretation and meaning." And yet, this allegorical method risks causing confusion,

[9] Perhaps an exception to this is Hanan Beyene, "Surviving Hardship Through Religion: Womanist Theology in Beyoncé's *Lemonade*," *Scientia et Humanitas: A Journal of Student Research* 9 (2019): 9. Even then, this paper is only 12 pages long, and concerns a womanist approach to the book of Genesis and Beyoncé. My research, which has been inspired by Beyene's methodological approach, is broader, seeking to highlighting a variety of gendered lenses and artists. My thesis also concerns the book of Exodus.

[10] "The term *intersectionality* was coined by African American lawyer, Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989… 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." Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 41 (1989): 139–167, in Gale A. Yee, "Thinking Intersectionally: Gender, Race, Class, and the Etceteras of our Discipline," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139, no. 1 (2020): 10–11.

[11] Yee, "Intersectionally," 11.

[12] Yee, "Intersectionally," 11.

insofar as it relies on one's particular definition and approach towards allegory (which, ironically, has various definitions across scholarship). For example, Milford's paper "Neo-Christ: Jesus, *The Matrix*, and Secondary Allegory as a Rhetorical Form"[13] presents three methods of allegory: 1) traditional allegory, 2) postmodern allegory, and 3) secondary allegory. The first, traditional allegory, supposes that "the allegorist provides a singular interpretation other than the literal one that is emphasized through allegorical form … the structure of the allegory funnels the audience's attention to the one intended meaning, a specific ideological referent."[14] By contrast, the second, postmodern allegory, "relies on a variety of symbols and images to relay multiple meanings free of ideological constraint…proving a *direction* that allows the audience to see whatever they chose."[15] And thirdly, Milford defines secondary allegory as:

> When an audience appropriates a text that is structurally a postmodern allegory and interprets it in a traditional fashion, imbuing it with ideological power via a pretext. The rhetorical text is no longer the pre-existing allegory (The Matrix in this case) but is the secondary discussion of it. Secondary allegory, then, is not a symbolic construction, but a symbolic extraction of ideological meaning from a postmodern allegory. Thus, the text is allegorized twice over, once as a postmodern set of images designed to disperse meaning, then as a traditional text with a specific ideological message. The audience then uses the new interpretation to promote their ideological message.[16]

[13] Mike Milford, "Neo-Christ: Jesus, *The Matrix*, and Secondary Allegory as a Rhetorical Form," *Southern Communication Journal* 75, no.1 (2010): 17–34.
[14] Milford, "Allegory," 20.
[15] Milford, "Allegory," 21–22.
[16] Milford, "Allegory," 20.

While my own reception of the rap/hip-hop/R&B texts (as an audience member) is most closely reflected by Milford's observations on secondary allegory, my focus within this thesis is not on audiences *per se*, but rather, the songs as texts and their social/historical contexts. In the context of this thesis, therefore, I will approach examples from the Rap/Hip-Hop/R&B genres as structurally postmodern allegories for African American liberation, with a specific focus on those symbols which evoke the Exodus text. This is significant given how the liberative themes within the Exodus narratives have been understood allegorically by the oppressed African American communities who produced the musical antecedents of modern African American music, rap/hip-hop/R&B, which, in the context of this history, invites audiences to consider the Exodus narratives (a point that I shall elaborate on shortly). I will, however, emphasise here that I do not wish to claim that modern rap/hip-hop/R&B artists intend their songs to allegorise the Exodus text, lest I commit an "intentional fallacy,"[17] that is when audiences "believe that there is some true meaning in a work of art and that we can decipher that meaning if we know the author's intentions when he or she created the work."[18] Rather, I merely wish to demonstrate how those rap/hip-hop/R&B musical texts which raise themes of liberation / oppression via their retelling of the everyday African American experience raise also the historical context of Exodus's use within African American liberational practice. This then allows the musical texts to be interpreted as modern allegories of the Exodus text.

Indeed, the chapters of this thesis will *regularly* draw upon a postmodern approach to allegory, using lenses of gender and race, established by intersectional biblical scholarship, to then interpret the texts, thus establishing clearly the necessary interpretive context towards

[17] Michael Berry, *Listening to Rap: An Introduction* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 36.
[18] Berry, *Rap*, 36.

identifying shared allegories of oppression and liberation within selections of the Exodus text and rap/hip-hop/R&B music.[19] Moreover, it is through this allegorical method I will establish an intersectional interpretative approach to the Exodus text and demonstrate how intersectionality benefits one's subsequent engagement with the liberative performances of rap/hip-hop/R&B music. Simultaneously, this thesis will also demonstrate how the allegorical narratives of rap/hip-hop/R&B may serve to illuminate those liberative/oppressive circumstances within the Exodus text. Often, I will lean into the situations of power and privilege drawing from the intersectional studies of gender *or* race, and then *intersect* them further by drawing the studies together within my argument. Other times, I will make use of that occasional scholarship that already highlights how those fields of race and gender *intersect* with each other. Coming to this argument as a white scholar, however, I will follow the advice of Gale Yee, and resist "colour-blind intersectionality,"[20] that is, one's tendency to neglect the oppressive role of whiteness within liberative intersectional approaches to a given text, which then neglects the "necessity of investigating the privileged as well as the disadvantaged, in order to attend fully to the complex and multifaceted dynamics of inequality."[21] When incorporating gender alongside race as a lens through which to interpret the Bible, therefore, I will not only be mindful of the patriarchal tendencies of the biblical text, but also of the typical androcentric interpretation which favours a *hegemonic male ideal*. In modern western society, this ideal is also coded white. Through this, I will demonstrate the ways by which this white-masculine ideal '*others*' the black body and experience (and black women even more so, since they are not male), and therefore, the dismantling of this ideal—via resistance, subversion, or negotiation—is also a process within black liberative performance.

[19] I will also include a Hebrew translation of the biblical passages used to demonstrate my use of translation and interpretation.
[20] Yee, "Intersectionally," 13.
[21] Yee, "Intersectionally," 13.

Now, of course, I cannot consider the entire Exodus text, nor can I consider the entire field of rap/hip-hop/R&B studies within this thesis—and I'm quite sure that even an entire book would prove no match for such! Therefore, I will structure this thesis around four case studies (divided into four chapters) drawn from the Exodus text with music from the rap, hip-hop, and R&B genres respectively.[22] As already noted, these case studies, and their intertextual relationships, will be observed under the approach of postmodern allegory. In each case study, this thesis will identify thematic similarities, drawing them together under a broader allegory of oppression and liberation faced by the marginalised *other*, whilst also remaining mindful of the differences between the biblical and musical texts. Admittedly, there shall be slight variances within my methodology across each chapter and therefore, I find it important to highlight those distinctions here in addition to introducing the case studies themselves. For example, my first study will investigate the negotiation of masculinity within C-Murder's "Lord Help Us," against Moses' prophetic and subversive body in Exodus 2–4. I will approach this study by establishing an allegory of character between Moses and C-Murder, drawing attention to each character's monologue across the two texts — specifically those which highlight the self-supposed weakness of the characters — and contextualise this under masculinity studies. My second study will concern the matter of socially constructed space within Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message," against the situation of exile within Exodus. I will approach this study by drawing into the descriptive language of "The Message," used by the artists to describe their geographical and social ostracisation from the racially coded and privileged spaces of modern America before allegorizing the impact of this ostracization within the ancient Israelites' situation of oppression and their

[22] Often these genres overlap with one another. I shall expand on this point in the 'limitations' section of this introduction, commencing p.10.

fight against the oppressive (Egyptian) state powers. This study too, will incorporate masculinity studies under its analysis, bringing particular attention to the plight of the ethnically marginalised male. My third study will introduce womanist scholarship to approach the negotiation of masculine space within Beyoncé's "Freedom," track and Miriam's Song of the Sea in Exodus 15. I will approach this study through a womanist approach to Exodus, drawing into the ways through which the women of the narrative challenge the patriarchal text. From here, I will then allegorize the texts' shared themes of patriarchal resistance, demonstrating Beyoncé's track as one that parallels the actions of the Israelite women, by also challenging the androcentric biases of the (rap/hip-hop/R&B) genre. And finally, my fourth study will compare the actions of mothers described within Lauryn Hill's "To Zion," and Exodus 1–2, allegorizing the shared motif of female-autonomy, despite the patriarchal biases towards motherhood held by each respective genre of the texts.

Significantly, I hope that the diversity of these case studies will serve well to highlight the deliberate intersectionality across this thesis's broader arguments, insofar that these chapters will approach varying circumstances of oppression, despite concerning those matters of gender and race equally. I would also like to note here, that while my analysis of a given rap/hip-hop/R&B track will primarily concern the matter of each track's lyricisms, and the allegories, therefore, will originate from that which occurs in the texts of each case study, I shall also incorporate a visual analysis into Beyoncé's "Freedom." The reasons for this are that the singer's *Lemonade* album was widely promoted as a musical movie—although a studio version of the album exists also. Writing on the matter of *Lemonade*, Venus Evans-Winters & Jennifer Esposito suggest that "music, sounds, images and words help us to

construct identities, relationships, perceptions, and the world around us."[23] And therefore, in order to obtain the fullness of "Freedom" I shall observe how these visuals also serve to accommodate the liberative themes within the track lyrics. First, however, I would like to return to address that historical relationship between rap/hip-hop/R&B and the Exodus text, before confronting the potential limitations of this thesis's ambitious and multi-layered undertaking.

Exodus: Tracing the Liberational Language of Rap/Hip-hop/R&B

"Black Lives Matter," the once protest slogan turned political movement, has gained much trajectory in recent history, and particularly so through black social media influencers and celebrities, who have propelled the movement's reach and impact from its founding year in 2013.[24] As Spring-Serenity Duvall & Nicole Heckemeyer write, "when a stratospherically visible star such as Beyoncé tweets even a few times in connection to #BlackLivesMatter, her simple message may reverberate through social media and news media, amplifying the movement significantly."[25] Yet while this celebrity engagement with BLM has received much positive attention from their fans, many have reacted negatively to the (seemingly) sudden politicisation of their *celeb-fave*. The day before Beyoncé was due to perform at the 2016 Superbowl halftime show, the singer released her "Formation," track: a track recognised by the media as a "Black Lives Matter-era allegory."[26] Beyoncé's unapologetic

[23] Venus Evans-Winters and Jennifer Esposito, "Introduction to *Lemonade*: Black Womanhood, Identity, & Sexuality," *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education* 16, no.2 (2017): 3.
[24] For more information about the impact of #BLM through social media, see: Marcia Mundt, Karen Ross, and Charla M. Burnett, "Scaling Social Movements through Social Media: The Case of Black Lives Matter," *Social Media + Society* 4, no. 4 (2018): 1–14.
[25] Spring-Serenity Duvall and Nicole Heckemeyer, "#BlackLivesMatter: Black Celebrity Hashtag Activism and the Discursive Formation of a Social Movement," *Celebrity Studies* 9, no.3 (2018): 391–408. This paper locates the origins of the #BlackLivesMatter movement back to twitter 2012, though does not state its source for this data. Much other work on the matter, including the Black Lives Matter website (https://blacklivesmatter.com/) locate the movement in 2013, and therefore I have done so also.
[26] Jon Caramanica, Wesley Morris, and Jenna Wortham, "Beyoncé in 'Formation': Entertainer, Activist, Both?" *The New York Times*, February 6, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/07/arts/music/beyonce-formation-super-bowl-video.html.

use of African American vernacular English (AAVE), lyrical references to African American culture, and accompanying music video—which referenced police brutality—called into her black American heritage and situated it within the ongoing circumstance of protests against racial oppression. "Formation," took many by surprise, and not necessarily in the best sense of the word.[27] As the Washington Post report:

> One reader commenting on an Entertainment Weekly article said they would never let Beyoncé's music be played in their home again and suggested the singer was "racist." Meanwhile, a Spin.com article hosted on Yahoo Music has already attracted nearly a thousand comments from both fans and detractors debating the singer's role in the national conversation about police violence.[28]

Perhaps such criticisms of the track somewhat originate from perceptions of "Black Lives Matter" as a violent, terrorist organisation.[29] And yet I was much surprised by the shock-reaction of Beyoncé's listeners. While Beyoncé and many other black artists have responded to 'Black Lives Matter' specifically (both across social media platforms and within their practiced art also), the integration of the racialised American, black experience into black art

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[27] Such reactions to "Formation," were so prominent that even Saturday Night Live (SNL) developed a satirical skit on the matter. "The Day Beyoncé Turned Black," comedies the release of "Formation," as doomsday film for white people. Saturday Night Live, "'The Day Beyoncé Turned Black' - SNL," YouTube Video, 3:24, February 14, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ociMBfkDG1w. Most notably, an ominous yet theatrical voice narrates the parodical trailer, "It was the day white people lost their Beyoncé" (1:45–1:49).

[28] Andrea Peterson, "Beyoncé is a Powerful Voice For Black Lives Matter. Some People Hate Her For It," *The Washington Post*, July 10, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2016/07/10/beyonce-is-a-powerful-voice-for-black-lives-matter-some-people-hate-her-for-it/.

[29] For example, the International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers Association faced much backlash when press discovered they had distributed a document that stated lines such as, "Antifa and Black Lives Matter have no intentions to negotiate. These are revolutionary movements whose aims are to overthrow the U.S. government" (p.74). The document also cited a lecture, telling readers "when reading urban guerrilla or terrorist [in the lecture's script], instead think of Antifa or BLM," (p.7). Document linked via the following news article: David Obelcz, "Police Association Manual About Black Lives Matter is Riddled with Falsehoods and Propaganda," *Malcontent News*, January 4, 2021, https://malcontentment.com/police-association-manual-about-black-lives-matter-is-riddled-with-falsehoods-and-propaganda/.

draws into a longstanding tradition of African American catharsis and political critique,[30] one that has origins in biblical reception, and Exodus more specifically. Since the late 18th century, "appropriation[s] of the Exodus saga [have] been an essential part of Black Christianity's literary and socioreligious imagination."[31] The biblical text resonated with those African Americans who, enslaved by hard labour, shared the plight of the ancient Israelites of Exodus.[32] These slaves often expressed their affinity with the ancient Israelites through music, otherwise known as the sorrow songs: "the music of an unhappy people."[33] That is not to say, however, that the lyrics of these songs were entirely negative. In addition to observing themes of suffering, the slaves found solace through the story of an emotive God[34] who, moved by the "groaning" // נאקתם of the Israelites (Exodus 2:24),[35] delivered them from bondage in Egypt.

Yet this rhetorical method of biblical-inspired expression continued, coming out of the antebellum era and through into the civil rights movement.[36] While many of these activists were clergymen or lay Christians, Exodus metaphors were often used for political, and not evangelical reasons. Once again, the Israelites' exodus emerged as powerful metaphor for black liberation and was often used to incite institutional reform against the racialised

[30] Within modern culture, BLM is just one example of the ways through which African American men and women may implement a call for liberation. I would like to emphasise, therefore, that black calls for liberation should not be reduced to those artists who affiliate with BLM alone. Indeed, the demand that "black lives matter" transcends the movement and is shared across the African American experience quite broadly.
[31] Kenyatta R. Gilbert, "The Trek from King to Common: Exodus Imagery and Sermonic Lyricism in the Age of Hip-Hop," *Liturgy* 32, no. 3 (2017): 38.
[32] Scott M. Langston, *Exodus through the Centuries* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 66.
[33] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 2012), chap. xiv, https://www.perlego.com/book/113653/. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic I have been unable to access resources except via Perlego, and, in many cases, resources obtained from Perlego do not offer page numbers. If no page number is indicated in a Perlego resource, I will offer the chapter number in my footnote instead.
[34] Langston, *Exodus*, 66.
[35] All English translations of the Hebrew Bible will be taken from the NRSV, unless otherwise stated.
[36] Sociologist Ron Eyerman identifies this phenomenon as one that originates through cultural memory. That is, a memory which exists across the collective consciousness of a given culture or group and informed by generations who experienced significant or traumatic event. Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

mistreatment of African Americans in the 20th century. For example, forming an allegory of Exodus 19, Martin Luther King's "I've Been to the Mountaintop," sermon followed the tradition of the sorrow songs to address human suffering which he then pairs with "despair with the refusal to relinquish hope."[37] W.E.B. Du Bois even recognised such influences of the sorrow songs (within the language of the civil rights movement) in *Of the Sorrow Songs*, where he described them as "siftings of centuries."[38] That is, "they [the sorrow songs] have travel[ed] across time, affecting and influencing successive generations."[39] Even in contemporary society Du Bois's sentiment rings true, where many secular rap, hip-hop and R&B artists decidedly evoke biblical imagery as a metaphor to represent their circumstance of oppression—thus suggestive of this rhetorical tradition. In this thesis, two case studies do such; "The Message" references a land of milk and money (Exodus 3:8), and "To Zion," references the birth-narrative of Jesus according to Luke's Gospel (Luke 1–2). However, this nod to such historical tradition does not extend necessarily to my other case studies, and nor was it my intention to investigate such as the primary study of this thesis. Rather, I would like to re-emphasise that this rich history of rhetorical tradition should demonstrate why I have chosen to use Exodus as the biblical book discussed in my thesis and not, for example, the book of Genesis. It should also indicate the origins behind the long-standing tradition of liberative practice within African American musical expression, which was first borne out of that desire for liberation from enslavement.

Possible Thesis Limitations

There are two possible limitations that I would like to draw attention to. Firstly, I have paired rap, hip-hop, and R&B as if they are one and the same. While my intentions here are not to

[37] Gilbert, "Exodus Imagery," 40.
[38] Du Bois, *Souls*, chap. xiv.
[39] Joseph Winters, "Contemporary Sorrow Songs: Traces of Mourning, Lament, and Vulnerability in Hip Hop," *African American Review* 46, no. 1 (2013): 11.

dismiss the nuances between each genre, I have found that they overlap in many cases—e.g. rap is its own genre, but it often features as a singing style in hip-hop and R&B also. Throughout this thesis, I will present the terms together, independently, interchangeably, and sometimes I will use just two of the terms, depending on what I feel is most appropriate in a given section. This essay already covers multiple disciplines, and I do not have the space to discuss musicology also—as interesting as that would be. My focus is on the key elements of black liberative practice within those genres (which are contemporary examples of black music).

Secondly, this thesis will be very context heavy due to its interdisciplinary and intersectional approach. Not only will each chapter require context to identify the situation of oppression occurring within the narratives of Exodus and hip-hop, but it will also require some sociological context on the matter of contemporary gendered & racial oppression to explain fully these oppressive situations within each case study. This may pose quite a challenge to the spatial limitations of this thesis. For that reason, I would like to offer my thesis as an *example* of how one may use biblical studies scholarship to reveal the themes of liberation within rap/hip-hop/R&B music, and vice versa.

II
"Lord Help Us": Vulnerability and Masculinity

Introduction

Rapper C-Murder's *Bossalinie* album (1999) certainly earns its "Parental Advisory: Explicit Content" warning label. The cover art boasts a collage of pimp "bling" (a pinstripe suit, a limousine, and diamonds, for example), which prepares listeners for over an hour of sex, drugs, and money references. However, amongst the more explicit tracks titled "Ghetto Boy," "Nasty Chick," and "Gangsta Walk," listeners may well be surprised by a set of heartfelt tunes that appear throughout the album. In these songs, C-Murder subverts hip-hop's masculine expectations and—like the sorrow songs —introduces his audiences to the more vulnerable aspects of black, American life. As if amongst the "groaning" of the ancient Israelites, the track "Lord Help Us" stands out as one these songs. Stylistically, the track is presented as if an open letter to God, wherein C-Murder laments the conditions and suffering of his community, "Our children are hungry, and we can't feed the poor." Since the 1980's (at least), black musical artists have grappled with the worsening social problems of the inner-city black communities. These problems include, but are not limited to, "high unemployment, police brutality, incarceration, inadequate public schools, political apathy, and dysfunctional behaviours that perpetuate [racial] oppression."[1] For further context, in March 1999 (the release date of *Bossalinie*), the unemployment rate of black / African American men, of twenty years and over, was at 6.7%.[2] By comparison, the unemployment rate for white men of the same age sat at a rate of only 3%;[3] that is, an unemployment rate of

[1] James B. Stewart, "Message in the Music: Political Commentary in Black Popular Music from Rhythm and Blues to Early Hip Hop," *The Journal of African American History* 90, no. 3 (2005): 218.
[2] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Unemployment Rate - 20 Yrs. & Over, Black or African American Men* (Household Survey)/LNS14000031, St. Louis, MO: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 1999. Online, fred.st.louisfed.org (accessed March 13, 2021).
[3] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Unemployment Rate - 20 Yrs. & Over, White Men*, Current Population Survey (Household Survey)/LNS14000028, St. Louis, MO: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 1999. Online, fred.st.louisfed.org (accessed March 13, 2021).

less than half of what it was for black / African American men. Admittedly, whether C-Murder was aware of these statistics when he wrote the song is not known. Yet, presumably, he was aware of the current issues facing his community. I propose, therefore, that the cry "Lord please help us" undeniably speaks into these racial inequalities that affected, and continue to affect, black communities. And, in particular, I wish to emphasise how this piece draws attention to the distinct emotional struggles that black men face in a racist and patriarchal society.

Prophetic Bodies and (Re)constructing Masculinity

C-Murder's cry, "Lord Help Us," certainly harks back to those sorrow songs and their calls to the emotive God of the enslaved Israelites. Here, the rapper not only calls upon a God who is moved by the suffering of humanity, but also a God who is capable of bringing forth justice in response to vocalised suffering. Yet in both the narrative contexts of the Exodus story and "Lord Help Us," it is not God alone who is moved by, and responds to, the suffering of a given community. Issuing statements of "prophetic realism,"[4] C-Murder stands as a Moses-like figure—speaking into, and suffering with, the lived realities of his community's suffering. Amongst the rhetoric of a broader social critique, however, the rapper does not shy away from addressing that which causes him suffering as an individual—particularly that which is brought by the pressures of representing a community in need of liberation. Like Moses, who judges himself to be an unfit leader / liberator, "but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" // כי כבד־פה וכבד לשון אנכי (Exodus 4:10), C-Murder expresses his own anxieties to incite change: "Now I don't know if imma make a difference." In each circumstance, our anxious leaders subvert the typical masculine ideals of their genre.

[4] Carey Walsh, "Shout-Outs to the Creator: The use of Biblical Themes in Rap Lyrics," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 25, no. 2 (2013): 232.

Certainly, in the Hebrew Bible, expectations of "domination, virility, and paternity elevate strength, agility and power as bodily ideals."[5] In Exodus 4, however, Moses expresses timidness. Drawing attention to his speech impediment and deficiencies, Moses identifies himself as an *other* against the hegemonic norms of the Hebrew Bible.[6] Self-proclaimed *otherness*, however, does not necessarily render the character of Moses effeminate.[7] For much of Exodus, Moses serves as a hero to the oppressed Israelites. David Clines supports this notion, proposing that in Exodus 32–34 Moses performs as: "(1) The Warrior Male; (2) The Persuasive Male; (3) The Womanless Male; and (4) The Beautiful Male."[8] Yet Clines's observations do not account for the entire characterisation of Moses throughout Exodus, and instead I find that he neglects those passages which pose threat to the masculine Moses as detailed within his paper—such as Exodus 4:10—where Moses otherwise subverts those typically hegemonic norms. Thus, I am more persuaded by those masculinity scholars who acknowledge the "rich variances and negotiations" [9] of masculinity which exist throughout the Hebrew Bible. Of course, while Clines's paper will still prove valuable to establishing a biblical hegemonic-masculine trope within this chapter—a trope that I shall draw further upon later[10]—these standards are certainly not representative of all the masculinities of the ancient text.

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[5] Rhiannon Graybill, "Masculinity, Materiality, and the Body of Moses," *Biblical Interpretation* 23, no. 4 (2015): 522.

[6] For further reading on the Hebrew Bible and masculinity, see David. J. A. Clines, "David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible," *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. David J. A Clines (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 212–43.

[7] Though my argument will be grounded in masculinity studies, I do not implore any notions that effeminacy is a negative trait, nor do I believe that Exodus 4 disallows for effeminate / queer readings of Moses. However, what I do intend, is to draw a parallel between those reconstructions of typically masculine spaces in both the Exodus text and in C-Murder's music.

[8] David J. A. Clines, "Dancing and Shining at Sinai: Playing the Man in Exodus 32–34," *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 54.

[9] Katherine Low, "Space for Women and Men: Masculinity Studies in Feminist Biblical Interpretation," *Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Retrospect. III. Methods*, ed. Susanne Scholz (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2016): 348.

[10] For example, when I suggest masculinity as something subverted, I am referring specifically to subversions of that idealised hegemonic masculinity which Clines outlines in his characterisation of Moses.

One example of these alternative masculinities, I argue, emerges as a result of that *otherness* which Moses professes in a moment of self-supposed vulnerability. Rhiannon Graybill coins the term "Mosaic Masculinity"[11] to suggest that Moses' body, albeit "wounded, open, vulnerable, and non-phallic" is not criticised by the writer of the Exodus text. Instead, Graybill recentres Moses' subversions of the traditional masculine norms and situates them within a biblical trope of prophetic masculinity. Prophetic masculinity according to Graybill's argument, is represented by the prophetic body. This bodily trope renders the host of prophecy as distinct / grotesque / deficient (which, "suggest[s] that prophecy at once depends upon, disturbs, and alters the body of the prophet").[12] Moses' body, with oral disability, indeed supports Graybill's reading of the prophetic body. And while the specifics of the Hebrew narrative are ambiguous—that being, there is no apparent indication as to whether Moses bears a literal deformity (cleft palate), a speech disability (a stutter), or linguistic incompetence—Graybill demonstrates that "what is really at stake here is not the specifics of Moses' condition but rather the more general status of Moses' body as an insufficient body [against the hegemonic norm]."[13] Graybill's argument may (at first) then appear to oppose to Clines's analysis of Moses' masculinity tropes—perhaps by allowing readers to assume that Moses' masculine expressions are *wholly* subversive of the hegemonic ideals (i.e. throughout the whole of Exodus). Yet Graybill is careful not to make such a sweeping claim herself. Indeed, when read as a complement to (or furthering of) Clines's paper, Graybill's Mosaic masculinity does not prevent Moses from performing into typical masculine expectation, and rather, what it highlights instead, is how Moses' masculine expression is somewhat paradoxical. That is, it both *maintains* and *subverts* the typical

[11] Graybill, "Body of Moses," 519.
[12] Graybill, "Body of Moses," 519. On page 527, Graybill also suggests that God can curse potential prophets with bodily disfigurements to convince them of their prophetic calling. Graybill uses the example of Moses' scaled-skin disease.
[13] Graybill, "Body of Moses," 529.

hegemonic tropes of the Hebrew Bible, going with and against the masculine ideal. Mosaic Masculinity is indeed its own distinct construction of masculinity within the Hebrew Bible.

When one then reads Graybill's paper alongside the masculinity studies of rap/hip-hop/R&B, therefore, they will surely discover that Mosaic masculinity (as a unique construction of masculinity within the Exodus narrative) is not unlike the subversive renderings of masculinity in those musical genres. Like the hegemonic standards of the Hebrew Bible, contemporary (racist) masculine ideals influence how rap/hip-hop/R&B artists may choose to express their masculinity. While the narrative features of the genre(s)—which features across rap music particularly—make them seemingly "equipped to represent blackness on an everyday level,"[14] (and thus invite a rendering of the everyday experience) the reality of this expression is regularly challenged by those racialised expectations of black masculinities and popular understandings of black American music as "masculine music."[15] While these standards of masculine music are certainly enforced by those working within the hip-hop/rap/R&B industry, these are only enforced insofar as they are expected by "the white male consumer who accounts for the greatest consumption of hip hop today … [and who also] exemplifies the conditions leading to hypermasculinity in the sense that record companies encourage images from artists that are appealing to customers."[16] Yet even if artists themselves were to attempt to counter this expectation for hypermasculinity by protesting the white consumer and pursuing effeminacy, this act would not liberate black men from white constructions of black gendered identity. Black men are typically caught between accusations of aggression *and* effeminacy, and so they must, according to these stereotypes,

[14] Keven James Rudrow, "'I See Death Around the Corner': Black Manhood and Vulnerability in Me Against the World," *Journal of Black Studies* 50, no. 7 (2019): 636.
[15] Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 118.
[16] Perry, *Prophets*, 126.

be reduced to a people of extremes. Playing into either masculine or feminine stereotypes, therefore, only perpetuates racist ideas of black men, who, like the character of Moses, are judged to sit outside of the masculine norm.

But black men do not just *sit outside of* the hegemonic norm. Rather, they are denied from ever obtaining it. Black men are unable to participate in the hegemonic norm because the standard of masculinity under white patriarchy is also judged by one's whiteness. White cisgender-men constitute the (socially constructed) hegemonic standard or ideals, and masculinity, or maleness, has "come to be…racially codified as white."[17] Under this same ideology, Black men are "relationally [to white men] defined as…feminine, because [they] lack the power of white masculinity."[18] And as such, black men become what Tommy J. Curry refers to as the "man-not;"[19] the "white race's antipodal monstrosity, a sexual threat to the very foundation of white civilization."[20] Here, Curry not only highlights those sexually violent stereotypes which often surround black men— "a savage heterosexualism … insatiable and violent lust by black men for women"[21]—but also refers to the theories surrounding black men's biological and social sexing as "deficient"[22] or *other*. Historically, these stereotypes of black men and their sexual deficiencies can be traced back to the enslavement and Jim Crow eras, whose racist governing imposed strict standards of behaviour to manage / oppress black men's self-expression. Using patriarchal stereotypes of women—those being the traditionally sexist stereotypes of women's tendencies to outbursts and extremities of emotion—"black emotiveness was translated into a description of the

[17] Tommy J. Curry, *The Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2017), 6. https://www.perlego.com/book/2042789/the-mannot-pdf.
[18] Curry, *Man-Not*, 6.
[19] Curry, *Man-Not*, 6.
[20] Curry, *Man-Not*, 6.
[21] Curry, *Man-Not*, 4.
[22] Curry, *Man-Not*, 3.

black 'race' as a 'female' among races."[23] This highly racist and sexist ideology was then used to defend the enslavement of African Americans and simultaneously assert racial dominance over them via theoretical emasculation.

And yet, even in our modern, (and supposedly) 'post racial,' era strict standards of controlled black, male emotional behaviour remain.[24] As consequence, Black men have had to seek new and safe ways to manifest and explore their emotional expression. While the narrative features of rap are indeed subject to those industry standards (of the white consumer), those features, at their core, also offer black men an alternative medium to negotiate their own emotional spaces through lyrical and cathartic expression. Spaces of vulnerability and hypermasculinity are subject to the control and rhetorical choices of the lyricist, who may accommodate (or subvert) these racialised masculine expectations as they please. This control is, in essence, a method of black liberation practice. Thus, while these vulnerable tracks such as "Lord Help Us" may first seem misplaced in *Bossalinie*, I will argue instead that their random occurrences throughout the album actually play into a liberating tradition of hip-hop expression. Like Graybill's observation of the Exodus text, C-Murder does not condemn the matter of vulnerability within "Lord Help Us." Rather, he pairs those expressions of vulnerability with typical masculine-dominant imagery to construct a gendered method of expression that does not adhere entirely to either extremity. Examples of these pairings include: the Bible (as an image of peace) and guns ("why can't I put this gun up and use my Bible for protection,"), crying and blood ("now my eyes bleed when they cry"), and forgiveness and vengeance ("And it's up to us to move on, but in our hearts, we'll

[23] Perry, *Prophets*, 118.
[24] These stereotypes, of course, do not apply to white men. As Jennifer Lynn Stover highlights, white men's "ability to be audibly annoyed at getting a traffic ticket and live is a contemporary marker of a very old strain of white privilege." On the other hand, black men who, if the same situation were to express their frustration, would face criminal charges or worse. Jennifer Lynn Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 3.

never forget"). Intentionally or not, these lyrics bear witness to C-Murder's creation of a new masculine space. By bringing together the conflicting, racist extremities that are attributed to a black man's character (masculinity / femininity, or strength / weakness, and aggression / vulnerability) C-Murder articulates his own experience of suffering as something *other* (masculine-femininity, strong-weakness, and aggressive-vulnerability). Now, listeners should not misunderstand this rhetoric as a means to approach the ideals of a 'balanced' norm of white masculinity, but instead, like Moses' prophetic masculinity, listeners should recognise this lyrical act as a *subversion* of the racist stereotypes of black gendered identity. By pairing together typically masculine imagery and typically feminine imagery, C-Murder does not identify with either extremity in or of itself. Nor does he employ each gendered extremity as means to resolve the other. These lyrics create a gendered space that is unequivocally *other*—one that sits between the typical gender binaries and against the white masculine ideals—and, through its challenging *otherness* is akin to that prophetic masculinity of Moses.

Otherness, Masculinity and Approaching Masculine Power

Invariably, gendered performances interact with patriarchal power structures. Even in this section of my own paper, I have contextualised the rhetoric of C-Murder and Moses within patriarchal ideals of masculinity = strength, and femininity = weakness. Of course, this analytical lens is deliberate given that both "Lord Help Us," and the Exodus text concern men whose narratives construct alternative, masculine identities (rather than feminine identities). In both scenarios, masculinity—regardless of its subversive variations—is the dominant ideal and pursuit of the narrator. For example, Susan E. Haddox's work on Hosea leads her to argue that "feminization [and not masculinity] is the figure often used to symbolise loss of

power in politics, social status, and economic arenas."[25] This sentiment, of course, harks back to my previous discussion of the racist stereotypes of black men's sexual deficiencies, which were gendered feminine in relation to the white, male ideal. Likewise, in modern American society "femiphobia—the fear and disdain of the female,"[26] is ever-prevalent in the urban black music cultures, causing the genre to be labelled as misogynistic and sexist. Even in the case of C-Murder, the masculinity-femininity lyrical pairings are only liberative insofar that femininity (which is identified with weakness) is used to construct a new and subversive *masculine identity*. Indeed, the rapper does not intend to construct a feminine identity, but rather, he pursues that masculinity (albeit subversive) which allows him to obtain the benefits of masculine power in a sexist society. Certainly, this subversion is somewhat problematic insofar as it plays upon the gender power hierarchy which serves to oppress women, and black women even more so.[27] But white listeners should refrain from condemning black men's participation in the masculine-dominant power structures. Imani Perry proposes that, "at times, it is difficult to distinguish between those accusations of sexism in hip hop that are meaningful and insightful and those that simply emerge to engage the gender / racial oppression of black men."[28] Asserting masculinity allows the assertion of masculine power. And subversive masculinity enables those who are typically denied access to the normative masculine power-structures to partake in the privileges of masculine power—which in the case of Moses and C-Murder, brings forth the power to liberate others, as well as themselves, from oppressors.

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[25] Susan E. Haddox, *Metaphor and Masculinity in Hosea* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2012), 88, https://www.perlego.com/book/1993399/.
[26] Michael Eric Dyson, *Holler if you Hear me: Searching for Tupac Shakur* (New York, NY: Basic Civitas Books, 2001), 178.
[27] I will further consider the impacts of explicit sexism within hip-hop masculine expressions on black mothers in chapter IV.
[28] Perry, *Prophets*, 127.

Approaching this power is crucial to the practice of liberation for oppressed men. And yet still, it can be delayed, complicated even, by the *otherness* of men who do not (and cannot) meet the masculine norm. Certainly, "masculinity seems to be a more fragile construct than femininity and thus requires more vigilance and effort to maintain it,"[29] and for Moses and C-Murder, audiences are invited to witness this struggle to negotiate their masculine power. For example, early in the book of Exodus Moses is considered the Egyptian oppressor. This is realised most clearly when he is scorned by the Hebrew fighters who witness his murder of the Egyptian slavedriver, "The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us?" // ויאמר מי שמך לאיש שר ושפט עלינו (Exodus 2:14a).[30] This passage in rich in irony. Here, Moses (a Hebrew himself) has intended to prove his allegiance to the Hebrew people, and as consequence, has been rejected by them. Yet the text is unclear, and we the reader do not know whether the Hebrew men recognise Moses as a fellow Hebrew, an Egyptian, or both! On the one hand, Moses participates in the oppressive Egyptian state (which grants him royal status and state power). On the other, he is born a Hebrew, to a Levite mother, and seeks to act as a liberator on behalf of the oppressed, Israelite community. Either way, Moses' authority is not recognised by either of the enslaved men. It is as if he does not hold masculine status (and power) at all. Clearly then, masculinity is not only dependant on the typical masculine tropes of power but *must* be complemented further by the external acknowledgement of one's masculine authority. If masculine power is not recognised, it bears no power. Perhaps then, this lack of perceived power is what leads one of the Hebrew men to question Moses' violent action: "This Hebrew neither fears Moses [as an Egyptian

[29] Haddox, *Masculinity*, 88.
[30] The Hebrew noun "שר" may also be translated as 'prince.' This translation would imply that the Hebrew man recognised Moses as Egyptian royalty and identified him therefore, with the oppressive state. Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius's Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1857), dccxciv.

authority] nor is he impressed by his action [as a Hebrew liberator]."[31] Realising that he has failed to assert masculine-dominant power (by either / both roles he holds), Moses flees.[32] It is not until later, in Exodus 4, where God grants Moses the virtue of speech through his brother Aaron (Exodus 4:10–17) that he is then able to begin exerting masculine authority over the Israelites, and even Pharoah too.

Alternatively, C-Murder only attempts to reconcile his masculine authority in the penultimate verses of "Lord Help Us" (aforementioned); and not, as Moses did, near the beginnings of his narrative. Here, he raps, "Now I don't wanna lose my freedom, cause I'm this close to making it big // Now I don't know if imma make a difference // But I just wanna be there for my kids." Like Moses, C-Murder realises that his masculinity is compromised by two conflicting areas of his present circumstance: 1) his growing success in the music industry, and 2) his desire to incite change. To the rapper, pursuing one task comes at the cost of the other, and while fighting against the injustices within his community seems to be a path that would bring forth liberation, this suggestion is ultimately framed by doubts of his ability to do so. Certainly, any track listeners concerned with justice, or 'doing the right thing' (so to speak) may initially perceive C-Murder's indecisiveness—and temptation for fame—as problematic. When one usually considers a prophet, they are met with a trope that offers others "a searing critique of social injustice" that "scour[s] conscience."[33] Perhaps then, C-Murder's failure to explicitly condemn this temptation means that momentarily he subverts even prophetic expectation—and not least because hip-hop's ghetto origins, "built on [community] identifications with poverty and black Otherness"[34] appear to contrast against

[31] Richard Anthony Purcell, "Yhwh, Moses, and Pharaoh: Masculine Competition as Rhetoric in the Exodus Narrative," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 44, no. 4 (2020): 542.
[32] Certainly, this act of 'fleeing; only undermines Moses' masculinity further. Instead of asserting masculine dominance over Pharaoh—who wishes "to kill" / להרג (Exodus 2:15) him —Moses cowers.
[33] Walsh, "Biblical Themes," 232.
[34] Perry, *Prophets*, 195.

the more recent hip-hop ideals of the individual of "having 'made it' in a big way."[35] As Dyson writes in 2001 (only two years after the release of "Lord Help Us,"):

> A dominant perception about today's rap superstars among hip-hop's purists, is that they have squandered the franchise by being obsessed with … [amongst other things] platinum jewellery, fine alcohol, [and] premium weed … [and therefore] in the minds of some of its most ardent guardians, it [hip-hop] has lost its soul.[36]

The 'from rags to riches' allegory is an "American dream narrative"[37] that has long permeated the language of hip-hop. And yet the ongoing growth of the rap/hip-hop/R&B industries —and increasing wealth of the genres' successful artists—have meant that this dream has become a lived reality within the genre. Current aesthetics of the rap/hip-hop/R&B genre often mark wealth, popularity, and status through heavy "bling,"[38] and C-Murder's *Bossalinie*, with its glitzy album cover and track themes is no exception. Though this may appear, as Dyson indicates, a shallow and immoral pursuit, rap's obsession with bling holds deeper significance. As Perry responds (to Dyson), fame, wealth, and displays of such "subvert the image of low status associated with black bodies."[39] And status is desirable, therefore, for those black men who, in a racist society have been *othered* as inferiors against white masculinity. Certainly, this is one explanation behind C-Murders bling aesthetics across the *Bossaline* album. In the immediate context of "Lord Help Us," however, this desire for wealth goes beyond the status achieved by musical success. It is more nuanced than that.

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[35] Perry, *Prophets*, 195.
[36] Dyson, *Tupac*, 108, in Perry, *Prophets*, 195.
[37] "Bling" being expensive/designer and ornate accessories—ranging from diamond studded jewellery to designer cars). Crystal Belle, "From Jay-Z to Dead Prez: Examining Representations of Black Masculinity in Mainstream Versus Underground Hip-Hop Music," *Journal of Black Studies* 45, no. 4 (2014): 293.
[38] Walsh "Biblical Themes," 233.
[39] Perry, *Prophets*, 197.

With fame comes fortune, and wealth too can bring a sense of status to those black Americans who have been disproportionately affected by poverty within their communities.[40] Indeed, the chorus of "Lord Help Us" reinforces the lyricist's concerns for poverty, "Our children our hungry, and we can't feed the poor." By identifying hungry children as members of "the poor" who need to be fed, perhaps this later line, "Now I don't wanna lose my freedom, cause I'm this close to making it big…But I just wanna be there for my kids," not only expresses C-Murder's desire to be *present* in the lives of his kids, but also expresses the lyricist's desire to ensure *financial* provision for them via a successful career. This, as I will come to shortly, is significant to the performances of masculinity within the rap genre.

But the moral problems associated with (and concerns for) the accumulation of money and wealth-associated status are not limited to external criticisms of the black musical genres. Money is a common topic of "moral panic"[41] within the genres also—even if it is used for liberative means. Of course, while Perry's point on liberation / elevation of the self and one's family is an understandable desire in the context of racism against black men, the contexts of prophetic tropes and hip-hop would determine that "self-interest, closed off from community…is not a spiritual value."[42] That being, priority of the self's wealth does not account for the others who are unable to liberate themselves from their condition (nor does it pay tribute to the value of a community-centred ideology within hip-hop and prophetic leadership.) It is a self-centred method of liberation. As Walsh writes, "in addition to power, the temptation of money [for the individual] is an ongoing vulnerability for rappers and the culture at large and so a target of prophetic critique."[43] Like C-Murder, many hip-hop and rap artists wrestle with bling culture and often aim fiery prophetic-like censures towards the "the

[40] See chapter III.
[41] Perry, *Prophets*, 191.
[42] Walsh "Biblical Themes," 234.
[43] Walsh "Biblical Themes," 233.

capitalist gorge of the music industry, which itself becomes another kind of cell block for the artist."[44] While C-Murder does not outwardly condemn the temptation to choose a career (which would bring himself, the individual money) over his sense of community justice (as per the prophetic tropes that Walsh establishes), he does not indulge it either. Perhaps this is because, by criticising the industry, C-Murder would not only contradict his desire to emphasise this situation of 'career versus community' as an inescapable *either-or*. But more significantly, in doing so, the rapper would immediately negate any possibility for a successful musical career. Perry addresses the nature of this predicament well. The black male patriarch "lives in a fragile existence, mediated by his own encounters with white male patriarchy."[45] Therefore, there exists for black men "a sense of powerlessness in the face of white masculinity…the fear of being pimped [and dropped] at the hands of wealthy white recording moguls."[46] For C-Murder, being political could threaten his career insofar as it challenges the white male industry giants; and we should not forget the threat that a rapper's involvement in racial politics would also hold for the white male consumers desire to control the rap/hip-hop/R&B artists' image.[47] Indeed, "black artists' admission into the cultural mainstream is conditional."[48] If they desire fame, black men must become the product that is sold (and controlled) by the white-dominated entertainment industry to the white consumer (who controls the artists *and* the industry through what they choose to spend their money on). This, of course, means that black artists must play into sellable (and profitable) tropes, and black bling aesthetics, despite their liberationist undertones, therefore, have the danger of also playing into those white expectations of black male culture (given that the white consumer is unlikely to consider the nuances of the glitzy bling aesthetics). For the white consumer, bling

[44] Walsh "Biblical Themes," 232.
[45] Perry, *Prophets*, 119.
[46] Perry, *Prophets*, 124.
[47] Perry, *Prophets*, 126.
[48] Ellis Cashmore, *The Black Culture Industry* (London: Routledge, 1997), 167.

is eye-candy, and serves as an essential component of the rap artist's costumed black body which has now "come to be viewed as alternative playgrounds for members of the dominant groups."[49] Unsurprisingly, within this profitable caricature of black bodies also enters those stereotypes surrounding black men as a people of extremes. And by indulging those excessive displays of wealth via bling, black men are at risk of playing into such stereotypes.

This overly masculine stereotype allows black men to obtain extreme masses of wealth—the hyper-dominant if you will—on the condition that this wealth is then further used to benefit the white-consumer's expectations of the black performing body. As minstrels to the white consumer, white men exert their powers in the industry to ventriloquise violently patriarchal fantasies through the medium of black men without receiving blame themselves. Throughout this masculinity, therefore, emerges some level of desirability, or as Miles White suggests, a masculine "fetishization of the hip-hop gangster,"[50] which serves the white male consumer primarily. Yet black men are not hailed for these displays of masculinity. Rather, the same white men that puppeteer these violent characteristics, allow black men to be labelled as threats, or as savage thugs who lack control over their masculine primitive instincts and thus are monstrous *others* in the face of polite society. As White continues, "these representations of black masculinity depend upon and perpetuate the imagined violence of black males."[51] Alongside those bling aesthetics, therefore, comes forward images of the violent *thug* or *gangster* also, and more often than not, these images are exploited by black hip-hop artists, who, seeing that this character turns over profit, play into the white fantasies of black men's tendencies to violence and aggression. One such example concerns the financial source of this bling. While the rapper's bling is realistically funded by profit from the music industry,

[49] Miles White, *From Jim Crow to Jay-Z: Race, Rap, and the Performance of Masculinity* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 20.
[50] White, *Performance*, 23.
[51] White, *Performance*, 23.

the white consumer—who chooses to perceive but an imagined character of the black artist—will instead fantasise that the artist's bling and wealth will have been obtained through illegal or violent means (such as coercion or theft.) From this perspective, masculinity within hip-hop, therefore, is tied to those socially constructed "black men who represent "the bad man" or "the trickster"."[52]

Listeners, therefore, should be cautious to remember that despite this blatantly racist characterisation, the appeal of financial and musical success remains an attractive choice for C-Murder. And rather, the white-consumer culture of the rap and hip-hop industry does not deter the artist but complicates his situation further. Of course, no artist would *wish* to participate in the minstrelsy that accommodates their fame, and though exploitation can complicate one's choice to peruse fame, it is likely that in this circumstance, C-Murder sees it as a necessary price to pay for fame—in the same way that pursuing a politically liberative position would come at the cost of his career. The effect of C-Murder's predicament here, therefore, is somewhat paradoxical. While the glorification of black wealth is liberative, it also reflects the ways in which white men project their fantasies of black men. And alternatively, while C-Murder articulates his desire to confront the racial-specific issues that oppress the wider black community, this act holds the potential to stunt any further career progressions for the artist. C-Murder does well, therefore, to emphasise the complicated existence of black men. Each path is equally liberative and equally restrictive, and ideally, each choice would not come at the cost of self-empowerment or liberation. It is clear then, that black men can either participate in the systems that oppress them or be ostracised from them. Perhaps, however, this is just one example of Du Bois' "double consciousness"[53]

[52] Belle, "Black Masculinity," 295.
[53] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 2012), chap.I, https://www.perlego.com/book/113653/.

phenomenon. Du Bois describes this experience as one of black Americans, who experience the conflicting but "ever…two-ness"[54] of their American and black identities. Engaging with Du Bois, Joseph Winters summarises the "double consciousness" experience as one "of being in but not of America…[which, in turn, is both] debilitating and enabling."[55] C-Murder also identifies and presents to his audience the conflicting circumstance of being in but not of America: that is, living in white capitalist America (which offers him a successful and wealthy career), and his blackness (which makes him an oppressed *other* in America and in the American music industry). Through these lyrics, however, the rapper is able to "[tease] out the contradictions and complexities of his existence in the public conversation that is the music."[56] Certainly, the performative element of this song indicates that C-Murder intends to speak to his audience *through* a conversation with God. This open letter to God then, is not only a conversation with God, but C-Murder's method of processing and articulating his experience, perhaps attempting to dominate it even through the power of a divine figure. Of course, the rapper understands his own limits in this situation and clearly, as a result of his predicament, he finds himself in a situation that has rendered him (and others) helpless—hence, "Lord help us." Again, we (the audience) witness C-Murder attempting to negotiate his status as a masculine figure. While this conversation is not necessarily indicative of the rapper attempting to overpower the "Lord," it is certainly a means by which C-Murder attempts to resolve his predicament. Nonetheless, a tension exists, and the audience do not discover whether God will obey the rapper's requests and "help" him. Yes, despite this method of processing, the predicament expressed in "Lord Help Us" remains starkly unresolved. And unlike the Exodus text, where Moses overcomes Pharaoh, neither C-Murder nor the listener approaches a solution to resolving (and dominating) this situation. The

[54] Du Bois, *Souls*, chap.I.
[55] Joseph Winters, "Contemporary Sorrow Songs: Traces of Mourning, Lament, and Vulnerability in Hip Hop," *African American Review* 46, no. 1 (2013): 10.
[56] Perry, *Prophets*, 118.

change that C-Murder wishes to incite in his community cannot come into fruition until he resolves this predicament and gains the power to do so without losing his career or livelihood. This circumstance further highlights then, how the rapper, as a consequence of his blackness and American nationality, is unable to assimilate into (and dominate) both areas of his identity simultaneously. Indeed, that same *otherness* that has enabled the artist to reconstruct his own masculine and emotional space, appears to offer little productive outcome here.

Or at least at first. C-Murder's indecisiveness, "two-ness," and inability to assimilate fully into his blackness and American-ness simultaneously is also a method of liberation. Listeners of the track should not underestimate those liberative and cathartic elements of articulating one's problems. C-Murder considers his predicament and in doing so, pain which "is spoken, [releases itself] from the trapped immediacy of suffering, transform[ing] suffering just as screaming diminishes unbearable pain."[57] More notable, however, is that through this method of catharsis, the rapper indirectly resolves his situation. Listeners here are invited to witness a paradox of simultaneous distress and release, which is only realised when C-Murder defines the predicament itself. While C-Murder is seemingly caught between speaking out against injustice and maintaining his career goals, the rapper manages to perform into both desires through the cathartic moments of this track. Indeed, by complaining about the predicament in and of itself, the rapper indirectly critiques that which causes his predicament—that being, the standards of the music industry, and the troubles of his community—and stands to represent his community, *while* benefitting his career through the release of a track which will generate sales. Moreover, even if this track specifically were not to prove popular, it is

[57] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 117 in Winters, "Sorrow Songs," 11.

complemented (in *Bossalinie*) by a variety of gangsta tracks to satisfy the white consumer. In that sense then, C-Murder is able to weave a political critique within his "Lord Help Us" without *directly* insulting the music industry standards, which could risk his career success. And, simultaneously, he is granted an element of catharsis, which helps relieve the suffering that this very predicament causes. Perhaps rather ironically then, C-Murder, through his weaknesses and *other* masculinity, indirectly dominates his situation—as per the masculine ideal of dominance / power. Arguably, while this resolve does not necessarily render our artist as the ideal, it does show how C-Murder achieves liberation by subverting and playing into the hegemonic norm *simultaneously*. Thus, the artist continues to construct a *subversive* masculine identity, which again, is liberative practice insofar that it grants masculine status and power to black bodies who are typically ostracised from embodying such.

Conclusion

Clearly then, C-Murder is able to express the complexities of his blackness through the rapped and sung lyricisms of "Lord Help Us," where the song's audience is given a glimpse as to how black men may directly and indirectly negotiate the *otherness* they experience as a result of racist constructs of black hyper/hypo-masculinity. Further to this, my analysis on the matter has also demonstrated how those masculinity studies of hip-hop and rap music may be enhanced by those masculinity studies conducted through a gendered analysis of the book of Exodus. Specifically, I have focused on the character of Moses, who stands as an excellent example of masculine subversion and *otherhood* against the hegemonic norms of his genre. And it is unsurprising therefore, that C-Murder, who also stands as a prophetic figure amongst community, shares many tropes with our Exodus protagonist—most notably, I have highlighted those shared tropes of 'two-ness' and vulnerable (subversive) masculinity.

Indeed, Moses, in Exodus 2:10–11 sits between *and* outside of the Hebrew / Egyptian power structure. And, as a condition of his dual heritage, Moses does not fully obtain the power granted to him by either identity. Likewise, it appears at first, that as a condition of his blackness and musical success C-Murder also is unable to exert dominance over his predicament. In each circumstance, powerlessness (specifically lack of masculine power) induces suffering, which then leads each character to lament their powerlessness. In "Lord Help Us," C-Murder supposes that—given his situation as a black man in America, which renders him as deficient against the white-dominant ideal—it is *God* that can grant him the power to resolve his suffering. Yet unlike Moses, who depends on God for his success, listeners will discover that it is through this this very track, that the artist develops a method of liberation and exerts dominance over his situation through the cathartic elements of his track. Therefore, by drawing parallels—and identifying difference—between the situation of Moses and C-Murder, I have demonstrated how reading masculinity in each circumstance allows audiences to identify processes of liberation against (patriarchal) audience expectations and hegemonic constructions of masculinity.

III
"The Message": Exile and Space

Introduction

Considered one of "rap's earliest hits,"[1] Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's[2] *The Message* (1982) has earned legendary status within the rap and hip-hop genres. Even C-Murder's 1999 *Bossalinie* album (track 3, "It's Like a Jungle") plays tribute to the hit over a decade later, sampling the *The Message*'s iconic line, "It's like a jungle sometimes // it makes me wonder how I keep from going under." At the time of its release, *The Message* stood as a stark contrast against the (then) conceptions of the rap genre as an uplifting disco / party-music.[3] When considering the song in his autobiography, Grandmaster Flash reflects, "shit was way too dark, way too edgy, and way too much of a downer. It was the furthest thing from a party rap anyone could imagine."[4] However, as a politically charged piece, the track would necessarily be "a downer."[5] Like the ancient Hebrews of Exodus—as I argue—the rappers identify their situation as one of exile. Trapped in and by their circumstances of social, economic, and educational disadvantages, the track's lyrics claim, "I tried to get away, but I couldn't get far." It is through such lyrics, which describe the rapper's inescapability, that I will identify a rhetoric of suffering through exile, space, and the consequences of exile on the African American psyche. However, as I will demonstrate, the situation of African American exile, and exile occurring via the concept of racial 'space' is complicated. And so, I hope that the reader of this paper will understand the need for this section's lengthy context on the matter given the complexity of how I will define racial exile (in relation to space and

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[1] Anthony Michael Pellegrino and Christopher Dean Lee, *Let the Music Play: Harnessing the Power of Music for History and Social Studies Classrooms* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2014), 64.
[2] While MC Melle Mel and DJ-mix artist Grandmaster Flash have been popularly hailed as the masterminds behind the "The Message," other contributors include: The Kid Creole, Keef Cowboy, Scorpio, and Rahiem.
[3] Loren Kajikawa, *Sounding Race in Rap Songs* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 57, https://www.perlego.com/book/552268/.
[4] Grandmaster Flash and David Ritz, *The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash: My Life, My Beats* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 2008), 157.
[5] Flash, *My Life*, 157.

gender) in the context of a modern American society. Though racial exile is something that effects *men* and *women* insofar as they are both discriminated by a white, patriarchal society, albeit it in different ways, I will place more emphasis on the ways in which exile impacts black men specifically. My most convincing points for doing so originate from the tracks predominantly male-centred experiences. Firstly, although women often feature as victims of oppression across the lyrics, the most dramatic and impactful allegory invites the audience to consider themselves as a young boy who grows up in these circumstances. Through this allegory of one man, the singers then demonstrate how their current, racialised experiences negatively impact all young black men within their community. Secondly, I argue, that the singers, who are all men, invariably speak into their own perspectives as men under exile. This is only emphasised by their use of first-person language, which speaks into their lived experience. And finally, I argue that navigation of geographical space marginalises black men in particular, who are seen as violent and aggressive threats to society (particularly to women, and white women in even more so).

Context: Identifying Institutional Racism as Exile in the Message

Indeed, while the United States abolished the legal practice of slavery in 1865, black Americans have found themselves unable to partake in the same privileges as white citizens. As Edward W. Said argues, "there is a popular but wholly mistaken assumption that to be exiled is to be totally cut off, isolated, hopelessly separated from your place of origin."[6] Rather, exile can be a metaphorical condition wherein members of a society are "divided into insiders and outsiders." Outsiders, "the individual at odds with their society [,] …[are] outsiders and exiles so far as privileges, powers and honors are concerned."[7] Yes, even today,

[6] Edward W. Said, "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals," *Grand Street* no. 47 (1993): 114.
[7] Said, "Exile," 117.

white-patriarchal informed governmental legislation continuously disallows black American citizens the same privileges, powers, and honours that white American citizens (particularly white men) are granted. Otherwise known as institutional racism, examples of this include legislation (or lack thereof) that enables the following: "extracting as much unpaid black labour as possible, limiting as much income and wealth from the black communities as possible, … criminalising black men, accompanied by the repeated violence by whites [directed at black people]."[8] As we are already well aware, racism is also informed by gendered stereotypes about black men and women—more of this will be explored shortly—and thus it is also unsurprising that institutional is enabled by these same stereotypes also.

Yet I am not the first to recognise the impact of institutional racism within rap/hip-hop music. Scholar Mark Anthony Neal, for example, demonstrates how Jay-Z's and Kanye West's *N****s in Paris* (2011) reacts to systemic racism, and defines it as "both a declaration of symbolic exile and a declaration of the metaphoric possibilities of exile."[9] The primary argument of Neal's paper however, argues that West and Jay-Z's track functions as an example of Afropolitanism,[10] and also suggests that the track enables audiences to witness African Americans travel beyond their "community, nation, [and] perhaps a racial status quo."[11] That status quo being, of course, the racial constructions of where black men are expected to be and remain quite literally—black neighbourhoods such as those in Brooklyn and Chicago.[12] Famously, when referencing his track, Kanye asks an interviewer, "Why do

[8] Diane C Emling, *Institutional Racism and Restorative Justice: Oppression and Privilege in America* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), "Conclusion," https://www.perlego.com/book/1601934/institutional-racism-and-restorative-justice-pdf. Unfortunately, I have been unable to provide a page or chapter number for Emling's conclusion. The Perlego digital format of her book has not provided either of these.
[9] Mark Anthony Neal, "N****s in Paris: Hip-Hop in Exile," *Social Identities* 22, no. 2 (2016): 154.
[10] Neal describes Afropolitanism as "the idea of a global Black diaspora that is always and already in flux…[which] remixes the concept of being a 'citizen of the world' (cosmopolitan) as 'Africans of the world." Neal, *Exile*, 151.
[11] Neal, *Exile*, 153.
[12] Neal, *Exile*, 154–155.

you think the song *N*****s in Paris* is called N*****s in Paris? 'Cause, N*****s was in Paris."[13] Admittedly, while this comment was made in the context of discussing Kanye's fashion line, it proves how the travels of black men can make for the significant subject of a rap/hip-hop/R&B track. Moreover, the track's explicit use of the N-word emphasises, that despite being in Paris—a city commonly identified with the white, polite, European bourgeoise—the artists do not compromise their blackness so as to travel outside of their racially constructed (black) spaces. Although the N-word is often used by hip-hop artists to mean "man,"[14] Imani Perry suggests that "in its loud articulation, [it] has presented a large space of social discomfort … it marks a provocative irreverence."[15] In the context of *N*****s in Paris*, this irreverence is intended for a white-audience, who might perceive the term as crass. Even-more-so, however, such re-emphasises Neal's argument concerning the raced designation of geographical spaces. In the track, black men proudly draw upon a language which reveals their blackness within a set geographical space that they (the white audience) have likely predetermined as white. This argument is well supported by the historical designations of 'black versus white' geographical spaces, and hints also at the threat white people feel towards black men's existence in such spaces. As María Lugones writes on the matter:

> Under the imposed gender framework [of colonial modernity] the bourgeois white Europeans were civilised; they were fully human. The hierarchical dichotomy as a mark of the human also became a normative tool to damn the colonized. The

[13] BBC Radio 1, "Kanye West. Zane Lowe. Part 3," YouTube Video, 7:19–7:25, April 30, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PED4zgjG3Ng.
[14] Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 142.
[15] Perry, *Prophets*, 143.

> behavior of the colonized and their personalities/souls were judged as bestial and thus non-gendered, promiscuous, sexual and sinful.[16]

Expectations surrounding that existence of white geographical spaces, of which black men are not permitted to enter, represent a fear of the *other.* And for black men specifically, I argue that this fear originates from historical stereotypes of their violent nature.[17] This stereotype has long been propelled by the image of the vulnerable white woman, who is also the assumed victim of the black male's "primal sexual lust."[18] Indeed, even in contemporary society, black men, who are generally labelled thugs, are also stereotyped as violently over-sexual.[19] This sentiment, lies deep in the American psyche,[20] and explains further, why black men *in particular* are decidedly unwelcome in white (read safe) spaces. Like Pharoah's fears of the Hebrew boys' potential for violent uprising (Exodus 1:10) therefore, modern (and historical) western society holds a fear of the foreign *other*, who, unless otherwise controlled, is labelled a physical threat to those who function within 'normal' society.

While *N*****s in Paris* is not the focal point of my analysis, I intend to employ that analysis from Neal's work on the matter of geographical space to my study of "The Message" track. I will also, however, draw inspiration from Neal's paper which emphasises Said's notions of exile as a metaphorical space. Indeed, Neal demonstrates how spaces of racial exile are also

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[16] María Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 743, in Tommy J. Curry, *The Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2017), 6. https://www.perlego.com/book/2042789/the-mannot-pdf.

[17] I have already explored these stereotypes in chapter II.

[18] Curry, *Man-Not*, 53. One may also recall here the unjust death of 14-year-old Emmett Till, who was lynched after he was falsely accused of flirting with white woman, Carolyn Bryant.

[19] Of course, I am not trying to suggest that black men do not commit awful crimes against women—rather, any man or woman, of any race is capable of such. What I would like to draw attention to instead, however, is that stereotype that enables white society to view black men as bigger threats to white women than white men, for example.

[20] Charles R. Lawrence, "The Message of the Verdict: A Three-Act Morality Play Starring Clarence Thomas, Willie Smith, and Mike Tyson," *Black Men on Race, Gender, and Sexuality: A Critical Reader*, ed. Devon W. Carbado (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1999), 213.

informed by racial bias and discrimination. That is, white people are able to travel because they—who benefit from institutional racism—assume the privilege of dominating space. Black people, on the other hand, have spaces that they are boxed into through legislation which fosters socio-economic disadvantages and prevents their escape. These spaces exist outside of whiteness and white privilege. While I will elaborate on the concept of "space" later in this essay, I find it important to emphasise that exile, in this context, is closely intertwined with *otherness*. As I have demonstrated in my analysis of "Lord Help Us," *otherness* does not always cause wholly negative circumstances, and in fact, *otherness*, when reconstructed as a liberating identity can be self-employed as means to liberate black men from their racialised and gendered stereotypes. However, white readers should be equally careful to realise that *otherness* is only empowering when it is *self-attributed* or, when it is used for the means of liberation. When *otherness* is enforced, it is oppressive. And that is how I will continue to define exile here, as the deliberate and oppressive enforcement of *otherness*.

Black people are systemically ostracised from accessing the same resources as their fellow white citizens. Moving from and beyond those designated racial spaces, therefore, is liberational practice, insofar that remaining in them (not of one's own free will) is oppressive and enables stereotypes of black people, by reducing them to a given space and gendered stereotype within that space also. Rapper Chuck D (Carlton D. Ridenhour) summarises the matter of systemic oppression well via his "Plantation Theory."[21] Chuck structures his theory around *communities*, which he defines as "an environment that has control over the three E's: education, economics and enforcement."[22] Black people, who are disadvantaged by state

[21] Chuck D, *Fight the Power*, (Edinburgh: Payback Press, 1997), 31.
[22] Chuck D, *Power*, 31.

legislation, "don't really have communities; [but] clusters of plantations."[23] While some of the black middle-class were able to escape these "plantations," governmental cuts to federally funded antipoverty programmes only increased the class divide between those poorer black neighbours.[24] For example, in 1982, the number of black families living in poverty increased from 32.4% to 35.7%, which was "about three times the figure for impoverished whites."[25] *The Message*, however, approaches exile not by escaping or subverting it, but by confronting it. And, while it certainly was not the first conscious-rap song—despite its fame as an early-era rap track—its significant popularity "helped transform rap as a whole into a powerful vehicle for the description of particular urban conditions of existence."[26]

A Land of Milk and Honey?: Exodus and Exile

Like Exodus, the plot of *The Message* is centred around a critique of the exilic state powers. In both instances, audiences are offered "a criticism of the dominant host culture from the perspective of those who live on its margins, neither completely outside of it nor fully participating in its blessings."[27] God commands Moses to "tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his land" // ידבר אל פרעה ושלח את בני ישראל מארצו (Exodus 7:2). And Pharaoh (who represents state power), is the point of contact for Moses to negotiate the Israelites' liberation. While the MC's of *The Message* do not confront the governmental powers in their track quite so boldly, the track's censure is directed at socioeconomic factors enabled by an apparent lack of government welfare interventions. Recorded and released under the Reagan

[23] Chuck D, *Power*, 31.
[24] For specific details on the cuts made during the Reagan administration, please refer to James B. Stewart, "Message in the Music: Political Commentary in Black Popular Music from Rhythm and Blues to Early Hip Hop," *The Journal of African American History* 90, no. 3 (2005): 217–219.
[25] Steven F. Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America since 1941* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 210.
[26] Murray Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 89.
[27] Tchavdar S. Hadjiev, ""I have Become a Stranger in a Foreign Land": Reading the Exodus Narrative as the Villain," *Biblical Interpretation* 26, no.5 (2018): 517.

administration, *The Message* served as an unapologetic critique of the governmental legislation which disproportionality affected the worsening conditions of America's black inner-city communities. Problems of inadequate housing, education, addiction, and unemployment are all confronted by the track-lyrics, leading the rappers to warn their audience, "[you] gotta have a con in this land of milk and honey."

Bringing in the rhetoric of Exodus, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five invite their listeners to consider the conditions of *The Message* against the conditions of the ancient Israelites. In the biblical context of the phrase, God promises Moses "a land flowing with milk and honey" // ארץ זבת חלב ודבש (Exodus 3:8). When interpreted metaphorically, the phrase "land of milk and honey" describes the prosperous land of which the ancient Hebrews are promised to inhabit. In contrast, *The Message* situates "milk and honey," within layers of contextual irony. Far removed from the paradisical land described in Exodus, the biblical phrase is set against images of "broken glass everywhere" and "rats in the front room, roaches in the back." It is almost as if the lyricists use the term to show that, unlike the Israelites, African American communities have not yet enjoyed full liberation from their oppression. And perhaps even, it is those conditions of uncleanliness that foster the track's sense of 'every man for themselves.' Certainly, the members of this community, by "pissing on the stairs," demonstrate that they "just don't care" for public hygiene or how their actions may affect or indeed, offend others. The artists, therefore, are faced with a community whose inability to care for itself reflects its struggles. However, while situations of exile do not necessarily imply that the place of exile itself is a negative environment, I concur with Janet Hoskins when she suggests that "exile is a loaded word."[28] In her reading of Exodus against

[28] Janet Alison Hoskins, "What is a Refugee Religion? Exile, Exodus, and Emigration in the Vietnamese Diaspora," *Building Noah's Ark for Migrants, Refugees, and Religious Communities*, eds. Alexander Horstmann and Jin-Heon Jung (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 23.

the Vietnamese diaspora, she argues that exile—which may be, as in *The Message* and Exodus, "imposed by political circumstances"[29]— rouses "the idea of expulsion and suffering."[30] Generally, exile is not a positive circumstance, and it is particularly negative for the exiled person(s). To achieve any chance of escape from suffering, and / or any chance of entering "a land and milk of honey," therefore, the subjects of *The Message* "gotta have a con," a means through which to obtain money. Indeed, black men faced, and continue to face distinct socioeconomic disadvantages. Those same gendered and violent stereotypes surrounding black men, which have made them unwelcome in white-designated spaces, have also impacted black men's employability and success within paid work opportunities. As Tommy J. Curry writes:

> Black men are often associated with such negative stereotypes that any assertive act of speech or demonstration of leadership is thought to be threatening. In these (professional executive) environments, Black men are penalised for exhibiting agentic characteristics (assertiveness, self-confidence, conviction), while black women are not.[31]

A "con" therefore, albeit a vague term, may suggest that, due to the limited work opportunities available for black men, financial income must be obtained by illegitimate means. On the one hand, "con" could suggest a conviction. In this case, the rappers may be using the term ironically—just as they did with "land of milk and honey"—to make light of that stereotype around black men's tendencies towards violent nature, which is the very reason that they are (also ironically) unable to find work. On the other hand, this "con" may

[29] Hoskins, "Diaspora," 23.
[30] Hoskins, "Diaspora," 23.
[31] Curry, *Man-Not*, 108.

also imply the reason for that conviction and suggest further that black men must work as con-artists, cheats, tricksters even, to exploit money from those unsuspecting victims.

Certainly, in the context of the 1980's, audiences would receive these lyrics against the background of an ongoing economic crisis. Much of America's economy suffered greatly from the 1980's recession, which occurred in the earlier part of the decade. In an attempt to resolve the country's economic crisis, President Ronald Reagan issued legislation to motivate work (and wealth) of the *individual*.[32] Unlike many of the presidencies held before him, Reagan believed that the "ills of the 1970's," which contributed to the 1980's recession, were grounded on "the ills of over-government."[33] Reagan's legislation, therefore, reduced government spending and size, which the presidency hoped would better the free market economy.[34] However, as stated earlier in this chapter, black communities were particularly disadvantaged by federal cuts to those much-needed antipoverty programmes, and it became considerably more difficult for these communities to jump—as Reagan famously did—from rags to riches. Moreover, the negative impacts of Reagan's social policy initiatives were long-lasting. By creating and sustaining poverty in many black communities, these initiatives harmed many black Americans for the years to follow his presidency.[35] Accumulating individual wealth would be difficult for those who existed in a state of poverty and unemployment already, but it would be essentially impossible to do so with little to no financial aid. As Melle Mel raps, "Got no money to move out, I guess I got no choice." Implicitly, this line suggests that wealth brings freedom from exile, and in doing so, the

[32] Michael C. Kimmage, "The Politics of the American Dream, 1980–2008," *The American Dream in the 21st Century*, eds. Sandra L. Hanson and John Kenneth White (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2011), 33.
[33] Kimmage, "Politics," 32–33.
[34] Kimmage, "Politics," 32–33. Of course, while this summary is reductive, I find it a sufficient overview of the economic environment intended by the Reagan administration. And, even more so, I find it a sufficient summary for the purposes of realising exile motifs within *The Message*.
[35] Otis B. Grant, "President Ronald Reagan and the African-American Community: Harmful Stereotyping and Games of Choice in Market-Oriented Policy Reform," *Thomas M. Cooley Law Review* 25, no. 1 (2008): 90.

rapper emphasises the situation of his exile as one brought on by economic hardship. Economic hardship, however, is realised most explicitly as a geographical restraint where the themes are juxtaposed in the line "I tried to get away, but I couldn't get far // Cause a man with a tow truck repossessed my car." Here, repossessing a car prevents the rapper's ability to travel out from exile, yet it is the situation of economic hardship that causes the repossession of his car (preventing travel) and financial hardship (preventing relocating, e.g., putting a deposit on a new home).

It appears then, that the "land of milk and honey" is only accessible to those who make money from their "con." And this land cannot, therefore, be a truly liberating or positive experience, insofar as it demands and enables the oppression or sacrifice of others. Here, the biblical story surrounding God's promise for a "Land of Milk and Honey" is simultaneously played into and subverted. While the use of the Exodus text in *The Message* emphasises the track's motif of exile, it does not go beyond that point. Rather, liberation is reserved only for the oppressors: the racially privileged and the "con[s]," who may even be one of the same. When considering the track as a whole, however, *The Message* (despite being an otherwise hopeless song) offers a glimmer of hope for the black community at hand. By describing their circumstance, the lyricists bring the situation of ghetto life up and out from the ghettos and into the public eye. And in doing so, they, like the track *N*****s in Paris*, go beyond those spaces that black men are expected to remain (specifically, remain silent, undemanding, and unaggressive). Here, racial spaces and the motif of exile go hand in hand, meaning that when racial spaces and expectations are disrupted—as they are here—so too is the general motif of exile challenged. Joseph Winters's analysis of the track suggests that "if a constraint can denote a limit, then the group [Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five] plays with the notion

of a limit or edge."[36] This statement is, of course, made in reference to the hook "don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge." And via this understanding, the "edge" is the boundary between black and white *spaces*.

Admittedly, for the sake of situating my argument in its historical context, I have not yet considered in much detail how white people are viewed in relationship to *The Message's* motif of exile. And, while discussing Neal's analysis of *N*****s in Paris*, I have only briefly mentioned space (and the dominance of it) as privilege. I intend, therefore, to dedicate more attention to the matter here, and prove how *The Message* intertwines Said's metaphorical space with the geographical space of black neighbourhoods. I will begin, of course, by identifying whiteness as an oppressive force within the context of *The Message* to prove that the situation of exilic oppression is not solely enforced by the governmental powers (which was the Reagan administration for the lyricists of the track). While *The Message* lends its censure to socio-economic factors—which are primarily managed by governmental powers—white people have undeniably had (and continue to have) an impact on the systemic racism that exists within modern society (e.g., by voting for governments that disadvantage black people). Therefore, I would encourage white readers to follow the work of Tchavdar S. Hadjiev. His interpretation of Exodus encourages white readers to adopt a strategy which directs them to recognise their affiliations with the oppressive state. That is, white people (who benefit from white privilege), should recognise that "the characters of the Exodus story whose situation is closest to ours [white people's] are the villains, the Egyptians."[37] However, by approaching white people as the Egyptians without any further context, there is a danger here of reducing my argument to simplistic ideas of white space and people (oppressive) vs

[36] Joseph Winters, "Contemporary Sorrow Songs: Traces of Mourning, Lament, and Vulnerability in Hip Hop," *African American Review* 46, no. 1 (2013): 14.
[37] Hadjiev, "Narrative," 516.

black space and people (oppressed) without realising the complexities of space as privilege. And it is important, therefore, to also clarify how I am defining 'white' and 'whiteness' via an ideology of privilege.

White privilege is a complex phrase and may take many implicit and explicit forms. White privilege is not consistent, even among white people. Many American citizens whom, while they are not African Americans or black, are ethnic minorities and thus disadvantaged by systemic racism. This includes those who, to a modern reader, may even appear white in complexion. Philosophy scholar, Shannon Sullivan notes, "many ethnicities that today are thought of as white have not always been so."[38] And, "ethnic groups such as the Irish, the Italians, the Greeks, the Poles, and the Jews were often considered black, or 'off-white,' in the United States until well into the twentieth century."[39] While these minorities are *generally* not who I encompass under my rhetoric of whiteness as oppressive, white privilege is *generally* measured by the colour of one's skin. Those who have a lighter skin colour, therefore, *generally* have more white privilege than those with darker complexions, even if they do not receive the same institutional and societal privilege as those white, Caucasian Americans.[40] In the same way that then, one may argue that the masculine ideals also contained within white-patriarchal privilege disadvantage LGBTQ+ or effeminate men, and yet still allows those men to hold patriarchal privilege above women comparatively. This is certainly more complicated, however, when we consider the black male, who also faces oppression from the white woman. As I have indicated earlier in this chapter, the white woman is viewed by white patriarchy as a powerless victim against the oversexed black male.

[38] Shannon Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 3.
[39] Sullivan, *Whiteness*, 3.
[40] For a deeper discussion on the complexities of White privilege—in relation to class, gender, race, etc.—see Shannon Sullivan, *White Privilege*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019.

This, however, also allows her to partake in controlling the white designation of geographical space, insofar as her own ideas of vulnerability—informed by racialised stereotypes—against the black male causes her to fear him. Through this fear, she too sides with that white patriarchy that prevents the black male from entering those white spaces that she now deems 'safe' in his absence.

Returning to the notion of space specifically, I would like to highlight that black bodies—amongst other things, including gender—are raced. And people have space because they have bodies that consume and take up space. Within the context of racial exile, therefore, this can define what space or spaces you own and, as Sullivan writes, "in the United States…human beings embody particular kinds of spaces because of the racing of bodies."[41] Certainly, space, at least geographically, is a central theme within the Exodus narratives. In fact, the situation of exile necessitates spaces of oppressed and oppressor. While I will not necessarily employ R.S. Wafula's analysis in great length here, their postcolonial reading of Exodus highlights how the dominance of space is an assumptive act of entitlement to that space. Reflecting on the acts of European colonialists, they write, "blocks borrowed from the Exodus story included the idea that European colonialists…like the Israelites…[felt] authorised to travel far and wide and possess whatever geopolitical areas on which they set their feet."[42] Of course, this oppressive reading of the Exodus narrative is why reading strategies such as Hadjiev's are so important. In the context of *The Message*, however, readers may have already noted where I have suggested that white privilege is reflected in dominance of space and / or place. And it is important to clarify to readers *why* whiteness assumes space, so that readers may further understand African American exile here in *The Message*, as one that is

[41] Sullivan, *Whiteness*, 179.
[42] R. S. Wafula, "The Exodus Story as a Foundation of the God of the 'Fathers,'" *Postcolonial Commentary and the Old Testament*, ed. Hemchand Gossai (London: T&T Clark, 2019), chap. 3, www.perlego.com/book/859083.

racially informed. In some of my thesis so far, I have commented on the history of slavery and the ideals of whiteness that have arisen from that. And it would be ignorant to neglect the deliberate, conscious racism that white people have used (and continue to use) as a tool of exerting dominance over black people. Sullivan, however, goes further, and locates white privilege (and the dominance of space) in Du Bois' writing on the "unconscious"[43] habits of white people. Here, she defines habit as a "subconscious predisposition to transact with… physical, social, political, and natural worlds in particular ways." Consequently, in a racist society, "white privileged ignorance"[44] (or habit) allows white people to "freely transact beyond their immediately inhabited spaces. The whiteness of their space is expansive and enables, rather than inhibits, their transactions."[45] Black people, on the other hand (and particularly men who are supposed a threat), "need documented reasons for excursing into neighbourhoods where they do not live, for venturing beyond the bounds of the zones to which they are supposedly confined."[46]

Being "close to the edge" then, invites listeners to consider the track itself as boundary breaking. That is (metaphorically speaking), it brings the scenario of exile out from a black geographical space and, by moving out from this black space moves the situation of exile into a white space. In doing so, it challenges those sentiments of racial exile, purely by existing beyond its 'place.' Now, one could argue, that *The Message*, which negotiates and challenges these racial spaces, sits in a neutral space. However, to assume that neutral spaces exist is an extremely privileged understanding of space, and neglects to consider how black people (in a racist society) may feel unsafe when travelling beyond their designated spaces. It "tends to

[43] W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Souls of White Folk (1920)," in *W.E.B. Du Bois: Selections From his Writings*, ed. Bob Blaisdell (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2014).
[44] Sullivan, *Whiteness*, 23.
[45] Sullivan, *Whiteness*, 18.
[46] Patricia J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 68.

create the tunnel vision of white solipsism, an allegedly contextless perspective that sees race as insignificant in matters of existence or experience."[47] Indeed, the lyricists talk about being "close" to the edge, and, given that they have no desire to be pushed over it, this edge is a place of fear. Until black people do not have their space determined by their race and that gendering of their race, their presence in patriarchal white spaces will always mean that they are considered *others*. Alternatively, white citizens benefit from being white members of a society that statistically disadvantages African Americans—as readers will gather from my analysis of Reaganism—and consequently offers whiteness an advantage over black people. By distinguishing the situation of oppressor and oppressed / white and black / welcomed and *other*, audiences of *The Message* should notice that privilege, otherness, and space, go hand in hand to inform one another. And they should also be able now, to distinguish the situations of exile-r from the exile-d. Or, alternatively, those who are able to participate in the land of milk and honey, and those who are prevented from doing so.

Battling Exile: Passion and Insanity

But this negation of space does not come without its consequences, and the track's chorus, does well to emphasise the narrator's ongoing fear of "going under." Followed by the hook, "Don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge // I'm just trying not to lose my head," *The Message* invites audiences to consider the traumatic effects of racial *otherness* / exile on the African American psyche by threatening that the lyricist might do something drastic to harm themselves (or, indeed others). The lyricist is also close to the *mental* edge. That is, the limit of their capabilities to continue coping with the inescapable nature of their condition. This rendering of the chorus is made explicit by the final lines of the track's third verse, "Sometimes I think I'm going insane // I swear I might hijack a plane." And against an

[47] Sullivan, *Whiteness*, 171.

upbeat, musical background this line is particularly unsettling. Here, audiences are presented with a threat, and the music does not seem to convey the severity of the threatened action. Rather, the threat of a plane hijacking is seemingly passé, despite being a threat that modern, American audiences would not take lightly. Again, it is quite likely that here, that audience are exposed to yet more irony. That is, the violent stereotypes surrounding black men (which have contributed to this socioeconomic situation also) are now a threatened reality. It is almost as if the rappers sarcastically tease, "but why not? Would anyone surprised that a black man is doing this violent act?"

Moreover, the tension that this line creates does not stray too far from what the track has already been doing until this point. From the beginning of *The Message*, scenes of deprivation have been framed by this same beat. Even the chorus—which details the lyricists deteriorating mental health—is followed by a breathy crescendo, "uh-huh-huh-huh-huh." Winters describes the phrase as a "distorted kind of laughter … a laugh tinged with irony and sarcasm."[48] Like the track's upbeat music, there is nothing of the lyrics to incite laughter in the average person (which is typically expressed in moments of joy.) And when set against a chorus of mental suffering, therefore, laughter in the absence of joy indulges the tropes of a madman. Descending into madness, however, is not too surprising given the unfavourable conditions of the rappers' circumstance. And similarly, this line that threatens a plane hijacking is shocking yet unsurprising. The conditions of the lyricist's environment are so poor that they are having a detrimental effect on his mental health, causing him to threaten drastic action in an attempt to resolve his situation. In doing so, the lyrist demands immediate attention on behalf of their community, which would prevent him from following through with the act. Therefore, the modern post 9/11 listener should be careful. Not least because a

[48] Winters, "Sorrow Songs," 15.

threat involving mental illness complicates the threat, but also because there is a danger that modern listeners apply their understanding of plane hijackings (as terror-based incidents via the aftermath the 9/11 event) onto a song whose lyricists had yet not faced the impact of 9/11.[49] Writing twenty years before the attack on the twin towers, it is more likely that Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five would have intended to imply a means-based action. One, that by fighting against the institutions would spark political change and liberative action—whether through showing the impact of the conditions on the rapper's mental health, or whether through the giving of the threat itself. And not, like the terrorists of 9/11, "pure punishment for the supposed evils committed by a people or civilization."[50] The lyricist supposes to undertake a daring protest that will (hopefully) incite change as a "violent act that is conceived specifically to attract attention and then, through the publicity it generates, to communicate a message."[51]

In the book of Exodus, Moses too seeks to act as a liberator on behalf of the ancient Israelites, even if by seemingly violent means. When readers refer back to that passage in Exodus 2:11–15, they may notice that the text "reveal[s] Moses to be a man on whom the sufferings of other persons weigh heavily."[52] After witnessing "an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk" // וירא איש מצרי מכה איש עברי מאחיו (Exodus 2:11b) Moses "killed the Egyptian [slavedriver] and hid him in the sand" // ויך את המצרי ויטמנהו בחול (Exodus 2:12b.) Fredrick C. Holmgren's sermon supposes that, "He [Moses,] hears these cries [of the Hebrew slave] and knows in that moment that they are directed at him. He can no longer wait for

[49] For further reading on the cultural impact of 9/11, I encourage readers of this paper to refer to the entirety of Robert Doran, "Terrorism and Cultural Theory: The Singularity of 9/11," *Substance* 37, no. 1 (2008): 3–19. In this essay, however, it will only be engaged with briefly.
[50] Doran, "Terrorism," 9.
[51] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006), 173–174.
[52] Fredrick Carlson Holmgren, "Between Text and Sermon: Exodus 2:11–3:15," *Interpretation* 56, no. 1 (2002): 74.

…someone else to do something." Admittedly, this interpretation of the text does take some liberties by assuming to know Moses' thought processes in the leadup to his killing of the slavedriver. However, Holmgren's sermon offers us a reading wherein Moses is driven by a passion to act on behalf of an oppressed community. A community which may reject Moses due to his affiliations with the oppressive state, but a community that he feels a part of and latterly goes on to represent. As parallel to this interpretation of Exodus, one could then suppose that the plane hijacking in *The Message* is also a threat issued in a moment of passion. Certainly, the rhetoric of the phrase supports the impulsivity of this threat. Not much depth or narrative space is given to developing the thought, and the act of violence seems less sinister than one may initially perceive it to be. It too is a reaction to all that the lyricists have witnessed in their community. But it is by no means passive. By placing these lines at the end of a verse, *The Message* gives them lyrical weight (and they are emphasised even more so when followed immediately by the chorus.) Like the text of Exodus—whose narrator does not condemn the murder of the Egyptian—the hook nor the following verses of the track condemn our lyricist. Rather, the chorus functions to support these lines further, and instead, invokes sympathy for the lyricist who, as a result of his suffering, considers an act of violence as an inevitable outcome. Yet Holmgren goes even further, and proposes that readers too, like the biblical author, should abstain from judging the actions of Moses negatively, "If we judge him to be a murderer … we are judging Moses' act in terms … far removed from the desperate circumstances in many places … where people are injured or killed if counter-violence is not taken—or threatened."[53] When white and / or middle-class listeners of *The Message* reflect on the threat of violence in exile, therefore, we too should recognise our financial, 'spacial,' and / or racial privilege as potential oppressors. Even by reflecting on this track, this essay proves how outsiders (unexiled readers) have the privilege

[53] Holmgren, "Exodus 2:11–3:15," 74.

to approach the biblical and lyrical texts and observe a situation of depravity from outside of the conditions at hand (or, in the comfort of that 'safe' white space). Here, the threat of a drastic act demonstrates the lyricist's hopes that a significant act of protest (even at the risk of harming others / themselves) will relieve their community from the circumstances of poor physical and mental health. A plane hijacking, therefore, is weaponised in *The Message* as a final tool of liberation from exile.

Beyond a reading of "the edge" in *The Message* as an edge between sanity and insanity, the track's later subject of death would imply that the lyricist is suggesting an edge between life and death. Indeed, the recurring "Don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge," does not conclude at this point, and the lyricists continue to drive through a theme of death. However, albeit it morbid, this thematic weight to death is not unsurprising and death is a popular lyrical feature across both hip-hop & rap music. For example, Michael Dyson considers the work of Tupac Shakur as a case study for the rhetoric of death in the rap genre. In doing so however, Dyson (like myself), adopts a broader socio-anthropological perspective on the matter, arguing that "there is a culture of death in pockets of hip-hop and in poor black communities that is alarming for its pervasiveness."[54] This sentiment is shared across scholarship and, in a similar vein, James Rudrow suggests that "Black men are perpetually susceptible to death as a key feature of social life."[55]

Perhaps this obsession with death stems from the substantially lower life expectancy of African Americans compared to white Americans.[56] Indeed, intuitional racism can "directly

[54] Dyson, Michael Eric. *Holler if you Hear me: Searching for Tupac Shakur* (New York, NY: Basic Civitas Books, 2001), 223.
[55] Keven James Rudrow, ""I See Death Around the Corner": Black Manhood and Vulnerability in Me Against the World," *Journal of Black Studies* 50, no. 7 (2019): 642.
[56] Paul C. Rosenblatt, and Beverly R. Wallace, *African American Grief* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), chap. 1, https://www.perlego.com/book/1604424/african-american-grief-pdf. For statistics see "Life Expectancy

or indirectly [contribute] to greater poverty, a less healthful environment, poorer health, fewer physician visits, poorer pregnancy care, poorer nutrition, and poorer access to health care."[57] And, lack of access to these essential health facilities invariably result in a shorter life span. But the mental suffering (like that alluded to in *The Message*) may also result in both African American's shorter life span and their obsession with death (as explored across a motif of death within hip-hop music). This motif of exile—which the lyricists identify as like a jungle (outside of a healthy community environment)—continues right up until they detail the death of a young man, which the track anticipates throughout. If one considers my analysis of "Lord Help Us," then listeners of *The Message* may realise that that track also follows an emotive God. Where each track differs however, is God's involvement in the situation at hand. Unlike the lyrics of "Lord Help Us," *The Message* does not request, nor does it call upon God to liberate the rappers from their situation. In contrast, "God is smiling on you but he's frowning too, because only God knows what you go through" are the *only* lines that God is mentioned throughout the track. And even then, God is not engaged with in conversation, but merely described. God, therefore, is the lyrical pivot used to introduce and foster an emotional response from the track's listeners. This, of course, is done in anticipation of the track's haunting ending which details a young man's death as an instance of suicide-by-hanging. Following the work of Angella Son, I propose that God is rendered here as the track's "selfobject."[58] Quoting Heinz Kohut, Son defines the selfobject as "objects . . . which are either used in the service of the self . . . or objects which are themselves experienced as part of the self."[59] And while I do not necessarily think that God as the selfobject in *The*

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at Birth, at Age 65, at Age 75, by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: United States, Selected Years 1900–2016," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed May 19th, 2021, https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/2017/015.pdf.

[57] Rosenblatt and Wallace, *Grief*, chap. 1.

[58] Angella Son, "Making a Great Man, Moses: Sustenance and Augmentation of the Self through God as Selfobject," *Pastoral Psychology* 64, no. 5 (2015): 751–768.

[59] Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self* (New York, NY: International Universities Press, 1971), xiv in Son, "Selfobject," 755.

Message offers audiences an augmented or higher sense of emotion (as per Son's analysis of Exodus),[60] I do contend that God is the selfobject wherein the lyricist's emotions are directed through. Moreover, I propose that by using God as selfobject, the lyricists are also granted the power to direct an audience's emotional response. By using a higher, moral authority to do so, it is clear that the lyricists wish to prepare us for the climatic weight of the situation that is to follow. Certainly, *The Message* does not shy away from describing the sufferings of the human body. Homelessness, "lady living in a bag," violence, "stabbed that man right in his heart," and drug abuse, "junkies in the alley," are all referenced by the lyricists. But the situation of death appears most forcibly the song's final verse, suggesting that it is of thematic—and, as I propose, political—importance to the track lyricists.

The death described in this verse here, of course, is not a natural death, but a premature and violent death caused by suicide. As the lyrists convey well, the conditions of deprivation—as created by those governmental legislations which were informed by racist and sexist prejudices—have had deadly consequences on young black men. Death, however, does not offer relief from exile, and even in death the hanging body's "eyes sing the sad, sad song // Of how you lived so fast and died so young." Winters's analysis on this verse (aforementioned), implies that "even in death, the eyes of the suicide victim indicate sorrow and loss."[61] Here, audiences witness a play on a traditional eulogy. While the life of the suicide victim is given poetic space, there is little praise handed to the circumstances of his condition. Rather, audiences are presented with an image of sorrow, but with the absence of hope. What the track further implies, however, indicated by its use of "you," is that *this* allegory of a black man's death holds the potential to represent *any* black man's journey

[60] Son, "Selfobject," 764.
[61] Winters, "Sorrow Songs," 15.

through life, those black men of the audience included. Thus, the track concludes and extends the theme of exile out into the audience to show that until change is made, and geographical and metaphorical release from exile is achieved, this fate of the young man described could just as easily affect any other black man.

Conclusion

Like the ancient Hebrews, therefore, *The Message* highlights the black community as a community in exile. More specifically, from the male-centred perspective of the singers / rappers, we, the audience, are invited to consider how this exile specifically impacts black men. While listeners are not granted the catharsis of witnessing the male artists' liberation (as one may find in the later chapters of Exodus), audiences are invited to witness the unfolding of *The Message*'s circumstances. Directed towards the governmental powers, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five issue a statement, bearing witness to the socioeconomic depravations in their circumstances. In that sense then, it offers a strategy for survival, or better yet, a strategy for liberation. Liberation here, takes two forms. By threatening drastic action (via a plane hijacking) and detailing the detrimental conditions of their circumstances on physical and mental health, the artists are granted catharsis of their situation. As Kenneth Chelst writes (in his analogical approach to African American Slavery and Exodus), "victims of brutality [in this case, exile] have many social and psychological needs. Addressing these needs helps provide the victims with a sense of closure."[62] In doing so, however, the lyricists also appeal for help. By bringing forward the situation of exile, the lyricists move the theme of exile into a white patriarchal space and this appeal, therefore, is not only to the governmental powers—who have the power to implement legislative action—but to an

[62] Kenneth Chelst, *Exodus and Emancipation: Biblical and African-American Slavery* (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2009), 169, ProQuest.

audience who is offered depth of insight into the racially-informed conditions that their fellow Americans suffer through. However, by framing *The Message* under rhetoric of exile, audiences can further engage with a long tradition of interpretation within the ancient Israelite's exile in Exodus. And, by engaging in a parallel between the ancient and modern stories, audiences can dissect biblical phrases such as "land of milk and honey." All this, I argue, enrichens an audience understanding of how the rappers may view the nature of their circumstance in the situation of exile, and particularly so regarding racial space.

IV
"Freedom": Beyoncé and *Badwomen*

A Brief introduction to the Second Section of this Thesis

Thus far, this thesis has concerned the study of men. Those studies being: black men's music, masculinities, and the liberative potential of white patriarchal power and space when appropriated and subverted by black men. There has been a particular focus too, on the character of Moses, his masculinities, and the power dynamics of Exodus against his character. While this has demonstrated *some* of the methods that black men use in liberative practice, this man-centred focus will only constitute one half of this paper.[1] For the second half of this thesis, I find it important to draw equal attention to the female artists of rap/hip-hop/R&B music and explore how black women too, pursue liberation in the context of a society that disadvantages them for: 1) their blackness, 2) their womanhood, and 3) their black womanhood. This focus on black women is particularly important given how significant gender studies have been to my prior case studies. And, by incorporating womanist studies henceforth as complement to those earlier masculinity studies, I hope that my thesis will offer its readers a better-rounded approach to the subjects of hip-hop and biblical studies—where the intersections of black and gender identity (and the subversions of racist and misogynistic stereotypes) within the context of womanism are often employed as features of empowerment against the white, patriarchal status quo.

Introducing Beyoncé's "Freedom," and Motifs of Liberation

The first case study of black, female hip-hop artistry that I would like to draw attention to then, is Beyoncé's track, "Freedom"—from the singer's visual R&B album (or musical movie) *Lemonade* (2016). Exclusively available to view on husband Jay-Z's *Tidal* music-

[1] Unfortunately, the limits of this thesis have restrained me from exploring this matter further.

streaming platform, the track features a section given by rapper, Kendrick Lamar. Most significantly "Freedom" is, as the title suggests, an homage to freedom. At the heart of this track, the chorus lyrics invite audiences to witness a metaphorical journey of breaking chains ("I break chains all by myself,") and running free ("Imma keep running"). And as with much of the album, these lyrics describe the singer's new-found strength in situations of personal hardship—most notably, Jay-Z's rumoured infidelity. In the context of African American liberation studies, I will situate the seemingly individualistic language of "Freedom" amongst the movie's imaged portrayals of a black, female community, with the aim to demonstrate how Beyoncé negotiates liberation within the distinct struggles of black womanhood. And still I will go further from here, drawing into the intertextuality of this thesis, and returning to the biblical text that first drew me to consider this liberation tactic: Exodus. Specifically, I will turn my attention to the "Song of the Sea" celebration— a song that details the Israelites' victory over the Egyptians at the Red Sea.[2] This song occurs in two distinct forms; the first rendition led by Moses in Exodus 15:1–18 and the second rendition led by Moses' sister, Miriam in Exodus 15:20–2 (otherwise known as the Song of Miriam). Whilst the significance of these two forms, and how they engage with one another, is a matter of ongoing debate across modern biblical scholarship, I do not find it necessary for this chapter to take a particular stance on the matter. Rather, I shall focus on the brief centralisation of women within text-narrative, which offers readers a rare insight into how the women of Exodus engage with their circumstance as female members of the oppressed ethnic other.

This does not mean, however, that I won't make use of the "Song of the Sea's" differences. Certainly, while each rendition of the song compares well to Beyoncé's "Freedom," the

[2] More specifically, the ancient authors—speaking through Moses and the Israelites—emphasise this victory as a victory enabled by God's intervention: "The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name. Pharaoh's chariots and his army he cast into the sea; his picked officers were sunk in the Red Sea" // יהוה איש מלחמה יהוה שמו: מַרכבת פרעה וחילו ירה בים ומבחר שלִשיו טבעו בים־ סוף: (Exodus 15: 3-4).

spatial limitations of this thesis disallow such a lengthy analysis. Thus, I shall favour my analysis towards Miriam's rendition of the song. This decision, of course, has not been made without due consideration. Firstly, Miriam's song involves dance, introducing an active, performative dimension to the text-narrative. This will do well to compare against the performative decisions imaged within the "Freedom" movie. And secondly, Miriam's song emphasises the participation of "all the women," — "and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing. Miriam sang to them" // כל־ הנשים אחריה בתפים ובמחלת: ותען להם מרים (Exodus 15:20b–21a). This second point here, is perhaps the most significant of my justifications, where women—and women from the marginalised community of Israelites, no less—dominate two verses of an otherwise male-dominated text.[3]

Yet my intentions are not just to consider "Freedom" and "Song of Miriam" as distinct case studies respectively. Indeed, under an intersectional and intertextual framework, I intend to bridge these case studies together, and therefore, I shall approach the circumstance of Beyoncé's "Freedom" in light of the circumstances of those Israelite women. This will then enable me to show how both the Israelite women and the Black women in Beyoncé's video use community as a means of addressing their oppression. This intertextual link is far less direct than that of my earlier chapters. Beyoncé's "Freedom", unlike Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five's "The Message," does not quote verses from the Exodus text. Nor does "Freedom"—against C-Murder's "Lord Help Us— imply that Beyoncé's liberation is accessed through God / the Lord; a theme which runs through much of the Exodus text (including the "Song of Miriam," and "Song of the Sea" more broadly). And yet by reading the allegorical parallels between the songs, this chapter will offer a uniquely intertextual

[3] I argue that both popular reception of the Exodus text, and the text narrative itself centres the male experience through the biblical patriarch and text protagonist, Moses. I will elaborate on this shortly.

analysis of the track's symbolism, wherein the additional context of biblical studies—as a comparative tool—serves as an unconventional means through which to engage with black, liberational music through the Exodus text.[4]

Like my previous chapters, I shall begin with a discussion of the racial context which, in this case, is best explained by engagement with womanist studies. To begin, I find it important to draw attention to the complexities and sensitivities of womanist studies—lest the movement be candidly misunderstood as a feminist approach, with racial overtones. I concur with Dawn-Elissa Fischer's approach to her paper *Hiphop within a Womanist Lens*, where she writes that "womanism attends to the culturally specific complexities … that abound in Hiphop," and therefore, "interpreting Hiphop within such a framework elucidates the role of intersectional identifications … while differentiating it from normative feminist descriptions and definitions."[5] Already, I have offered much contextual space to the area of masculinity studies in Chapter II and would like to dedicate similar attention to a womanist critique here.[6] Even more, however, I wish to clarify my decision for a womanist lens given Beyoncé's popular affiliation with the feminist movement. Therefore, I will begin my chapter by attending to matters of feminism, womanism, and ethnically-othered women at the intersections of gender and race.

[4] This approach to intertextuality has been largely inspired by Hanan Beyene's work on the *Lemonade* album. Like this chapter, Beyene brings in the studies of Genesis biblical scholarship, womanist scholarship, and Beyoncé's *Lemonade* to argue that "Beyoncé shows allegorical parallels and implicit theological themes in relation to the story of Hagar, which serves as a narrative to many struggling African American women." See: Hanan Beyene, "Surviving Hardship Through Religion: Womanist Theology in Beyoncé's *Lemonade*," *Scientia et Humanitas: A Journal of Student Research* 9 (2019): 9.

[5] Dawn-Elissa Fischer, "Hiphop within a Womanist Lens," *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 36, no. 1 (2012): 87.

[6] And particularly so, because this context will also serve my penultimate chapter, where I shall approach motherhood in Lauryn Hill's "To Zion" track from a womanist perspective.

Defining Methodology: Feminism, Womanism and Beyoncé

At the 2014 MTV Video Music Awards (VMA's), Beyoncé famously performed her "***Flawless" track; where behind her, the word "FEMINIST" flashed in pink emboldened text on the stadium screen. Staying true to the studio recording of the track, the singer's 2014 performance sampled various lines from award winning Nigerian novelist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "We Should all be Feminists" TEDx talk.[7] Most memorably, the track defines: "Feminist: A person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes."[8] Unsurprisingly, this politically-charged performance roused much attention from the media, leading some critics to award the singer, "feminism's most powerful pop culture moment"[9] and others to argue that Beyoncé's sexy attire was incompatible with her feminist declaration: "Clad in just a sparkly leotard and flanked by several other minimally dressed females and a few bare-chested males… Cue the confusion."[10] However, in a subsequent interview with Elle Magazine, Beyoncé clarified her use of feminism on this track: "I put the definition of feminist in my song ["Flawless"] and on my tour, not for propaganda or to proclaim to the world that I'm a feminist, but to give clarity to the true meaning."[11] That 'true meaning' being (to the singer), "someone who believes in equal rights for men and

[7] TEDx Talks, "We Should All be Feminists | Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie | TEDxEuston," YouTube Video, 30:15, November 10, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hg3umXU_qWc.
[8] Beyoncé, "***Flawless" (2014): 2:13- 2:19, Track 11 on *BEYONCÉ [Platinum Edition]*, Parkwood Entertainment. Although Beyoncé does not source which version of Adichie's talk she uses, I have found a version of the speech at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hg3umXU_qWc. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has openly spoken about the incompatibility of Beyoncé's feminist definition with her own, insofar that—as the singer demonstrated in her 2016 interview with ELLE— "it is the kind that, at the same time, gives quite a lot of space to the necessity of men." See Ben Dandridge-Lemco, "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie on Beyoncé: "Her Type of Feminism is not Mine"," *The Fader*, October 7, 2016, https://www.thefader.com/2016/10/07/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-beyoncs-feminism-comment.
[9] Rebecca Traister, "Beyoncé's VMA Performance was Feminism's Most Powerful Pop Culture Moment," *The New Statesman*, August 26, 2014, https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/music-theatre/2014/08/beyonc-s-vma-performance-was-feminism-s-most-powerful-pop-culture-moment.
[10] Hollie McKay, "Beyoncé's Feminist VMA Message Prompts Some Eye Rolls," *Fox News*, August 25, 2014, https://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/beyonces-feminist-vma-message-prompts-some-eye-rolls.
[11] Tamar Gottesman, "Beyonce? On Feminism, Motherhood, and the Real Message in Formation," *ELLE*, April 5, 2016, https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/news/a30096/beyonce-on-feminism-motherhood-and-the-real-message-in-formation/.

women."[12] She continues, "I don't like or embrace any label. I don't want calling myself a feminist to make it feel like that's my one priority, over racism or sexism or anything else. I'm just exhausted by labels and tired of being boxed in."[13]

Despite the singer's reluctance to label herself as such, many academic scholars have come out in support of Beyoncé's decision to employ the word feminist. For example, Janell Hobson (Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University at Albany) argues that Beyoncé's VMA performance demonstrates a "popular rebranding of feminism… [in a context where] media rarely show a black face when talking about feminism."[14] Certainly many scholars would agree with Hobson on the premise that feminism has, for too long, centred around white women, "as white women ignore their built-in privilege of whiteness and define woman [sic] in terms of their own experience alone, then women of Color become 'other,' the outsider whose experience and tradition is too 'alien' to comprehend."[15] Thus emerged womanism, first coined by Alice Walker in 1983 to imply a "black feminist or feminist of colour."[16] Now synonymous with the modern notion of Black Feminism, Walker's womanism acknowledged the unique experience of black women, marginalised by both their race and gender.[17] Womanism, however, has (arguably) since evolved into a movement distinct from feminism. For example, "Hudson-Weems seeks to

[12] Gottesman, "Formation."
[13] Gottesman, "Formation."
[14] Janell Hobson, "Feminists Debate Beyoncé," *The Beyoncé Effect: Essays on Sexuality, Race and Feminism*, ed. Adrienne Trier-Bieniek Jefferson (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Incorporated Publishers, 2016): 24.
[15] On white feminists, see Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," *Sister Outsider* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), 117 in Dreama G. Moon and Michelle A. Holling "'White supremacy in heels': (White) Feminism, White Supremacy, and Discursive Violence," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 17, no.2 (2020): 254.
[16] Alice Walker, *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1983), xi.
[17] See Janette Taylor, "Womanism: A Methodologic Framework for African American Women," *Advances in Nursing Science* 21, no.1 (1998): 53–64. Taylor's paper offers an excellent overview of Alice Walkers "womanism" term, and identifies well the similarity and difference between feminism, black feminism and womanism.

sever the feminist-womanist connection established by Walker because Hudson-Weems views the term "feminism" as one that is loaded with cultural prejudices, pre-conceived notions and labels, and is fundamentally exclusive to women of color."[18] One may question then, why Beyoncé; a black, African American woman, would choose to align with feminism; a movement that not only centres whiteness, but is, as one paper argues "informed by a white epistemology, [thus limiting] its ability to challenge white supremacy [and white supremacist ideals]… significantly."[19] Hobson supposes that for Beyoncé's performance here, "it signals something else: a black woman's reclaiming of the word [feminist] without adjective—"BLACK FEMINIST"—or renaming—"WOMANIST."

Yet, even with Hobson's reasoning in mind, I have decided (deliberately) to approach "Freedom," under a womanist analytical lens. While I am not, by any means, intending to police Beyoncé's affiliation with the feminist movement (over womanism or black feminism), or make any sort of statement against Beyoncé's ideologies of feminism, I have found that womanism, by its modern definition, emphasises those intersections of gender and race within the black, female experience. And since I am not talking about the concerns of every woman but those distinct experiences of black women, I will adopt the term because it offers a clear articulation of the double marginalisation faced by Black women in the United States. Certainly, while consideration of an artist's / author's intentions behind that which they create or perform may enhance how a reader engages with that media, we should not be limited by it. For example, *if* (hypothetically) Beyoncé had intended 'Freedom' to represent the experience of all women—which, for reasons that I shall come to shortly, is very

[18] Taylor, "Womanism," 56, on the matter contained within Clenora Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (Troy, MI: Bedford, 1993).
[19] Moon and Holling "White Supremacy," 254. Though I do not have reasonable space to explore this source in further detail here, I strongly encourage readers to approach this quote in the wider context of this article, which evidences its conclusions well. In doing so, the conclusion I have cited here will appear far less radical, and far more agreeable.

unlikely—the afterlife of her performance allows it engaged with from a variety of perspectives, including that of marginalised women of colour. This is perhaps most obvious when we engage with exegesis of the Exodus text – the authors of which I sincerely doubt considered that black men and women, or even researchers, would seek to engage with the liberative themes of the text, beyond the situation of the Israelites. Therefore, before I attend to those images of assembly, I wish to first identify the situation of ethnically-othered, female oppression that invites a womanist engagement with both the "Song of Miriam" and "Freedom."

When Life Gives You Lemons: Ethnically-Othered Women in the Face of Prejudice

The Exodus text is concerned with survival—and it is not only concerned with the survival of the Israelites. For much of Exodus, the plot centres around the book's male protagonist, Moses, who is tasked by God to aid his deliverance of the Israelites, "So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt" // *ועתה לכה ואשלחך אל־פרעה והוצא את־עמי בני־ישראל ממצרים׃* (Exodus 3:10).[20] In many instances, Moses and Moses' livelihood is threatened by way of his marginalisation—not only by Pharoah and his Egyptian cohort, but also by the Israelites who often contend his leadership capabilities.[21] Israelite women, on the other-hand, feature rarely, and when they do they are usually narrative props who ensure Moses' survival. For example, Moses' mother—unnamed until Exodus 6:20—ensures the survival of her son by concealing him in a basket amongst the river reeds. His sister too, protects the child, keeping watch from a distance (Exodus 2:1–4). Indeed, right up until the "Song of Miriam" in chapter 15, the experience of Israelite ethnic *otherness* is voiced through the experiences of Moses (and often his sidekick, Aaron, too). And although

[20] Moreover, since Moses is the prophet chosen to lead / aid deliverance of the Israelites, then his survival may be given *additional* importance, since it ensures and maintains the survival of the Israelites also.
[21] See Exodus 2:11-15. See also chapter II, where I discuss the othering of Moses by both Hebrew and Egyptian characters throughout the text.

Moses often subverts the masculine norms of the Hebrew Bible (see chapter II), this subversion of the masculine norms, in and of itself, is reflective of his experience as ethnic *other*. Moses is a man nonetheless, who benefits from a privilege that enables him to subvert these norms (while also idolised by the text and subsequent reception of the text).

One could argue that, given Moses and Aaron's role as prophets, *that* their prophetic status is what entitles them to represent the collective, and not, as I argue, their gender. But we must consider that Miriam too, like Moses and Aaron, is a prophet: she is described as "the prophet Miriam" // *מרים הנביאה* (Exodus 15.20). Miriam, like the rest of her female cohort, does not stand to represent any collective until her song and, despite holding the same prophetic role as her brothers, she is not nearly as central to establishing the motif of suffering. But this should not come as much of a surprise to readers. In the book's first chapter, the text establishes that the Israelites' liberation is dependent on the Israelite men (and not women), who threaten to "in the event of war, [to] join our [Pharaoh's] enemies and fight against us [the Egyptians] and escape from the land [Egypt]" // *והיה כי־תקראנה מלחמה ונוסף גם־הוא על־שנאינו ונלחם־בנו* (Exodus 1:10b). Thus "Pharaoh commanded all his people, 'Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live'" // *ויצו פרעה לכל־ עמו לאמר כל־הבן הילוד היארה תשליכהו וכל־הבת תחיון* (Exodus 1:22). The Israelite women are not a threat to the Egyptians, insofar that the text (via Pharoah) prevents them from leading the liberation movement. Men now dominate the text—and through the emphasis on their persecution (enter the *endangered male* trope),[22] similar space is dedicated to their negotiation for liberation. This male-centred narrative continues throughout the rest of the

[22] Term taken from Irene Monroe, "When and Where I Enter, Then the Whole Race Enters with Me: Que(e)rying Exodus," *Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible,* eds. Robert E. Goss and Mona West (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2000), 86. Although Monroe's paper adopts a queer, black lens, and not a womanist lens necessarily (Monroe popularly identifies as a black, lesbian radical-feminist), her paper highlights well her experience as a black woman within an African-American patriarchal setting.

book, where even the Hebrew phrasing centres collective suffering through "the *sons* of Israel" (בני ישראל), popularly rendered in English translation as "the Israelites."[23] This *endangered male* trope, I argue, promotes and invites an androcentric interpretation of the text, by pushing women to the margins of the story and portraying liberation as something led only by men. And, even in the context of Exodus's liberation exegesis, as Irene Monroe suggests, the "endangered black male"[24] motif "tells African American women that only their men's lives are endangered," and that "they [men] have the ordained right to lead our liberation movements, and we [women] are to organise and follow them."[25] This engagement with the text is significantly reductive, and conceals how much one can engage with the liberational themes and moments which run *across* the Exodus (beyond the circumstance of the endangered (black) male). Even more, however, this fascination with the endangered black male risks neglecting to appreciate those rare moments where, through the liberative practice of the Israelite women, black women may observe the situation of their own oppression mirrored in an otherwise male-centred text (and male-dominated exegesis).[26] As Michael Dyson writes: "Reducing black suffering to its lowest common male denominator not only presumes a hierarchy of pain that removes priority from black female struggle, but also trivialise[s] the analysis and actions of black women in the quest for liberation."[27]

It is significant then, that researchers and readers of the Bible bring forward those texts which invite a womanist liberationist engagement, and particularly those passages that hold the

[23] To clarify, while I understand בְּנֵי ישראל may well be a turn of phrase—see: Daniel I. Block, "'Israel'—'Sons of Israel': A Study in Hebrew Eponymic Usage," *Studies in Religion* 13, no. 3 (1984): 301–326, this gendered language still centralises the male experience, and this is emphasised even more so by the surrounding, androcentric text.
[24] Monroe, "Que(e)rying Exodus," 60–61.
[25] Monroe, "Que(e)rying Exodus," 86.
[26] The situation of a male-dominated exegesis is also informed by patriarchal bias and exists also within the white church.
[27] Michael Dyson, *Making Malcolm: The Myth and Meaning of Malcolm X* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 98 in Monroe, "Que(e)rying Exodus," 86.

ability to mirror the black female experience. Black women—who are systemically discriminated against on the premise of their black-ness and womanhood—cannot easily, as cisgender men can, employ the privileges of patriarchal power to liberate themselves from the nature of their circumstances,[28] and attending to that media which centres the ethnically marginalised female experience, therefore, holds significant potential for liberative engagement. Even Beyoncé knows the value of popular media, which she desires to function as "a mirror through which her children and other black women should see themselves, showing images that 'reflect their beauty.'"[29] And yet sadly, this is not always the case. Female artists, even more than male artists, are constantly subjected to the black music genre's relentless *femiphobia,*[30] "misogynist and heterosexist discourses employed for the sake of asserting a kind of hypermasculinity contradicting the sense of powerlessness experience by black men in relation to white men."[31] In the lyrics of rap music specifically, a study on the matter found "five misogynistic themes that appear with some frequency … (a) derogatory naming and shaming of women, (b) sexual objectification of women, (c) distrust of women, (d) legitimation of violence against women, and (e) celebration of prostitution and pimping."[32] Certainly, this attitude towards women is one that reduces them to objects for the amusement of, and engagement by, men—aiding further those common associations of rap/hip-hop/R&B as black, masculine music[33] and making it easier to dismiss or dehumanise

[28] By saying this, of course, it is not my intention to judge black men for using the limited power resources that are available for them—let us not forget that sentiment of both my previous chapters. However, *generally speaking*, cisgender men are not systematically discriminated against by their gender. And rather, masculinity studies (when used to observe methods of liberation), often demonstrates the ways in which cisgender men utilise their sexual and patriarchal privilege to liberate themselves from elements that may deem them deficient in comparison with the white hegemonic norm (e.g. race, disability, sexuality).
[29] Ashton Toone, Amanda Nell Edgar, and Kelly Ford, "'She made angry black woman something that people would want to be': Lemonade and Black Women as Audiences and Subjects," *Participations*, 14, no. 2 (2017): 204.
[30] See earlier definition and exploration of *femiphobia* in chapter II.
[31] Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 129–130.
[32] Ronald Weitzer and Charis E. Kubrin, "Misogyny in Rap Music: A Content Analysis of Prevalence and Meanings," *Men and Masculinities* 12, no. 1 (2009): 11.
[33] Perry, *Prophets*, 153–190.

the sincerity of womanist narratives within black women's cathartic and empowering uses of the genre. Alternatively, those women who wish to redeem their success within the black music industries feel pressured to conform to the genre's misogynistic ideals of women. As Imani Perry writes, "After the turn of the twentieth century … it became clear that sexuality, sexual objectification, and beautification constituted fundamental parts of the marketing of the female MC, thus collapsing distinctions between the video "hoe" and the female artist."[34] She continues, "the visual landscape of women hip hop artists represents the contested terrain of the black female body in the music."[35] Indeed, like black men, black women are stereotyped as a people of extremes, and as parallel, but complementary opposite to Perry's observation within the music industry, Zeffie Gaines writes more broadly: "American society, as a whole, generally regards black women as unattractive and black women are consistently portrayed as uncouth, "ghetto," angry, and manly"[36] by both black and white men.

This surely adds new context to reading Beyoncé's "Freedom".[37] From a womanist liberationist perspective, audiences may now seek to identify the ways in which Beyoncé offers liberational media to black audiences through her portrayals of black women with the genre (including herself), and thankfully, the visual elements of the *Lemonade* album provide an obvious example of how she does so (as I will come to shortly). Indeed, much recent scholarship has indicated how black women view themselves through Beyoncé's *Lemonade*,[38] and this relationship is established well through Beyoncé's acknowledgement of

[34] Perry, *Prophets*, 156.
[35] Perry, *Prophets*, 156.
[36] Zeffie Gaines, "A Black Girl's Song: Misogynoir, Love, and Beyoncé's Lemonade," *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education* 16, no.2 (2017): 98.
[37] Although Beyoncé is often labelled a 'pop' artist, 'pop' as well as being a genre, is short for 'popular' music. I am more convinced that Beyoncé's music is 'pop' insofar that it is popular. Much of her work features R&B, rap and hip-hop styles, and this is particularly true of the *Lemonade* album. It is also worth noting that her initial success was within the R&B group destiny's child.
[38] E.g.: Toon *et al*, "Subjects," 203–225.

the unique but shared struggle black women face. Setting the tone for *Lemonade,* Beyoncé samples Malcolm X's "Who Taught You to Hate Yourself Speech," within the beginnings of the film: "The most disrespected woman in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the black woman. The most neglected person in America is the black woman."[39] The significance of this quote is emphasised by the sudden pause of all surrounding music, and images of everyday black women flash on the screen, unsmiling, accommodate the sample. It is clear here, that Beyoncé desires the black female viewer to insert themselves into the context of Malcolm X's speech and acknowledge the shared suffering of black women. Of course, the specific experiences and prejudices each black woman faces will vary by individual, and Beyoncé is not trying to suggest otherwise. Rather, the singer puts an emphasis on the general, shared experiences of black women, as means to evoke solidarity and solace amongst the community. As bell hooks summarises, Beyoncé's *Lemonade* does not just seduce, celebrate, and delight… the black female body [which] is utterly aestheticized," but in doing so, it "challenge[s] the ongoing present-day devaluation and dehumanization of the black female body."[40] That body, which, at the intersections of race and gender, suffers discrimination twice over. My forthcoming analysis, therefore, will differ from my previous chapters insofar as it will necessarily incorporate a light analysis of "Freedom's" (and *Lemonade*'s) visual elements. And, while I may not explicitly highlight my analytical dedication towards a womanist lens here, I will now demonstrate how the visual elements explicitly position Beyoncé as a strong and confident black woman, despite the androcentric genres of rap/hip-hop/R&B.

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[39] *Lemonade*, directed by Kahlil Joseph and Beyoncé Knowles Carter (Parkwood Entertainment, 2016), 00:13:36–00:13:47. https://tidal.com/browse/video/59727844. Again, Beyoncé has not provided a source for her sample. I, however, have found a copy of Malcolm X's speech (referenced) here: Malcolm X, "Who Taught You to Hate Yourself?" Speech at the funeral service of Ronald Stokes in Los Angeles, 1962.

[40] bell hooks, "Moving Beyond Pain," *bell hooks Books* (blog), 20 September, 2018, https://bellhooksbooks.com/moving-beyond-pain/. Note, bell hooks is the pseudonym used by Gloria Jean Watkins. The lowercase spelling is a deliberate move by the author.

Making Lemonade: Ethnically-Othered Women and the Pursuit towards Liberation?

Beyoncé's track "Freedom," (on the *Lemonade* movie album) concludes with a home-video of Jay-Z's grandmother, Hattie, celebrating her 90th birthday. Like much of that which Beyoncé samples across *Lemonade*, this video carries more than sentimental value alone. Revealing the inspiration behind her *Lemonade* title, Beyoncé samples Hattie's speech, "I had my ups and downs, but I always found the inner strength to pull myself up. I was served lemons but made lemonade."[41] While the exact form of those "Lemons" Hattie refers to is not made entirely clear, the openness of this quote, sampled from a black woman no less, invites a black female audience to reflect not only the subject of their own *lemons* (prejudices, injustices) but—in the context of this album—it enables us to consider how Beyoncé has brought, and continues to bring forth, images of *lemonade* (making the best of one's circumstances despite the prejudices and injustices) as a means to incite and portray liberative practice. Certainly, to consider this all would be quite a sizeable task. And so, where I would like to begin with this quote from Hattie, then, is how marginalised women may access liberation *from* the reappropriation of their (oppressive) circumstances.

The "Song of Miriam," for example, demonstrates this approach to liberation quite clearly. Exodus does not often make way for the voice of women— and, as I have suggested already, this is due to the androcentric nature of the text, which thus far has marginalised the experience of the Israelite women in favour of the *endangered male* trope. Clearly, the narrative space of Exodus is not intended to accommodate women, and it would be quite a stretch, therefore, to propose that Exodus 15:20–21 is an exception to the rule. Rather, what is more likely, is that when the Israelite women assume space in the text here, they approach the conditions of entering that space, which is coded male. This does not mean that these women

[41] *Lemonade,* 00:51:31.

must sacrifice their identity as women by any means. As David Clines writes, "It is precisely because our own culture insists so strongly on defining a man as 'not a woman' that we are tempted to think that anything a woman can do cannot also be characteristically male; but that is a fallacy."[42] Thus emerges what I shall refer to as the *masculine woman* trope—a characterisation that occurs throughout the Hebrew Bible when women assume roles or spaces typically given to men.[43] The first appearance of this trope in the "Song of Miriam" is demonstrated by the women's assumption of the narrative space: "Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing" // *אחריה ותקח מרים הנביאה אחות אהרן את־התף בידה ותצאן כל־הנשים בתפים ובמחלת:* (Exodus 15:20). Notably, this act is not commanded or prompted by any male character, and nor are the women dancing for a man's sake (of course, assuming God as the divine who is *coded masculine* rather than a man *per-se*). Miriam and the women dance because *they wish to* dance, and they do so with confidence, authority and autonomy. The second realisation of the *masculine woman* is when Miriam, the leader of this cohort of women even commands "them" // *להם* to "Sing to the Lord" // *שירו ליהוה* (Exodus 15:21)[44]—the imperative "sing" // *שירו* an explicit realisation of masculine power and influence, "the power of words, not in any magical sense …[are] instruments of control. To be master of persuasion is to have another form of power…part of the repertory of the powerful male."[45] Perhaps this power realises Miriam's status as a prophet, *מרים הנביאה* (Exodus 15:20)—an authority not recognised until this moment—a mark of respect from the patriarchal

[42] David. J. A. Clines, "David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible," *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. David J. A Clines (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995): 220–221.
[43] Genderqueer scholarship is particularly good at identifying the disruption of typical gender roles within the Hebrew Bible. For example, Ken Stone, and Teresa J. Hornsby, *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011).
[44] On "them"/ *להם*: whether Miriam commands just the women, or, if she commands the men also is a matter of interpretation; hence, I have not made a comment on the matter of whom she addresses here. More significantly, however, it's interesting that *להם* is a masculine plural pronominal suffix, and as is the imperative *שירו* (sing!). This distinctly gendered language would also seem to support the masculinity of Miriam.
[45] Clines, "Man," 220.

authorship, granting her increased status for the remaining Exodus text. Yet these masculine performances hold more value than status (and respect). Most importantly, they have allowed Miriam and the women to freely express themselves with dedicated narrative attention. Thus, on the one hand, assuming these masculinities is liberative. They allow women to work within the situation of patriarchal privilege—a privilege that more-often than not, marginalises them—by assuming those characteristics that are generally coded male.

On the other hand, the necessity of this gendered performance to achieve liberation means that the practice itself cannot be entirely liberative. Certainly, the masculine-woman trope disadvantages women insofar that it still emphasises masculinity as the means to access space and / or liberation. And yet, the women do well to counter this by maintaining much of their femininity also. In his process of identifying "David the Man," Clines's paper raises the subject of biblical musicianship as masculinity. Indeed, "David the man" performs the lyre, and the women of Exodus perform "with tambourines" // *בתפים* (Exodus 15:20). But there is a reason that I have not identified the Israelite women's musicianship with their performative masculinity. As Clines explains:

> In the Hebrew Bible, women as well as men make music. But is the music-making they engage in a gendered activity? Women are singers, accompanying themselves with timbrels and tambourines and other assorted idiophones and membranophones. The playing of stringed instruments, on the other hand, seems to have been largely a male activity … the only place where a woman plays it [the lyre] is in Isa. 23.16: it is Tyre as a prostitute who takes a lyre and makes sweet melody. The exception proves the rule.[46]

[46] Clines, "Man," 22–228.

Therefore, while the women in the Exodus perform boldly, it is with tambourines—an instrument typically associated with women. Despite their presence in the masculine space (and necessary demonstrations of masculine characteristics to get there), they incorporate aspects of femininity into their performance. Miriam also, while introduced as a prophet first and foremost, is introduced as Aaron's sister—maintaining her identity as a woman with her identity as a prophet. Admittedly, this phrase still defines Miriam through her relationship to a man, (she is introduced as Aaron's sister, not Aaron as Miriam's brother), and so it is further clear that, despite approaching the masculine, these women will not achieve full status as recognised by the androcentric text. Indeed, the fight is not yet won, and so what we identify here then is not liberation achieved in its fullness, but a *process* which women may employ as means to push through the patriarchal text for a moment of vocality. With this in mind, I shall now approach Beyoncé's "Freedom," and identify the *process* towards liberation that occurs, as one done through entering the masculine space also.

As I have indicated earlier, female rap/hip-hop/R&B artists continue to face negative stereotyping both within, and outside of the industry. And so, as with the Exodus narrative, I will not attempt to suggest that "Freedom," has somehow been so successful as to liberate black women entirely. Stereotypes of hyper-sexuality via the *hoe* trope, against stereotypes of the *angry black woman* have invariably helped foster "black women's difficult path in the male dominated musical form."[47] This disrespectful stereotyping is damaging, not only through the objectification of black female bodies, but also because it neglects black women's emotions, experience, and livelihood in favour of pre-allocated expectations. Yet black women do not have the patriarchal privilege to negotiate, counter, or subvert the

[47] Perry, *Prophets*, 156.

masculine norm, insofar as they are women, who do not have access to the masculine space in the first place. Hip-hop is "a masculinist form with masculinist aesthetics" [48] and "masculinist ideals of excellence and competitiveness."[49] It is therefore unsurprising that, like the Israelite women, many black female artists occupy those "styles of presentation and archetypal roles coded as male." Imani Perry coins the term "badwoman"[50] to describe this trope — women in hip hop who "use the language of violence, power, and subversive tricksterism to articulate their artistic prowess."[51] And, with plenty of lyrical imperatives emphasising the singer's strength—"tell the storm I'm new … Call me bulletproof"—Beyoncé's "Freedom" certainly performs into that masculine-informed *badwoman* trope. As one critic writes, "On [the track] Freedom, and indeed for much of *Lemonade*, Beyoncé sounds genuinely imperious… [she is] not to be messed with."[52]

The matter of *community* liberation in "Freedom," however, is more ambiguous than that of the Exodus text. The first-person perspective of "Freedom's" track lyrics appears to centre the singer's experience alone. And, while this is not necessarily a bad thing, it does mark quite a striking difference between the two texts. Writing on the matter of "Freedom's" Beyoncé-centric lyricisms, Anne Marie Mingo argues that "Beyoncé's individualistic language … [explores] freedom from personal challenges in love and life that [,] while relatable to some, are not linked to the collective pain of the black community."[53] And yet, Mingo later clarifies that this trope of individualism is identifiable *only* through an isolation of the track lyrics. Rather, when these lyrics are set against the musical background of a

[48] Perry, *Prophets*, 156.
[49] Perry, *Prophets*, 156.
[50] Perry, *Prophets*, 159.
[51] Perry, *Prophets*, 156.
[52] Alexis Petridis, "'Beyoncé is not a woman to be messed with' – Lemonade Review," *The Guardian*, April 25, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/apr/24/beyonce-lemonade-review-a-woman-not-to-be-messed-with/.
[53] AnneMarie Mingo, "Transgressive Leadership and Theo-ethical Texts of Black Protest Music," *Black Theology* 17, no.2 (2019): 109.

chorus (such as that gospel-inspired chorus which introduces to "Freedom") or when heard alongside the movie's "stylisation within the performances and the artistic direction of the visual album,"[54] audiences may observe a "richer communal legacy."[55] For example, In the movie rendition of the track, Beyoncé stands alone onstage, surrounded by an audience of black women who listen to her eagerly. Her eyes are closed, and her expression is impassioned. At first it appears as though she is preaching of her own experience to the crowd beneath her. And yet the camera moves slowly towards her, coming eventually to her face. It is now apparent that Beyoncé is not speaking to her audience, but to us, the watcher / listener—the *true* intended audience of this performance. But for what purpose do those that surround her now have? They are, I argue, most likely symbolic of a united black womanhood. This is proven further as the movie track progresses and the viewer is faced with a diverse collection and display of black women's communities: e.g., women preparing food, women dining in the forest, women gathering on/around a tree.[56] Sometimes, the women stare directly into the camera, standing with strong stature, and demanding our respect. Other times, these women pose or dance freely. Black female bodies are presented as delicate and graceful regardless of shape, size, or age, and adorned with flowers or crowns (e.g., the ballet dancer who occasionally dances onstage in place of Beyoncé). Black women are celebrated through elaborate but feminine costume design, those white gowns a symbolic protest of the stereotypes of black, female aggressiveness and unattractiveness.

Certainly, this strong sense of the feminine is set against Beyoncé's use of typically masculine language and contrasted further by the women's dominant body language. There is deliberate emphasis on the feminine here, despite the masculine space that is accessed

[54] Mingo, "Protest," 109.
[55] Mingo, "Protest," 109.
[56] In Beyoncé's Formation track, the recurring chorus line: ""Ok ladies now let's get in formation," does well to summate the Lemonade's broader attitude towards unified black, female empowerment.

through Beyoncé's direct linguistic choices and staging. Imani Perry's later definition of the *badwomen,* however, perhaps clarifies the contrasting characterisations: "The badwomen do not simply occupy male spaces…they also use their presence to call into the question the masculine designation of those spaces."[57] Like the ancient Israelite women, the black women of "Freedom" bring with them an unapologetic black femininity into the masculine space of the R&B genre, and thus incorporate that which needs to be liberated in the only space that allows them to do so. But, as Perry further highlights, they also question the masculine privilege that does not value the feminine. "Freedom," therefore is defined as the "ability of Black women to define, express, and own their minds, bodies, and spirits independent of external influence and depiction."[58]

Before I conclude this chapter, however, I would like to respond briefly to Mingo's earlier claim that Beyoncé's individualistic language … [is] not linked to the collective pain of the black community."[59] While I enthusiastically support Mingo's emphasis on the significance of *Lemonade*'s imagery, I disagree that Beyoncé's lyrics do not reach out to a collective, even if taken in isolation from the accompanying movie. As Morgan and Fischer explain, "referents in Hiphop are often unspoken, what might seem to be a simple narrative of one's experience in life is usually a commentary on shared knowledge of how social structures impact individual lives in similar ways and create collective identities among those affected."[60] Therefore, Beyoncé's individualistic language is perfectly suited to represent the collective experience, according to hip-hop tradition. However, even if this tendency to the collective is not already clear in "Freedom," the track's feature artist, Kendrick Lamar,

[57] Perry, *Prophets,* 159.
[58] Phelps-Ward *et al* "Institutions," 51.
[59] Mingo, "Protest," 109.
[60] M. Morgan and D.E Fischer, "Hiphop and Race: Blackness, Language and Creativity," *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st* Century, eds. Hazel Rose Markus and Paula M. L. Moya (New York, NY: Norton, 2010), 518.

includes ‘we’ language throughout his bridge, thus bringing Beyoncé’s ‘I’ language into the context of the wider African American community, “Yeah, open our mind as we cast away oppression // Yeah, open the streets and watch our beliefs.” Admittedly, given that Lamar is a man, it is difficult to suggest now that his ‘we’ language speaks for the black female community only. But perhaps this is something intended—a juxtaposition of the black male & female oppression narratives, indicating their unification / equalisation. Racialised oppression, persecution, and gendered stereotypes are experiences that *also* affect black women, and, with this consideration, Beyoncé’s chorus line becomes a womanist prophetic cry, concerned not only with “the well-being of the entire African American community,”[61] but more specifically, “oppressive forces impeding black women’s struggle for survival and for the development of a positive productive quality of life conducive to women’s…wellbeing.”[62] In “Freedom,” she sings “I [implying we, black women] need freedom too,” and thus invites audiences to counter the typical persecution narratives which favour the *endangered black male*. Pair this against the feminine-centred imagery of the *Lemonade* move, and the message of “Freedom” is clear. Black women, who face racial *and* gendered discrimination, are *equally* in need of those liberation pursuits and especially so, given the duality of their marginalised experience.

Conclusion

As is the case with most of my chapters, I cannot claim here that there is a deliberate attempt from Beyoncé to evoke the Exodus, or at least as something central to the “Freedom” track.

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[61] Dolores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013), 67. Although Williams is speaking in the context of womanist theology, I find there to be something quite prophetic about the way in which Beyoncé speaks out into the circumstance of the black, female community. Of course, while the ‘prophetic / spiritual’ elements of “Freedom” may not be something that the singer herself has intended, this does not mean that it cannot be received or gauged by her audience, and especially by those who receive “Freedom” in the context of biblical studies as I have done so.
[62] Williams, *Womanist*, 67.

And rather, my concern has been with the reception of *Lemonade*, and how liberative themes (specifically for black women) may be exposed further when considered in the context of biblical studies. I have emphasised the significance of a womanist approach and employed it as a lens through which to view the Israelite women of the Exodus, and subsequently those black women addressed / portrayed in "Freedom." While the biblical and musical circumstances are not exactly the same, there exists many allegorical parallels between the texts. Not only does each circumstance concern women who are marginalised by the androcentric genres in which they lie, but these women approach liberation similarly: Beyoncé, Miriam, and the cohorts of women respectively, engage with masculine characteristics in order to meet the quota for obtaining space through which to performatively engage with their circumstance of oppression. And yet, they also incorporate elements of their femininity to the performance, challenging the masculine privileges of space and highlighting that the circumstances of their oppression, therefore, are tied in with their status as women. Beyoncé calls us to see beyond stereotypes of black, female—the *hoe*, the *angry black woman* —and beyond the limited trope of the *endangered black male*, which has otherwise dominated black liberative practices. Rather, as Howell and Hillery summarise well, "what the audience observes throughout the film [*Lemonade*] is the anguish, struggle, determination, and hope of women who have faced ridicule and discrimination throughout their lives and who's [sic] mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers were subject to the same."[63] Beyoncé's appropriation, and reappropriation of the masculine space brings (quite literally) the struggles of black women centre stage, as Miriam did with her own cohort of Israelite women also.

[63] Alexandra Lynn Howell and Julie Louise Hillery, "Teaching Intersectional Identity through Beyoncé's Lemonade," (International Textile and Apparel Association Annual Conference Proceedings, Ames, IA, 1 January 2017), 1.

V
"To Zion": (M)otherhood

The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill (Introduction)

To begin, I wish to first state that, as complement to my longest chapter (IV), this chapter will be the shorter by comparison. Already, my fourth chapter has already offered much context to the field of womanist studies, an approach that I shall apply here also. This does not mean that my forthcoming analysis is, by any means an *extension* of my analysis on "Freedom," but rather, it shall be a fitting complement to the study, wherein I shall draw into the wider applications of womanist liberational practice and elaborate on my earlier discussion concerning the use of "feminisms"[1] in the masculine space of black music. In this chapter, I find it especially important to emphasise that although marginalised women (in modern and ancient patriarchal environments) may often be defined by, or reduced to, their relationship with men—mothers / daughters / sisters / wives—this does not mean that these women cannot ascertain or reveal some method of liberative practice from within their role as such. And, therefore, I shall dedicate my analyses here to the circumstance of black motherhood as revealed in Lauryn Hill's "To Zion" (1998), a hip-hop track dedicated to the pregnancy and birth of her son, Zion. Even the title of *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* album (the album which features her "To Zion" track, henceforth referred to as *Miseducation*) invites audiences to consider black liberation themes. Inspired Carter G. Woodson's 1933 book title *The Miseducation of the N*gr**[2] Hill's album, speaks into the injustices and joys of the black experience, which for Lauryn, is only further shaped by her

[1] Term taken from: Msia Kibona Clark, "Feminisms in African Hip Hop," *Meridians* 7, no.2 (2018): 383–400.
[2] Melissa Ewey, "Lauryn Hill: Smashes Records and Tells how Motherhood Changed Her Life," *Ebony* 54, no. 1 (1998): 194. I am aware that, at points in history and today, a term in this title has been used offensively. After much consideration, therefore, I have decided it best to censor the vowels contained within this word as to distinguish it from other terminology I have censored throughout this piece.

status as a black, female, industry artist and mother.[3] As one journalist writes, "Miseducation is a deeply personal album, breaking down love and loss one minute, criticizing 'wannabes' the next, pausing to celebrate in the song "To Zion" the birth of her son, Zion, and condemning those who told her not to have a baby."[4] Perhaps this authenticity is what lead to the album's success, which was very well received by the public, winning the singer numerous awards including two Billboard awards and album of the year.

This popular attention has been reflected in academic scholarship. While recent scholarship has favoured Beyoncé as the choice female hip-hop artist of study, the spiritual significances in Hill's albums have not gone unnoticed. Throughout her *Miseducation* album, Hill often makes musical references to God and the biblical texts.[5] For example, her "To Zion" verse, "But then an angel came one day // Told me to kneel down and pray // For unto me a man-child would be born," has been widely recognised within such scholarship as a reference to the gospel birth narratives, with Hill positioning herself as a Mary-esque figure.[6] What is less explored, however, is how one may approach this track through the Exodus narratives, and specifically the birth narrative of Moses (Exodus 2:1–4). Of course, while I understand that Hill's reference to the gospel birth narratives is quite direct, I find the absence of the Exodus story in recent scholarship surprising. "To Zion" expresses cathartic elements of the black female experience which invites us to consider the track within a context of black liberationist practice (which has, historically been informed by the Exodus). Moreover, much Christian scholarship draws into the allegorical parallels that occur between the Hebrew

[3] It is worth remembering here the sexist expectations of women within the rap/hip-hop/R&B industry as well as the racialised stereotyping of black women both within, and outside of the genre. See chapter IV of my thesis.
[4] Melissa Ewey, "Lauryn Hill: Hip-Hop's Hottest Star Balances Love, Motherhood and Fame," *Ebony* 54, no. 7 (1999): 60.
[5] Lauryn Hill also makes lyrical references to Islam throughout her music, so I shall refrain from claiming that her use of Christian imagery indicates any direct affiliation with the Christian faith.
[6] For example, Celnisha L. Dangerfield, "Lauryn Hill as Lyricist and Womanist," *Understanding African American Rhetoric: Classical Origins to Contemporary Innovations*, eds. Ronald L. Jackson II and Elaine B. Richardson (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 209–222.

Bible (Moses) and New Testament birth texts (Jesus).[7] As an alternative to popular interpretation of "To Zion," therefore, I shall employ an Exodus-informed interpretation of the track, attending to the study of motherhood, a theme that is significant across both the biblical and musical cases. My methodological approach will echo that which I have taken in chapter IV, offering a womanist interpretation and context as a means through which to then identify and compare the circumstance of motherhood as liberational practice between the biblical text and musical media.

Identifying (M)otherhood in Exodus and Hip-Hop

Mothers are valuable characters within the androcentric texts of the Hebrew Bible. They ensure the rearing and raising of the biblical patriarchs and satisfy the text's concerns with lineage. Generally, these biblical mothers are wives too, with childless and unwed women being exceptions to the text's broader characterisations of idealised women. Even the first woman of Genesis, Eve is introduced to biblical readers through the text's designation as a mother and a wife, placed in the garden as a "helper" // עזר (Genesis 2:18) that enables Adam to "be fruitful and multiply" // ורבו פרו (Genesis 1:28). Adam then names the woman "Eve, because she was the mother of all who live" // כל־חי אם היתה הוא כי חוה (Genesis 3:20)—this act of naming being one that implies wives / mothers are property of their male husbands. This attitude of ownership towards wives / mothers continues throughout the Hebrew Bible and, as Esther Fuchs writes:

> Male control of female reproductive powers in conjunction with patrilocal monogamous marriage (for the wife) secures the wife as her husband's exclusive property and insures [sic] the continuity of his name and family possession via

[7] E.g., Allan Kensky, "Moses and Jesus: The Birth of the Savior," *Judaism* 42, no. 1 (1993): 43–49.

> patrimonial customs and patrilineal inheritance patterns. The institution of motherhood as defined by the patriarchal system guarantees that both the wife and her children will increase his property during his lifetime and perpetuate his achievements and memory after his death.[8]

The idealised biblical mothers, however, are not only defined by their marital relationship to men. They are also characterised within plot-narratives as figures who are wholly committed to their sons' livelihoods. The Hebrew text has far less concern for mothers' daughters and places little-to-no emphasis on the daughter-mother relationship unless, of course, these daughters contribute to the survival of sons also.[9] Thus, we return to the *endangered male motif*.[10] This motif not only marginalises the experience of women in favour of men's oppression narratives (shown here by the biblical mother's preference for sons over daughters) but one that demands the unquestioned care/provision of women in a maternal and self-sacrificial way.

For example, Exodus 1–2 is one such example of this *endangered male* motif in full force. All the text's chapters are framed by the book's very first verse— "These are the names of the sons of Israel" // ישראל בני שמות ואלה (Exodus 1:1)—a verse that indicates the significance of sons within the forthcoming story.[11] Surely, it is the persecuted son(s), who, as idealised subjects of the androcentric text, demand a protective-mother archetype; an archetype which will ensure the survival of the patriarchal hierarchy via their son's future leadership also. This archetype is first introduced through the Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah who, at risk of

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[8] Esther Fuchs, "The Literary Characterisation of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible," *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Alice Bach (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 134.
[9] Jopie Stiebert-Hommes, "But if She be a Daughter…She may Live! 'Daughters' and 'Sons' in Exodus 1–2," *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 62.
[10] Introduced to this thesis in Chapter IV, 64–65.
[11] Stiebert-Hommes, "Exodus 1–2," 63.

their *own* survival disobey Pharoah's command to kill the Israelite boys: "if it is a boy, kill him" // אתו והמתן הוא אם־בן (Exodus 1:16). Even when Pharaoh notices that these midwives have disobeyed him, Shiphrah and Puah claim that "The Hebrew women are brutish, animalistic, *chayoth*—not refined, like Egyptian women. Their babies just plop out of them"[12] // וילדו: המילדת אלהן תבוא בטרם הנה כי־חיות העברית המצרית כנשים לא כי (Exodus 1:19). Pharoah appears to make no response to the women, and instead the text that follows, celebrates the livelihood of Shiphrah and Puah, whose dedication to God and the Israelite sons is rewarded through God's gift to them of motherhood, no less. Pharoah is quick to believe their negative portrayals of the Israelite woman, who, against the refined Egyptian women, are perceived as *other*. This sentiment is surely indicative of his own "cultural bias"[13] (stereotype) towards the Israelite women. To Pharaoh, the Israelite (m)other is already strange and foreign, and now the Hebrew women have enabled Pharoah to believe that she births in uncouth ways. Thus, not only did the midwives perceive the sons' livelihoods as ones more valuable than their own—insofar as they were willing to risk the consequences of lying to Pharoah—but they are also willing to stereotype the Israelite mothers in doing so. For the sake of their sons, the birthing mothers are thrown under the bus, so to speak. The protection of the sons has come at the cost of the Israelite mothers' dignity.

But it is not just the Egyptians and midwife informants who participate in othering the Israelite mothers. The androcentric text ensures that (m)other-archetype continues beyond the

[12] Translation dependant on relating חיות to חיהwhere חיה is translated as beast or wild animal. Translation obtained from Wilda Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), chap.2, https://www.perlego.com/book/2100891/womanist-midrash-pdf. Additional factors have also informed my decision to momentarily divert from the traditional translation, "the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them" (Exodus 1:19, NRSV). I find that Gafney's translation adds an exciting element to that which the Hebrew women say. That is, the Hebrew women are not *just* lying but lying tactically. By insulting the Hebrew mothers, and thereby removing any friendly associations with them, the midwives attempt to convince Pharoah *even further* that they are on his side.

[13] Gafney, *Midrash*, chap.2.

presence of Shiphrah and Puah, who are only momentarily successful in ensuring the sons' survival (perhaps, because they are not yet *true* mothers, but mothering figures). Thus enters Moses' mother. Despite being framed in the immediate context of that 'beastly' birth stereotype, this mother has a somewhat less controversial presence in the text. As with many female protagonists, Moses' mother's space in the text is limited. Over the initial verses of chapter two, Cheryl Exum demonstrates that "Moses' mother, called here simply 'the woman', is the subject of a series of verbs (Moses is the object). The first two deal with procreation … the next two, with her response to the child she bears."[14] In the later chapters of Exodus, Moses' mother is eventually granted the name "Jochebed" // יוכבד (Exodus 6:20, NRSV). In Exodus 2, however, it is unimportant—we, like Jochebed are instead directed to focus on the text's subject, Moses. In the following verses, Moses survives until adulthood successfully. Jochebed, however, disappears for the remainder of the Exodus text until her brief mention in Exodus 6.

Like the Exodus text, the genres of rap/hip-hop/R&B have a complicated relationship with motherhood: "rarely does rap music offer the chance to examine how women perceive themselves as mothers or as potential mothers, nor is there much attention paid to the intense political implications of that subjectivity."[15] Instead, mothers often feature throughout rap/hip-hop/R&B as the lyrical subjects of men. Within their place as subject, they are then pathologized into either characterisation of a fixed dichotomy, *The Black Lady* (usually the male artist's mother, who is celebrated) versus the *Baby Mama* (usually the mother of the

[14] J. Cheryl Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live': A Study of Exodus 1.8–2.10," *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 53.
[15] Marlo David Azikwe, "More Than Baby Mamas: Black Mothers and Hip-Hop Feminism," *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Critical Reader*, eds. Gail Dines and Jean McMahon Humez (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2011), 138. I would like mention here that while I do not entirely agree with Azikwe's paper—more specifically, those comments regarding proper liberative womanhood as one that rejects sexual or provocative expression—I do consider her work on Lauryn Hill and motherhood a valuable contribution to the arguments of this chapter.

male artist's child, who is demonised).[16] Described by the black male lyricist in entirely different (and opposing) ways, the mothers of rap/hip-hop/R&B become a subject of extreme characterisation. As Chaney and Brown describe in their study on the matter, male artists generally apply "positive terms such as "Queen," "Good Woman," "Strong Sista" to describe their mothers [as] … comforting, trustworthy, supportive, and self-sacrificing. Rappers often expressed love for their mothers because of their self-sacrificing ways, and as a result, developed a strong desire to financially support and protect them."[17] Alternatively, "Rap lyrics that described baby mamas were often saturated in misogyny and sexism and generally painted these [unwed] women … [as] opportunistic 'gold diggers' [using pregnancy as exploitative means for financial gain] and 'drama queens'."[18] Indeed, these opposing characterisations suggest a typical Freudian mother-whore dichotomy wherein mothers are either perceived by men as asexual and elevated mothering figures (their relationship with the male artists are non-sexual), or those who have engaged in a sexual relationship (with the male artists) and as consequence, their motherhood capabilities are perceived as compromised, deficient even. Either way, however, none of these stereotypes of the mother figure—from the perspective of the black male artist—are images that stand to empower women. Even in the situation of motherhood, black mothers are reduced to their sexuality and / or non-sexual relationship with men. While the black masculine allegories of motherhood (in and of themselves) are not to blame here, the patriarchal attitudes towards women that exist within the assertion of that masculinity are.[19] And so we should also realise here that

[16] Terms obtained from the following paper: Cassandra Chaney and Arielle Brown, "Representations and Discourses of Black Motherhood in Hip Hop and R&B Over Time," *The Journal of Hip Hop Studies* 3, no. 1 (2016): 12–46.
[17] Cassandra Chaney and Arielle Brown, "Is Black Motherhood a Marker of Oppression or Empowerment? Hip-Hop and R&B Lessons about 'Mama'," *The Journal of Hip Hop Studies* 2, no. 1 (2015): 12. Throughout their study, Chaney and Brown draw upon the conclusions made in Tia Tyree, "Lovin' Momma and Hatin' on Baby Mama: A Comparison of Misogynistic and Stereotypical Representations in Songs about Rappers' Mothers and Baby Mamas," *Women & Language* 32, no. 2 (2009): 50–58.
[18] Chaney and Brown, "Representations," 18.
[19] This point is echoed in Loretta J. Ross, "Reproductive Justice as Intersectional Feminist Activism," *Souls* 19, no. 3 (2017): 296.

black male artists—who wish to be successful within a white patriarchy—will invariably be influenced by the white, male industry owners and consumers who hold pre-existing stereotypes of the black family, including black women. Yes, even outside of hip-hop culture, these dichotomous stereotypes of black motherhood are ever-present within white patriarchal popular media, where they are received and redistributed with additional layers of misogyny and sexism. For example, in popular white culture the *Black Lady* is otherwise transformed into the "mammy" figure, — traditionally depicted as a dark-skinned, overweight woman, wearing a headwrap and shawl…employed by a white family to care for their children."[20] Meanwhile, those black unwed women who seemingly exploit motherhood as means for financial gain become *welfare queens*, the popular racist phrase first coined by former president Ronald Reagan to describe (fictitious) black mothers who, out of laziness and greed, exploit public aid for their own leisurely purposes.[21]

Despite this stereotype of the *welfare queen*, however, white recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) make up the majority of program participants.[22] So, where did this *welfare queen* stereotype emerge from? The short answer is racism. The slightly longer answer concerns the "The Moynihan Report,"[23] where "sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan proclaimed the rise in mother-headed families was not due to lack of economic opportunities (e.g. stable jobs) afforded Black families, but rather a ghetto culture that encouraged and glorified out-of-wedlock childbirth."[24] Certainly, white societies'

[20] Ellen E. Jones, "From Mammy to Ma: Hollywood's Favourite Racist Stereotype," *BBC*, May 31, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20190530-rom-mammy-to-ma-hollywoods-favourite-racist-stereotype.
[21] Chaney and Brown, "Representations," 16.
[22] Chaney and Brown, "Representations," 16, cite data from the 2013 report. In the most recent available SNAP analysis report (2019), 36.5% of the programme participants were white, whilst 28.5% of the programme participants were African American. Data obtained from Kathryn Cronquist, *Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2019* (Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support, 2021), 25.
[23] Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The N*gr* Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Print Office, 1965).
[24] Chaney and Brown, "Oppression or Empowerment," 10.

obsession with unwed black mothers, portrayed as financially irresponsible figures, continues within popular imagination and reports such as these which serve and continue to serve as ammunition for those racists who wish to evidence their stereotypes of black mothers. At the other end of motherhood stereotyping, white motherhood is very much celebrated by the contemporary white patriarchal culture. The white mother is often portrayed as a bearer of white sons, and this is particularly apparent within celebrity culture. Celebrity mothers are typically elevated to a *poster-mother* status to the extent that celebrity culture is "normatively white, heterosexual, and economically privileged;"[25] the antithesis of the *welfare queen* stereotype which others black, unwed, and poor mothers.[26] The idealisation of white motherhood has frequently been challenged by those white feminists who seek to dismantle the patriarchal narratives that portray motherhood as the ideal representation of womanhood. The issue lying here, however, is that white feminism (as I have previously suggested) risks approaching womanhood, and motherhood as a monolithic experience, forgetting how the experience of African American may differ dramatically. Of course, while black women also face the patriarchal expectation that their biologically female bodies be dedicated to the rearing of sons via heterosexual relationships with husbands, motherhood is a way of reclaiming that bodily autonomy (including the right to mother one's own children) that has historically been denied to black women through the events of slavery.[27] Certainly, these circumstances are something that white women do not need to consider within their liberative practices, and thus black motherhood—as it is demonised by popular media, stereotyped within the black music genres, criticised under white feminism, and historically regulated—stands as something which holds liberative potential from the stereotypes that seek to oppress

[25] Christina Baade, "A Complicated Transformation: BEYONCÉ, 'Blue,' and the Politics of Black Motherhood," *Popular Music and Society* 42, no. 1 (2019): 43. Baade studies Beyoncé's approach to motherhood through a black feminist lens. I have found much of that which she writes about white celebrity culture fitting for this section of my thesis.
[26] Baade, "Politics," 43–44.
[27] Baade, "Politics," 44.

it. All of this then, I argue, is the context in which we should approach “To Zion” by Lauryn Hill. Although Lauryn does not lead the track’s focus to confronting each of these stereotypes respectively, she does allude to the ways in which her motherhood capabilities have been challenged by those around her, “I knew his life deserved a chance // But everybody told me to be smart // Look at your career they said // Lauryn, baby use your head.” As a black woman, Lauryn Hill’s success in the industry is already challenged, and with these additional layers of expectation (and marginalisation) that the black mother figure holds across popular society, it is unsurprising that others (assuming their intentions are well-meaning) would wish her not to pursue that path. Nevertheless, Hill emphasises her decision to pursue motherhood despite these circumstances that face her as a black woman in the industry. A matter that I shall approach in further detail shortly.

Narratives of Liberation from within the circumstances of (M)otherhood.

Certainly, the matter of negotiating liberation within this complicated framework of androcentric expectation is also complicated. And, as I have shown so far through a womanist criticism of each piece, the matter of oppression is multi-layered, affecting those ethnically othered women through patriarchal stereotypes of the mothering role. One may even argue then that, given how grounded the other-mother figure is within those patriarchal narratives of Exodus and Rap/hip-hop/R&B respectively, obtaining liberation from those circumstances is unachievable. Within the context of biblical studies, however, I have found a womanist approach encourages a liberative exegesis from Biblical texts *despite* their androcentric reception and authorship. And while one cannot completely ignore the looming shadow of a given text’s reception history / authorship and should be mindful of such in their engagement with it, I would like to reemphasise my sentiment in chapter IV, that “what we identify here then is not liberation achieved in its fullness, but a *process* women may employ

as means to push through the patriarchal text for a moment of vocality."[28] From the perspective of the reader, we too should adopt a *process* towards moments that invite exegetical opportunity from a liberationist perspective. For example, realising the intensity of a given text's oppression narratives (as I have done already) draws us to recognise those more implicit or subtle expressions of liberation even more—which can be to the benefit of liberationist studies. Already, this passage from Exodus 1–2 has offered much in the way of allegory for minority communities. For example, Gregory Lee Cuéllar's "Migrant Centric" Reading of Exodus 2"[29] paper draws upon the theme of action and survival using the work of feminist scholar Phyllis Trible[30] to approach the biblical material "not as a birth story but as a relevant migrant-survival story that contemporary immigrants are currently living."[31] Like Cuéllar, I too would like to divert from the typical androcentric attention that the Mosaic birth narrative often receives. And while the subject matter of our papers is quite different (Cuéller's concern is with migration, and mine with black liberation studies) I would also like to dedicate my focus to that of Moses' mother, Jochebed (the *birth-giver*) and not so much Moses *per se* (the *birthed* male patriarch). Therefore, I shall approach birth not as the focus of this text but interpret it—under the general rubric of womanism—as one of Jochebed's many actions which demonstrate liberative practice under (m)otherhood. As Cuéller writes, "Tragically, the women are nameless, but they are not actionless."[32] Indeed, the actions of the women of Exodus 1–2 are valuable means through which to observe moments of autonomy, as I shall come to shortly.

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[28] P.72 of this thesis.
[29] Gregory Lee Cuéllar, "A Migrant-Centric Reading of Exodus 2: Tactics of Survival for Immigrant Women and their Unaccompanied Children," *Biblical Interpretation* 26, no. 4–5 (2018): 499–514.
[30] Phyllis Trible, "Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows," *Bible Review* 5, no.1 (1989): 14–34 in Cuéllar, "Exodus 2," 504, 514. Although Cuéllar's paper draws on feminist theory, I find that much of his work is suited also to the application of womanist studies, insofar that it concerns the experience of the *alien other*, the foreigner—a situation that African American women (and men also) know all too well. See p.26–28 of this thesis, for details concerning the "double consciousness" phenomenon.
[31] Cuéllar, "Exodus 2," 501.
[32] Cuéllar, "Exodus 2," 504.

From her moment of entry into the Exodus narrative, Jochebed stands out as a figure of resistance. As I have noted earlier—through Exum's observation of the text[33]—Jochebed is the active subject for the entire section between Exodus 2:2–3, and while her actions are committed to the survival of the male patriarch, they are also actions which demonstrate some level of autonomy. There is no mention of her husband's involvement in the passage here, and whilst one may argue that the actions such as *conceiving* and *birthing* are Jochebed's actions insofar that she is a woman with a womb, this does not account for the absence of her husband in the *hiding* and *placing* actions. Jochebed is a lone parent. Thus, these actions of survival; *conceiving, birthing, seeing, hiding, placing* (to name a few) are ones attributed to Jochebed alone. Moreover, if we take each of the actions respectively, they invite different but complementary expressions of Jochebed's bodily autonomy and liberative expression. Firstly we, the reader, are informed that "the woman conceived." Despite Pharoah's persecution of the Hebrew baby boys, and the risk associated with falling pregnant therefore (the odds of bearing a son were of course, 50-50), "The woman [Jochebed] conceived and bore a son" // בן ותלד האשה ותהר (Exodus 2:2a). Here Jochebed issues her first act of resistance against the persecution of the Israelite people, falling pregnant under the Egyptian regime despite the ongoing risks associated with bearing children. She follows through with this pregnancy until birth, and when she sees that she has borne a son "she saw that he was a fine baby, [and] she hid him for three months"[34] // ותצפנהו הוא כי־טוב אתו ותרא ירחים שלשה (Exodus 2:2b). Arguably, this act of *seeing* is the most revealing moment of this passage, as it is here that Jochebed first openly forms an opinion on the matter of her child. Wilda Gafney's womanist Midrashic approach to the biblical text has also noted the

[33] Exum, "Exodus 1.8–2.10," 53.
[34] טוב may also be translated as "good," or "beautiful." Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius's Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1857), cccxvi.

significance of this moment, leading the scholar to propose that Jochebed's *seeing* action even "imitates God."[35] Gafney writes, "God sees that each stage of creation is "good," tov; and Jochebed sees that the child she brings forth is also good, invoking the same word, tov [טוב]."[36] In some ways then, this spiritual act of *creating* (here through birthing), *seeing* & *acknowledging* her son as טוב is one that not only calls into Jochebed's Hebrew faith and tradition (evoking God's language in the creation narratives of Genesis 1), but one that poetically realises the inherent *goodness* of God's people, despite the circumstance of oppression that may tell them otherwise. Indeed, Jochebed's recognition of Moses' *goodness* stands in stark protest towards Pharoah's view of the Israelites whom he perceives as the alien *other*. To Pharoah the Israelite people are worthy of enslavement, the mothers perform uncouth birth practices, and the mothers' sons are worthy of death. This act of Jochebed's *seeing*, therefore, not only demonstrates a moment of Jochebed's autonomous engagement with her son, but it reveals to the biblical readers a mother's statement against the ideology of Egyptian oppressive state.

But this resistance to Pharoah does not come without cost. Jochebed gives birth to a boy—the target of Pharaoh's death-ruling—meaning that she must now drown him in the river Nile, or else disobey Pharoah. Jochebed attempts at first to protect the child, *hiding* him for three months against Pharaohs most recent command to all of his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live" // הילוד כל־הבן תחיון וכל־הבת תשליכהו היארה (Exodus 1:22). Despite this initial resistance, however, a predicament soon arises, "she [Jochebed] could hide him no longer" // הצפינו עוד ולא־יכלה

[35] Gafney, *Midrash*, chap.2. Gafney also notes here that "Her [Jochebed's] name bears a trace of the Divine Name. The "Yo" is derived from the "Y" in YHWH. Her name means something like the honor (or weightiness) of YHWH." Although the Hebrew Bible does not acknowledge the name "Jochebed" until Exodus 6:20, this is an interesting point to note for those who wish to consider the representation of Jochebed across the wider text of Exodus.
[36] Gafney, *Midrash*, chap.2.

(Exodus 2:3), and Jochebed soon brings her son to the water. Exum, however, invites readers to consider this moment predicament further:

> At first glance, Moses' mother seems to be following the command to expose male infants upon the Nile. Is she being a model subject (or even more, since 'all his people', v. 22, appears to mean only the Egyptians)? Or is she, like the midwives, ostensibly obeying Pharaoh while in reality defying him?[37]

In response to Exum's hypotheticals, I too understand this scenario to be "no exposure story."[38] Jochebed works a labour of love, sourcing materials of her own choosing to create the structural basket in which to place her child. For a final time, Jochebed resists the expectations of Pharoah, and instead dedicates herself to *protecting* Moses for the (seemingly) final time. Some popular interpretations have suggested here that the crafty mother was aware of Pharoah's daughters bathing habits—Moses' soon to be adoptive mother, who finds him in the water. And others have suggested that Jochebed's faith drove her to entrust her child to the care of God. Whatever the reason, I do not find it necessarily important to argue towards one suggestion or the other here—doing so, I argue, would risk centralising the life of Moses over Jochebed's willingness to act against the matter her circumstance. Indeed, Moses' designated role as the Israelite liberator is not fully revealed until Exodus 3, and unlike the New Testament birth narratives, there is no implication that Jochebed knew that in preserving Moses, she would be saving the Israelites from Egypt also. Instead, I would like to emphasise that Jochebed, *through* her (m)otherhood, was able to pursue liberation. Through the bodily autonomy that the text grants her, Jochebed uses her motherhood as a means to resist Pharoah's commands, and thus establishes her nameless,

[37] Exum, "Exodus 1.8–2.10," 51.
[38] Exum, "Exodus 1.8–2.10," 51.

wordless, character as an action-driven figure within the otherwise patriarchal-centred text of Exodus.

With this in mind, I would now like to approach Lauryn Hill's "To Zion," and will do so as informed by those liberative actions identified within the Jochebed narrative of Exodus: *Conceiving, Birthing, Seeing, Protecting*. Indeed, "To Zion," is a song of action and active verbs. Comparing the song against Beyoncé's "Blue" track, Christina Baade writes, "If Hill's "To Zion" marches purposefully toward change, Beyoncé's "Blue" holds back, savoring the moment."[39] This observation, of course, is drawn from the emphasis Hill places on the act of marching itself, using the repeated and phrase "Marching, marching, marching, marching to Zion,"[40] as the track's refrain. Yet the singer is not alone in her experience of "marching." Like Beyoncé's "Freedom," track, Hill is joined by a chorus of voices at many moments throughout the track, signifying that that the experience of black motherhood that she outlines in "To Zion," is one shared by others.[41] In an anecdotal story, Tarana Burke—activist and founder of the #MeToo movement—speaks of how "To Zion" engages her as a black mother, "I would sing it to my daughter and change the words to "Beautiful, beautiful Kaia. "To Zion" was our little story. It resonated with me deeply. It still does."[42] Hill's track, which was not always so warmly met—particularly by her record label—soon became an "anthem for motherhood, choice, and one of her most popular songs."[43] This popularity can surely be owed to the first-hand and honest retelling of black motherhood, which does not shy away

[39] Baade, "Politics," 48.
[40] This refrain draws from the hymn "Marching to Zion," by Isaac Watts and Robert Lowry. Perhaps, as Esther Crookshank writes, this nod to the Christian hymn is influenced by Hill's "Baptist heritage of gospel hymns." Esther R. Crookshank, "'We're Marching to Zion': Isaac Watts in America" *Rethinking American Music*, eds. Tara Browner and Thomas Riis (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2019), chap. 5, www.perlego.com/book/859083.
[41] Baade, "Politics," 47 notes this also.
[42] Burke's anecdote obtained from Joan Morgan, *She Begat This: 20 Years of the Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* (New York, NY: Atria Books, 2018), chap.3, https://www.perlego.com/book/1393717/she-begat-this-pdf.
[43] Morgan, *Miseducation*, chap.3.

from the singer's difficult experiences in the early stages of her pregnancy. Hill opens her track with the line, "Unsure of what the balance held // I touched my belly overwhelmed." Here, the singer immediately presents "To Zion" as an opportunity for catharsis. She is both pregnant and overwhelmed; and doesn't hold back in saying so. But those reasons resulting in this need for catharsis are certainly worth our attention also, lest we underestimate the impact of Hill's unrestrained approach towards self-expression. While Hill's unborn child was not quite the intended subject of a murder attempt (as per Exodus 1–2), she, as a black woman, would invariably have faced those societal stereotypes concerning her motherly capabilities. At the time of "To Zion's" release, Hill was unwed, 22 years old, and only just embarking on her solo career after her success in *The Fugees* group.[44] To those around her therefore, the decision to have a child would risk her growing career. Lauryn even indicates in "To Zion" that she was advised to terminate her pregnancy, thus recognising another dichotomy of characterisation that black women face under the controlling expectations of white patriarchal society. Black women who exist in white spaces (e.g. Lauryn Hill as a celebrity in Hollywood) must either remain childless or sacrifice their presence public eye—they are not perceived able to manage both simultaneously, let alone speak of their choice to do so.[45] As Kimberly Harper writes in her book, *The Ethos of Black Motherhood in America*, "We know that the hyper surveillance that renders us invisible and hyper visible exists to remind Black women that their silence is required if they are to exist in certain spaces typically reserved for whiteness … Black women in particular are taught how to speak so that they do not offend or transgress those in power."[46] Here, however, Hill defies expectation, choosing both to publicly chastise those who doubted her, and articulate the pride in her decision to choose

[44] Azikwe, "Black Mothers," 140.
[45] Danielle Fuentes Morgan does well to consider the problems of this dichotomy and does so within the context of BLM activism. Danielle Fuentes Morgan, "Visible Black Motherhood is a Revolution," *Biography* 41, no. 4 (2018): 856–875.
[46] Kimberly C. Harper, *The Ethos of Black Motherhood in America: Only White Women Get Pregnant* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020), 61.

both motherhood and a career, rendered through the musical announcement of her son's birth, "Now the joy of my world is in Zion." For Lauryn Hill, motherhood is not a performative limitation to her career, but a means through which to perform public catharsis on the matter, thus protesting those racist expectations of the black (m)otherhood experience as something hidden and deficient against the valorisation of white motherhood.

Hill loves her child, and visibly so. For much of the "To Zion" track, Hill devotes affections to her (now-born) son, ending her track with the repeated line "beautiful, beautiful Zion." Like Jochebed, Hill *sees* and *acknowledges* her child as good, beautiful, טוב. Again, this moment is significant towards the black mother's black liberational practice, where it demonstrates both the black motherhood experience as somewhat blessed, spiritual even (in that it evokes those creation narratives of Genesis also, deliberately, or not), and places inherent value on the new black life, as one that is "beautiful." Of course, it is well known that all mothers view their child as beautiful, and yet for Hill to publicly establish her black child's objective beauty—note how she does not say "Zion, you are beautiful to me," for example—is also a means through which black mothers actively resist the perception of black bodies as deficient, or *other*. Rather, Hill speaks into the black motherhood experience and says to her audience (leaving no room for questions), "look at my (our) child(ren), they are beautiful." She emphasises the inherent worth of the black body through her child, and therefore, stands to protect their livelihood(s), "Now let me pray to keep you from //
The perils that will surely come." Through this line, however, Lauryn politicises her work further, confronting the welfare of young black children in a modern racist society that holds little concern for their safety or their lives. Indeed, as many of us have witnessed through the activism of BLM protesters—which has increasingly spread throughout the past decade, thanks to the rise of social media—those "perils," are severe. Black men, who were once

black baby boys like Zion, continue to lose their lives due to racial profiling, which not only perceives the black male as a threat over their fellow white male citizens, but also devalues the black life—particularly by those white police officers who *should*, ironically, serve to protect them in their vulnerability.[47] Hill's "Marching," refrain, therefore, may be a militaristic march, inviting those mothers to join with her in this movement of resistance to protect and demand respect for the next generation of black lives. She does not dwell on her sadness here, and rather, Hill "remains future oriented and positive,"[48] as means to communicate this message to her audience, who should be roused to action by her motivating chorus. Like Jochebed, Hill too uses her autonomous presence in the patriarchal genre as means to assert resistance to the oppressive circumstances of her situation, and she does so in chorus with all those *other* mothers who face similar persecution for their black motherhood.

Receiving (M)otherhood

It seems, then, that the role of motherhood within patriarchal culture is not one that is intended to empower women. While the circumstances of patriarchal oppression are quite different between Jochebed and Lauryn Hill, each character is met with complicated layers stereotypes and pre-established expectations of their role. Both are marginalised women, silenced by their genres respectively. For Jochebed, this silencing emerges from her characterisation within an androcentric text. She, the mother, is an archetypal prop, committed to the survival of her son, the patriarch Moses. She is nameless, speechless, disrespected (even by fellow women of the text) and holds but a momentary role in the narrative. When she is no longer needed, she disappears. For Hill, she, as a black mother

[47] Specific instances of police brutality are detailed by Chaney and Brown, "Representations," 20.
[48] Azikwe, "Black Mothers," 140.

within the hip-hop industry is silenced by the designation of celebrity motherhood as white and ideal (meanwhile the designation of black motherhood is a dichotomised *other*). She faces criticism from those around her, and even those who may believe to hold her best interests at heart (e.g., white feminists, her management, and those who advised her to terminate the pregnancy).

What the biblical scholarship of Exodus 1–2 allows however, is for a womanist interpretation of the text. Jochebed, regardless of the text which seeks to control her, can be released as an example of marginalised motherhood—a mother who, though silenced, speaks through her actions and autonomy. This interpretation certainly demonstrates an implicit, through equally as productive method through which to approach liberative practice within the Hebrew Bible. Even more significant, however, is how this biblical interpretation, which rings true to the experiences of womanist interpretation and experience, may then be applied to instances of motherhood in rap/hip-hop/R&B music. In this case, it has been applied to the hip-hop track "To Zion," by Lauryn Hill, to expose how Hill's lyrics reveal the significance of establishing autonomy within the liberative practice of black motherhood. Indeed, Hill's resistance to the patriarchal status quo echoes the resistance that Jochebed shows in Exodus, and it is through this resistance that Hill poetically renders the beautiful and spiritual experience of black motherhood. Black mothers are just as attentive, providing, and caring as those white mothers who are acknowledged for such traits. They, like Jochebed, *do*, and in *doing* reveal a narrative that stands in contrast to their oppressive circumstances.

VI
Conclusion: Confronting the Racial and Gendered Stereotypes in Rap, Hip-Hop, and R&B

Summary: Key Findings and Re-Emphasising the Thesis Argument

This thesis falls into two complementary sections, separated by gender. Chapters II and III concern the liberative practices of black men (and Israelite men, specifically Moses), while chapters IV and V concern the liberative practices of black women (and Israelite women, specifically Miriam and her cohort of women, and Jochebed). This transition—from a male-centred to female-centred study of race, Exodus, and black music—is marked by a short introductory paragraph at the start of chapter IV, where I had marked my motives to adopt a womanist lens specifically. However, at risk of stating the obvious, this transition highlights how my choice of gendered lens and choice of biblical character (serving as one allegorical parallel between the texts) has been directly impacted by the gender of a given singer in each musical case study. That is, I have found that a lens of masculinity studies works well for identifying those liberative performances of black male artists, and a womanist lens works well for identifying those liberative performances of black female artists. Indeed, this is notable as it demonstrates how impactful those racialised stereotypes, surrounding African American gender, are in forming different circumstances of oppression and differing methods of liberation performance between men and women in rap/hip-hop/R&B respectively. This does not mean, of course, that the experiences of black men and black women are monolithic, divided only by gender. Rather, as I have demonstrated in each chapter, those circumstances including geographical location, social role (e.g., motherhood), and individual needs can also influence how a singer may then approach their liberative performance. For example, my first chapter demonstrated that, like Mosaic masculinity, C-Murder's liberative performance within "Lord Help Us," is achieved through his subversions of the idealised masculinity (which, in contemporary western society is also coded white). Instead, the rapper performs a

new masculine identity, marked by his status as the masculine *other*. My second chapter demonstrated the value of catharsis under exile within Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message," which communicated the deadly impact of systemic racism on a black community's male members. My third chapter demonstrated how the Israelite women, and women in Beyoncé's "Freedom" track, challenged and appropriated the masculine designation of their musical genres. And my fourth chapter highlighted motherhood, turning to the parallels between Jochebed (Moses' mother) and Lauryn Hill's "To Zion," to suggest how each mother demonstrates autonomy despite those typical androcentric designations of the mother figure as one that is committed only to the needs of their son(s).

Indeed, this study has acknowledged a patriarchal status quo, which is then realised within black music and Exodus through gendered "spaces." Those "spaces" may be geographical or metaphorical, but their primary role is to distinguish the privileged insider (oppressor and normative) from the non-privileged outsider (oppressed and *other*), and ensure that the designation of that privileged space, or lack thereof, is measured by the patriarchal ideals of gendered bodies. Racial *others*—be they the ancient Israelites or black rap/hip-hop/R&B artists—are not granted entry into those privileged spaces given the gendered stereotypes that surround them, and therefore, the exposure, subversion, transference, or reappropriation of their own racialised space is integral to their liberative practice. They may even, as Beyoncé does in "Freedom," use subversive expressions of gender and/or race to move out of their space and into one that is more privileged, before then using the privilege of that space to call into question its very existence. What this existence of privileged and non-privileged spaces also signifies, however, is the ways in which racism is informed by sexism. This is realised most explicitly by the continuation of that historical racial science into those modern stereotypes surrounding the black gendered body, which then serve as the reason through

which black people are denied access into privileged spaces (which are also coded white). I argue, therefore, that this notion of space not only lies at the heart of my thesis but has emerged out of its intentions to identify the ways in which Exodus and African American music expose the liberation themes within each other. Space, insofar as it is gendered and raced, is the realisation of my gendered and raced intersectional approach, which, though informed by scholarship from Biblical and African American studies, was first used to identify the methods of oppression and liberation within each case study of the Exodus text and black music via their allegorical parallels.

Evaluation: Methodology and Limitations

Certainly, this answer to my research question is quite convoluted, but that is the result of my interdisciplinary, intertextual, *and* intersectional thesis, which have all served me well as methodologies. In addition to identifying the matter of privileged and oppressive spaces, I have found that this study's intersectional approach has emphasised well how complicated and multifaceted the circumstances of oppression may be. And, as a result of that, it has also demonstrated the strength of those black musicians who have actively fought against such circumstances in pursuit of liberation. But aside from my intentions to bring forward those situations of racial and gendered exile, this methodology has also exposed other intersecting factors that have contributed to the situations of oppression within the Exodus text, and more so the situations of oppression within the rap/hip-hop/R&B case studies. For example, chapter III demonstrated how the discrimination against black men (based on stereotypes surrounding their supposed violence) also holds socioeconomic impacts via workplace discrimination. Black men who are unable to earn money by legitimate means are forced to geographically inhabit an unpleasant space or neighbourhood. In that same vein, this chapter also highlights class issues. Those who do manage to make money are generally middle class

and have been able to escape the worsening conditions of the inner-city neighbours that Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five describe. Thus, it is through these factors also that "The Message" highlights its theme of exile.

Even further, intersectionality has enabled me to fulfil specific interdisciplinary niches throughout my study. Most notably, there has been little biblical scholarship (if any) conducted on C-Murder's track "Lord Help Us," and especially so in comparison to a more prominent singer such as Beyoncé, who appears as the subject of such scholarship often. With this intersectional approach, however, I was able to draw out my own observations and parallels between "Lord Help Us" and the Exodus text under the study of gender and race; thus, fulfilling a niche subject of study within biblical studies scholarship. Of course, this is not to say that my methodology has been undertaken without flaw. My methodological approach has been very context demanding, where in each chapter, I have had to introduce *two* areas of study, both each in terms of gender *and* race. This has also meant, sadly, that certain areas of research, which otherwise would have been of interest to this thesis, I have omitted from this study due to spatial constraints. One such area is that of queer studies, the scholarship of which I have made use of on occasion. A genderqueer case study would certainly stand well in the context of subversive raced and gendered bodies (or lack of) and would be a valuable contribution to my observations on privileged space in terms of sexuality and sexual expression. Indeed, socially constructed masculine-feminine binaries and queer responses to them, deserve attention that was beyond the scope of this thesis. The second subject that I have been unable to consider properly is that of the black church, and African American church more specifically. While this would add excellent context to the biblically informed linguistics of rap/hip-hop/R&B singers, as well as perhaps indicate their spiritual influences behind using such language (i.e., they are at least culturally Christian), I ultimately

concluded that this would be an ambitious undertaking. Like many churches across America, African American churches are found in different denominations and adhere to different interpretations of scripture. There is no single method of biblical interpretation across the black church, and I did not want the investigation of such to come at the cost of my argument, or own observations of the biblical text. Certainly, much of this study has been concerned not only with what the musical artists *intend* to communicate but also how their lyrics may be received by their audiences, who would, most likely, be unaware of specific references to the theologies of any particular black church denomination within the genre of secular rap/hip-hop/R&B. Ultimately, therefore, in light of the spatial restraints of my thesis, I find that these limitations are justified. One study simply cannot concern every aspect of influence across the Exodus text and black music genres. What these limitations should indicate instead, is the potential that this study holds for future research.

Final Reflections: Recommendations for Future Research and Closing Statements

As I humorously indicated in the introduction to this thesis, if anyone were to consider the entire field of rap/hip-hop/R&B studies against the entire Exodus text, they would struggle to write a book on the matter! One could, however, consider my limitations for this thesis and implement them at a further level of study where more space for research is granted, for instance at a PhD level. Alternatively, this thesis could be narrowed into an even more niche field of study, where one musical case study or excerpt from the exodus text is explored under the lens of gender and race. I would also be excited to see further work under this intersectional and intertextual approach, using other books from the Hebrew Bible. As noted earlier, Hanan Beyene's paper has already demonstrated the potential for such within her own

study of Beyoncé's *Lemonade* and the book of Genesis.[1] Most importantly, however, I would like to finish this thesis by stating again that, as a white scholar, there will be much that I have neglected, or missed. This is entirely indicative of my own biases and experience as a white woman. And I shall remain open to any feedback and knowledge of black scholars who might offer a valuable critical response to this study. However, what I do hope that this thesis will contribute is that it may serve as demonstration to other white researchers. To them, I would like to emphasise that we need not shy away from subjects of race, if we engage with the subject, using the work of black-informed scholarship, sensitively and respectfully.

[1] Hanan Beyene, "Surviving Hardship Through Religion: Womanist Theology in Beyoncé's *Lemonade*," *Scientia et Humanitas: A Journal of Student Research* 9 (2019): 7–19.

Appendix A

Song Lyrics

C-Murder, "Lord Help Us," (1999).
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