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## **The Reimagination of Hagar in the Hebrew Bible and Islamic Scripture**

Amanda Arguetta

### **Introduction:**

In the Hebrew Bible and Islamic Scripture, the function of Hagar the Egyptian has been overlooked within the dominant narrative of Abraham's divine promise, for her character impedes the fulfillment of future, sacred descendants. In both Hebrew and Islamic traditions, the revered status of male patriarchs and male prophets overrides the theological experiences of women in Scripture. More specifically, Hagar is treated as a minor character, either minimally accounted for or completely absent by name. However, her humanity and especially her offspring, Ishmael, perpetuate the fulfillment of the Covenant in Judeo-Christian traditions and the establishment of the Hajj, a sacred ritual in the Islamic tradition.

Hagar's invisibility must be rectified and her importance made known within the greater religious narratives. Her literary character reveals the nature of God and provides a model of relationship with the divine throughout Hebrew and Islamic Scripture. By cross-comparing two sacred texts, I seek to unravel Hagar's image as a pariah in the Old Testament and correct her lack of existence in the Qur'an. In doing so, her role can be reclaimed as a part of God's will and her place in narrative proves equally important and worthy of the faithful devotion that Abraham receives. Informed by a myriad of scholarly commentaries, I argue that Hagar is the first female character, named in the Hebrew Bible and un-named in the Qur'an, to have an encounter with God. Her forced displacement in both scriptural narratives gives testimony to God's unconditional love for humanity. Her exilic experience showcases the reciprocal nature of Covenant: to respond to God's promise with piety and to inquire after God in his absence, or rather lack of responsibility of His will.

In the Hebrew Bible, Genesis 21 is a conflict narrative, telling of the complex family dynamic that arises between Sarah, Abraham, and Hagar as a result of their response to covenantal lineage. Genesis 21:14-19 narrows the focus from a family conflict to a power dynamic between Sarah and Hagar. Hagar is forcibly exiled into the Beersheba desert by Sarah's authoritative instruction and Abraham's obedience to Sarah's social authority and God's Covenant.<sup>1</sup> The biblical passage displays the desperation of Sarah's interpretation of covenantal fulfillment, but more importantly, it exhibits a different portrait of God as a God who directly communicates with an Egyptian slave. Hagar is the first person,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Anchor Bible Dictionary: Volume 3 H-J*, ed. David Noel Freeman (New York: DoubleDay, 1992), 18.

specifically the first woman, who God speaks to directly; therefore, her character poses a slew of controversial theological inquiries. Is the God of Genesis a God of non-Israelites? Why did God directly communicate with a non-Israelite woman about the divine promise of a successful nation, rather than His chosen patriarchs? Does the covenantal fulfillment encompass others who are not Israelites? Why is Hagar not classified as a divine martirach, or more controversially, why are covenants a man's faith experience? Ultimately, Hagar's experience in the Beersheba desert makes a strong claim about the nature of God. It declares that the God of Israel is the God of existence, and that He is concerned with the survival of both the Israelites and non-covenantal people.

The Book of Genesis recounts the origin stories of Israel, including the creation of existence, an outline of ancestral genealogies stemming from Adam and Eve, and the existential quest of the Israelites. Genesis houses what are called, "the Ancestral Narratives," stories that emphasize the covenantal fulfillment of God's chosen patriarchs such as Noah, Abraham, and Moses. The overall chapter of Genesis 21 addresses the covenantal concern of Abraham's lineage, since he has two sons from two different women.. The literary setting outlines an internal family conflict: Sarah exercises her social, authoritative power to cast out Hagar, her handmaiden, and Ishmael, Abraham's first son, without the consultation of Abraham or even the consideration of his familial bond with Ishmael.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, Genesis 21:14-19 details the expulsion and desperation of Hagar in her forced exile. She and her son are exiled from the Abrahamic Covenant and essentially left to die from dehydration.

### **Historical and Literary Contexts in Hebrew Scripture:**

From a literary standpoint, Genesis 21:14-19 provides a haunting story which narrates the frightening and intimate experience of Hagar in the Beersheba desert. The fourteenth verse of Genesis 21 sets the stage for Abraham's emotionless release of Hagar, his second wife, and Ishmael, his first born son, into exile. Hagar then wanders through the lifeless desert without verbal or physical objection. The fifteenth verse introduces the biblical reader to the chilling desperation of Hagar's need for survival. With no access to water or other necessities, Hagar realizes the deathly fate of her son and weeps as she processes his demise. Suddenly, hearing the cry of Ishmael, God resolves Hagar's emotional condition and her son's physical state by providing them with a well of water. The final scene of the nineteenth verse closes with God's resolution, but most importantly, with the promise of survival for both Hagar and her son. The literary setting plots a theological dialogue between God and Hagar in the deathly desert,

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<sup>2</sup> Terence E. Fredtheim, "Hagar," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: D-H* (U.S.A.: HarperCollins Publisher, 2007), 714.

which is the first narrative testimony of a woman receiving divine promise through direct communication with God.

Historical biblical scholarship has marked Genesis 21:14-19 as a product of the E source authors, due to God's name being written as *Elohim*. Scholars have noted that the E source authors, along with the J source authors, wrote their accounts during the early Davidic monarchy dating back to the 10th and 9th centuries BCE.<sup>3</sup> The composition of Genesis 21, specifically verses 14-19, was influenced by the historical context of E source authors' social reality. The narrative imagination of the E source authors centralized their biblical drafts on the justification of David's monarchy through the criteria of covenantal fulfillment. Accordingly, the exile of Hagar and her son was an intentional action of Abraham because their forced departure aligned with the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant through Isaac, Sarah's son. Abraham's unemotional placement of his second wife and first son in the desert was not the abuse of an absent father but rather the divine responsibility of a divinely chosen patriarch according to E source authors.

Although the covenantal measurement is a dominant concern, the E source authors were also cognizant of justifying the structures of David's monarchy as they experienced them during their writing process. Hagar's exile is not just a filler story in the Book of Genesis; the socio-political structures of David's monarchy are subtly embedded in her exilic experience. Savina Teubal, a Jewish scholar of women in the Hebrew Bible, notes that David had personal relationships with the descendants of Ishmael, Hagar's son, who were considered cultural and geographical foreigners under the rule of Israel. David's brother-in-law and one of his administrative officials traced their cultural origins back to Ishmael.<sup>4</sup> The production of Genesis 21:14-19 thus provides the origin story of the Ishmaelites, but more provocatively, the divinely-inspired survival of Hagar and Ishmael assigns social and political precedent to David's reign, since his monarchy was meant to serve the Israelites rather than Ishmaelites.

The literary and historical settings of Genesis 21:14-19 showcase the imperative to fulfill Abraham's Covenant with God, yet the disparities between these contextual settings give particular insight into the function of the narrative. From a literary perspective, the banishment of Hagar and her son was not personal but rather an obedient submission to the building of Israel as a prosperous and divine nation. Genesis 21:14-19 provides a theological explanation for God's compassion towards his people, i.e. the Israelites, and outsiders, i.e. the Ishmaelites. On the other hand, the E source authors wrote the expulsion of Hagar and her son through a Davidic lens. Their aim was to further enhance the

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<sup>3</sup> Savina J. Teubal, *Hagar the Egyptian: The Lost Tradition of the Matriarchs* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962), 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

imperative goal of covenantal fulfillment, despite Hagar's suffering and imminent death, as well as provide theological justification for the demographic structures of David's reign.

### **Textual Analysis of Hebrew Scripture:**

While the literary and historical settings of Genesis 21 outline specific contextual realities of the time, it theologically mediates the expectation of Abraham's Covenant and the oppressive exile of Hagar sanctioned by Abraham and Sarah. In verse fourteen, Abraham prepares Hagar and her son for banishment by supplying them with a limited amount of water. He places the "skin of water" on her shoulder and then sends her away to wander in the wilderness of Beersheba, without a word or any emotional consolation. Abraham is completely silent with regard to the purpose of her exile, withholding the explanation of covenantal fulfillment. The biblical reader is left to digest the heartless action of Abraham by understanding that his response is based towards a commitment to the fulfillment of his covenant through Isaac. Hagar, on the other hand, is forced to enter the wilderness without any direction, reason, or assurance of her survival.<sup>5</sup>

Verse fifteen of Genesis 21 illustrates Hagar's desperation for survival when her only supply of water runs out. The E source authors intentionally skip over the time that lapses between her initial expulsion and impending death, jumping from one sentence to the other. The realization of her helpless condition forces her to act of her own will. She responds to her situation by "cast[ing] the child under one of the bushes"<sup>6</sup> Within this scriptural verse, the subject adjective and the location of the bush echo Hagar's emotional and mental preparation for her son's death. The author emphasizes her forthcoming separation from her son by saying "the child" in lieu of "her child".<sup>7</sup> Further, by placing Ishmael under the bush, Hagar takes her son's fate upon herself. The literary interpretation of this "casting" under the bush resonates with other uses of the verb in scriptural accounts, whereby it is utilized to mean putting a body in the grave.<sup>8</sup> Hagar is not only forced into exile but more frighteningly, forced to witness the death of her child. In verses 14 and 15, Hagar does not verbally express or try to understand why her son is fated to die. His death cannot be justified through human reason; it is purely a result of Sarah and Abraham's interpretation of the covenant. God is

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<sup>5</sup> American theologian Phyllis Trible emphasizes that the Hebrew word for wander, *th*, indicates the loss of direction. See Phyllis Trible, "Hagar: Desolation of Rejection," in *Texts of Terror: Literary- Feminist Readings of Biblical Scripture* (U.S.A : Fortress Press, 1984), 23.

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 21:15.

<sup>7</sup> Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 24.

<sup>8</sup> Phyllis Trible, "Chapter 2: Ominous Beginnings for a Promise of Blessing," in *Hagar, Sarah and their Children* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 48.

absent in Hagar's silent hopelessness and preparations for her child's death. The theological conclusion of verses 14 and 15 is thus that the suffering and death of the non-elect, i.e. Hagar and Ishmael, is justified under the standards of the Abrahamic covenant.

In verse sixteen, Hagar finally speaks, saying "Do not let me look on the death of the child."<sup>9</sup> The verse does not indicate whom Hagar is addressing, and Phyllis Tribble argues that Hagar's rhetorical plea is her having an internal dialogue with herself.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, her only objection to exile seems to be the witnessing of her child's death. Throughout Genesis 21, Hagar never resisted the oppressive nature of her reality, from being a slave of Sarah's, to the instruction of giving birth to Abraham's first son, to her expulsion by both Sarah and Abraham. Theologically, however, her plea to not witness her child's death is an objection to Abraham's Covenant and resulting actions as immoral. Her statement interrupts her pattern of submission to him and the Covenant. In addition, her plea indicates an evaluation of God's position in the Covenant, as she indirectly asks and demands an answer from Him. The combination of God and Abraham's physical and emotional absence leaves her with no option other than to weep.

Verse seventeen presents God's first appearance to Hagar following her and Ishmael's expulsion and his prolonged silence through their suffering and impending deaths. The verse is packed with layers of detail about God's perspective towards Abraham's action. In the introduction of the verse, God hears the voice of Hagar's son. Perhaps He hears the boy whining, crying, or issuing some other vocal expressions of suffering, but the scriptural author neglects to emphasize the specifics. God immediately responds to Ishmael, rather than Hagar's desperation or emotional plea. The verse continues with God's questioning of Hagar regarding her condition: "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is."<sup>11</sup> Phyllis Tribble brilliantly states the theological understanding to the paradoxical actions of God in this verse: "Although the mother's weeping elicits divine silence, the *lad's* voice evokes divine speech."<sup>12</sup> Hagar's exilic suffering and emotional distress was apparently not a concern of God's, but this reaction is not particularly shocking considering His promise of divine nations to Abraham concerns Ishmael, not Hagar, as the first heir to the fulfillment of this promise. The survival of Ishmael is imperative whereas Hagar's survival is solely dependent upon the service she provides to keep her son alive. A theological issue with this paradigm is the temporary usage of a foreigner's body to sustain the covenant. If Hagar and Ishmael were separated in the desert by Abraham, Hagar's desperation would go

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<sup>9</sup> Genesis 21:16.

<sup>10</sup> Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 48.

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 21:16.

<sup>12</sup> Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 25.

unnoticed. Simply put, Hagar is the human mediator between God and Ishmael, which leads to a greater theological concern: Hagar is expelled from her original oppressors, Abraham and Sarah, only to enter into another experience of oppression, whereby God uses her body as merely a source for communication between himself and Ishmael.

God's response to Ishmael is followed by an eschatological, verbal response in verse eighteen. God instructs Hagar to lift "the" boy to receive water because his survival will produce a great nation. Within this verse, Ishmael is referred to generically illustrating Hagar's disassociation from him as he approached death. The language utilized conveys a dissociation between Hagar and the covenantal narrative focused on Ishmael. God promised a great nation for Ishmael, who must be lifted up and rescued by God, yet Hagar's hands are needed to do the lifting. Rather than being in service to Ishmael, Hagar is presented as a mother demonstrating unconditional love for her son and faith in God who is to keep him alive.

The nineteenth verse of Genesis 21 illustrates God's heroic rescue of Hagar and Ishmael, where he provides Hagar with survival tools, both spiritually and literally. God "opened her eyes and she saw a well of water."<sup>13</sup> God replenishes the limited supply of water given by Abraham. Both Abraham and God desired the survival of Ishmael while neglecting to consider the well-being of Hagar the Egyptian slave. Thus, the selected verses close with the survival of Ishmael at the hand of Hagar.

The prominent theological concern of Genesis 21:14- 19 is how the physical and emotional suffering, and even death, of the foreigner propels the Covenant. Abraham and Sarah's interpretation of their covenantal responsibility is to birth the heir of the nation; therefore, the body of Hagar is forcibly confined to the underpinnings and failures of the Covenantal promise. She is a victim to expulsion because her son threatens the Covenant as the first born. God ignores her condition and plea because Ishmael is of concern, not Hagar. She then serves as the human mediator between God and Ishmael. Although the God of this story can be perceived as having a covenantal bias, Old Testament Professor Thomas B. Dozeman offers a different portrait of the divine. He believes that the human interpretation and response of Abraham and Sarah contains divinely sanctioned consequences, and that Genesis 21 provides a cognitive rationale behind Israel's future oppression under the Egyptians and Mosaic exile in the Book of Exodus. "Sarai does to a child of Egypt... what the Egyptians would later do to Sarai's children."<sup>14</sup> The traumatic experience of Hagar during her exile is accounted for and even experienced by Sarah's descendants in Egypt, who wandered in the

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<sup>13</sup> Genesis 21:19.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas B. Dozeman, et al., "The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117, no. 1 (1998): 23- 43.

desert following their liberation. Thus, the character of Hagar is not merely a tool for Ishmael but rather a re-evaluation of the Covenant. Not surprisingly, the Hagar narrative is an origin story of covenantal failure for Abraham and Sarah. From a historical standpoint, the E source authors took note of Hagar for a reason. Genesis 21:14-19 was produced to remind the Israelites in the early stages of David's monarchy that the success of covenantal accountability is not just a literary concern but a lived reality and an absolute necessity to survive.

### **Historical Context and Textual Analysis Extended - The Comparative Image of Hagar in the Qur'an and Muslim Theology:**

Islamic Scripture found in both the Qur'an and the Hadith recount the expulsion of Hagar and provide theological explanations of her abandonment. The *surah* (chapter) of *Ibrahim* (Abraham) in the Qur'an completely erases the existence of Hagar. Her name is absent from Abraham's chapter because the Qur'anic focus is centralized around the obedience of Abraham. Verse thirty-seven, in *surah* fourteen is a prayer given by Abraham to *Allah* (God): "Lord, I have settled some of my offspring in a barren valley near your sacred house, so that they may be constant in devotion. Put in the hearts of men kindness towards them, and provide them with the earth's fruits, so that they may give thanks."<sup>15</sup> Abraham's account echoes the necessary disparity of Ishmael and Hagar as a prayer offering; the abandonment of Ishmael is an emotional sacrifice that serves to create the Ka'bah, a sacred site for *Allah*. Like Genesis 21:14, the Qur'anic prayer of Abraham expresses the theological reason for Ishmael and Hagar's expulsion, as a means of fulfilling God's will. In the Qur'an, Abraham submits to God's will without verbal or physical objection, just as he does in the Hebrew Bible. In contrast, however, the Qur'anic prayer offers Abraham's verbal concern for his offspring. He prays for his son's survival, whereas Abraham in the Genesis narrative strictly observes his covenantal obligation without any personal response to Ishmael and Hagar's situation.

Hagar is never directly cited in the Qur'an and the importance of her character is minimally inferred. Muhammad, the last prophet of Islam, received direct revelations from *Allah* in Mecca around 610 AD, approximately 1500 years after the writings of the E source authors in the Hebrew tradition. With the help of scribes, Muhammad composed the Qur'an, the Islamic Scripture that houses the direct words of *Allah* as spoken through Muhammad. Under the threat of assassination, Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina for political and religious refuge. In Medina, around 622 A.D., he encountered Jewish communities and learned about their religious traditions. More importantly, he was exposed to the scriptural accounts of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar narrative from the Hebrew

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<sup>15</sup> Carlos Bakhos, "Chapter 17: Abraham," in *The Qur'an*, ed. Andre Rippen and Jawid Mojaddedi (Oxford:WILEY Blackwell , 2017), 285.

Bible.<sup>16</sup> Theologically and historically then, the Qur'anic prayer verse of Abraham aligns with the same person mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. The simplified, historical context of the Qur'anic composition that has been provided here does not seek to invalidate or delegitimize the scriptural accounts of Abraham and Hagar in Islamic tradition, however. The function of the historical context is to point out that the Qur'an does not expand on the narrative of Hagar's exile because it was a common narrative during 622 A.D. Muhammad and his scribes had no reason to further explain the narrative.

The danger of oral stories is that they can easily be forgotten, and so Ibn 'Abbas', a Hadith writer, felt it was necessary to provide a detailed backstory to Abraham's prayer within the Qur'an. In Islamic tradition, the *hadith* (report) is Muhammad's commentary and guidance towards the revelations of *Allah* within the Qur'an. According to Tribble and Russel, "The particular hadith about Abraham's extended family drew on stories circulating in the city of Medina during Muhammad's time."<sup>17</sup> Ibn 'Abbas' precise account of Hagar's exile served to compliment Abraham's prayer found in the Qur'an.

Ibn 'Abbas' hadith, called the *Anbiya* (Prophets), eloquently and elaborately narrates the exile experience of Hagar in the style of storytelling. The purpose of cross-comparing this text with the narrative of Genesis 21 is to highlight the imperative of acknowledging Hagar as a theological significant character in both scriptural sources. With the guidance of Islamic feminist theologian Riffat Hussan, I will extract the corresponding scenes from Genesis 21:14-19 in order to see how the comparative details lend a different voice to the experience of Hagar.

In Genesis 21:15, Abraham emotionlessly prepares for the banishment of Hagar because his focus rests on the fulfillment of the Covenant. In the same fashion, Abraham of the hadith prepares for Hagar's expulsion by providing her and Ishmael with a limited amount of water. After giving them the skin of water, he departs and leaves them alone without any further assistance. In contrast though, the hadith Abraham physically brings them to the sacred site in Mecca rather than leaving them to die in a mysterious, foreign desert. He does not disappear without a theological explanation for his behavior. When he turns to leave, Hagar inquires as to the meaning of his departure, "O Abraham! Where are you going, leaving us in this valley where there is no person whose company we may enjoy, nor is there anything (to enjoy)?"<sup>18</sup> Clearly, Hagar does not take Abraham's action lightly and even demands that he reflect on his decision to

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<sup>16</sup> Phyllis Tribble and Letty M. Russel, *Hagar, Sarah and their Children* (Kentucky: Westminster, 2006), 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Riffat Hassan, "Chapter 6: Islamic Hagar and Her Family," in *Hagar, Sarah and their Children* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 152.

abandon them. She questions him many times when he neglects to respond to her. Here, Abraham's hesitancy to answer demonstrates the struggle of his articulation of God's will to another person. She then asks him, "Has *Allah* ordered you to do so?" He replies, "Yes." She replies, "Then He will not neglect us."<sup>19</sup> There's a major contrast between Hagar's response to the silent Abraham in the Genesis account and the theological discourse in the hadith. Hagar is clearly confused about her fate and she demands a reasonable explanation. She then seeks an explanation of Abraham through the structure of an interview. The absence of God's intervention is understood, not doubted or questioned. She knows that her exile is an aspect of God's will. Most strikingly, she accepts her fate by displaying ultimate devotion to God.

After Abraham departs, Hagar and her son are faced with the challenge of faith, placing all of their trust in God for their survival. Similar to the Genesis 21 account, Hagar in the hadith cannot bear to witness her son die, so she distances herself from him. Unlike the hopeless paralysis of Hagar in the Hebrew Bible, Hagar in the hadith takes it upon herself to physically search for water by running between two mountains, Safa and Marwa.<sup>20</sup> She takes Ishmael's life into her own hands, literally, by desperately looking for access to water. As she approaches the Marwa mountain for the seventh time, she hears a voice from an unknown source. She calls out to the mysterious voice, "O, (whoever you may be!) You have made me hear your voice again; have you got something to help me?"<sup>21</sup> Hagar not only took the initiative to question Abraham, but dares to question if someone, divine or human, is going to help her. Suddenly, she sees an angel of God digging through the dirt with his wings. After much digging, the angel opens a spring of water so that Hagar can supply herself and her son with water to quench their thirst. The angel says, "Don't be afraid of being neglected, for this is the House of Allah which will be built by this boy and his father, and Allah never neglects His people."<sup>22</sup> Similar to the Genesis account, God rescues Hagar and her son from dehydration by supplying them with enough water to survive. Likewise, the God in the Genesis story and the God of the Hadith promise not only the survival of her son but also the political and religious prosperity of their descendants. The difference lies within the context of the promise. For Genesis 21, the survival of Hagar's son, with the help of Hagar, fulfills God's original promise to Abraham. In the Qur'an and Ibn 'Abbas' hadith, Hagar's desperation for the survival of Ishmael is built into the formula of God's will, and helps establish God's House.

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<sup>19</sup> Tribble and Russel, *Hagar, Sarah and their Children*, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Hassan, "Chapter 6," 152.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

### **Synthesis and Conclusion:**

The implications of the theological claims made in both the Hebrew Bible and Islamic Scripture demand thoughtful consideration of the experience of exile, agency towards fate, and the establishment of ritual reflection. The lack of any significant description of Hagar's character denotes the patriarchal bias of God's covenant in the Hebrew Bible and God's will in Islamic Scripture. The theological explanations of her exilic experience gives voice to how Israelites and Ishmaelites process their relationships with God and ultimately, their roles in upholding God's will. Hagar's displacement represents a testimony of survival with the divine intervention of God, but differing interpretations of her experience offer various understandings of isolation and abandonment. From the perspective of the Hebrew Bible, separation from one's homeland connotes the loss of identity and a sorrowful longing for one's existential purpose. From the perspective of Islamic Scripture, displacement presents a faith exercise that challenges one's commitment to God's plan. The textual analysis of Genesis and the hadith offers literary evidence to Hagar's crucial role in the fulfillment of the Covenant and establishment of the will of Allah through the exilic experience. Hagar is not merely a background character but rather a component of God's greater design in each tradition.

The cross-examination of Hagar in the Hebrew Bible and Islamic Scripture challenges the role of human responsibility as it plays out alongside the will of God. According to Bruggeman, the counter-testimony of God's involvement in Hagar's survival is expressed in the practice of agency or lack thereof. In both narratives, Hagar responds to her forced displacement with either submissive acceptance or verbal objection. Comparing the narratives of a displaced Hagar presents an important question: does agency, like that of Hagar's in Islamic Scripture, or the lack of agency, in the Hebrew Bible, perpetuate God's will? In one tradition, Hagar's passive action activates God's intervention. In the other, though, her aggressive action brings about God's intervention. In the Old Testament, Hagar is presented as a desperate character who loses all hope of survival, simply gives up and weeps. The scriptural account then demonstrates how God is the divine hero who hears the cries of humanity and saves a hopeless non-Israelite; therefore, the image of God is a God of unconditional love who alleviates all of humanity from worldly suffering. In Islamic Scripture, Hagar is portrayed as a powerful character who desperately searches for a means of survival and does not succumb to her deathly fate. This account displays how God is the divine provider who witnesses the suffering of His people and supplies the success of His people; therefore, the image of God (*Allah*) is also a God of unconditional love but a God who provides humanity with tools to address the suffering of the world.

The hadith narrative is not only a descriptive origin story explaining the construction of the Ka'bah, it also sets up the Hajj ritual in Mecca. Today, millions of Muslims perform the Hajj in order to commemorate and reflect on the actions performed by Abraham and his family. The ritual of running between the Safa and Marwa mountains is a beautiful reminder of Hagar's desperation and survival in the desert. The running ritual (*s'ay*) is the only ritual dedicated to a woman. Hagar demonstrated ultimate submission to Allah and his will, and pious Muslim practitioners reflect on their own faith and agency to God's will when honoring Hagar in the *s'ay*. Hagar's exilic experience is seen as providing an *axis mundi*, a channel to God, for future descendants of Allah.

In stark opposition to the Islamic tradition, Hagar's narrative is not ritually practiced in the Hebrew tradition, and it is greatly ignored by most Jewish and Christian traditions today. More recently, however, the life of Hagar has been theologically applied to the lives of womanist theologians in which the analysis of Hagar has provided a theological compass for lived experiences of African American women. Hagar's experiences of single motherhood, slavery, and abandonment parallels the experiences of many African American women in the United States. Delores Williams, a womanist theologian, states that the Hagar narrative illustrates how rather than liberating, God's presence helps one survive.<sup>23</sup> I propose, however, that if contemporary Jews or Christians were to craft a ritual service in honor of Hagar, we can develop more substantial reflective practices that help us understand the significance of Hagar in theological and mundane paradigms. Hagar of the Hebrew Bible highlights the need to question God's absence during near-death experiences at the hands of powerful oppressors who also claim to be people of God, like Abraham and Sarah. Hagar is a literary and symbolic character in the Hebrew Bible and Islamic Scripture who testifies against androcentric and ethnocentric powers and demands that God intervene in such structures, even when these structures proclaim themselves to be agents of God's will.

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<sup>23</sup> Tribble and Russel, *Hagar, Sarah and their Children*, 171-184.

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