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"SURVIVAL IS NOT AN ACADEMIC SKILL":
A WOMANIST READING OF ESTHER

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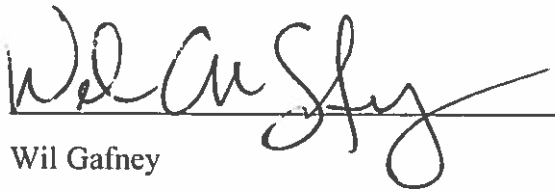

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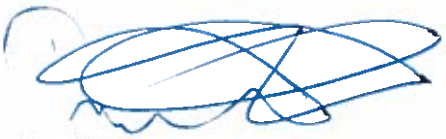

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BRITE DIVINITY SCHOOL

“SURVIVAL IS NOT AN ACADEMIC SKILL”:

A WOMANIST READING OF ESTHER

by
Kamilah Hall Sharp

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the

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"Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference-those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older–know that survival is not an academic skill."

~Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches,* 2012

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

I have been intrigued by Esther for quite some time. Growing up in the church, I rarely heard sermons on Esther, and those I heard typically painted the same picture of Esther saving the Jewish people. Still, I would come back to Esther. While in seminary, I learned for the first time about the LXX and Additions of the story I never heard previously, which seemed like missing pieces to the story. I began to see the story of Esther as a puzzle with many pieces. Using different pieces in the puzzle, such as the text considered, genre, and questions presented, the picture may change. As a Black woman I watch so many people struggling to survive and many are not surviving, in a society where Black lives are not valued, and women are always in danger. I wondered if pieces of the Esther story could create a picture of survival other than Jewish communal survival. I pondered who, if anyone, in Esther could speak to survival, and I questioned what pieces would be necessary to form a broader vision of survival.

Planting the seeds of my questions was a headline that gripped the nation: on August 9, 2014, Lezley McSpadden was at work when she received a call stating the police had shot her son. She rushed to the scene and saw a lifeless body on the ground; her fear became her reality as she realized her son was the dead body.[1] She endured the trauma of losing a child, a loss compounded by her child's death by state-sanctioned violence. McSpadden survived a horrendous experience and is a survivor of that trauma. Police shootings are a common source of trauma in the Black community, and there are many stories available to tell.[2] However, I

[1] Lezley McSpadden and Lyah Beth Leflore, *Tell the Truth & Shame the Devil: The Life, Legacy, and Love of My Son Michael Brown* (New York: Regan Arts, 2016), 10–11.

[2] See Samuel R. Aymer, "'I Can't Breathe': A Case Study—Helping Black Men Cope with Race-related Trauma Stemming from Police and Brutality," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 26, nos. 3–4 (2016): 367–76; Thema Bryant-Davis, Tyonna Adams, Adriana Alejandre, and Anthea A. Gray, "The Trauma Lens of Police Violence Against Racial and Ethnic Minorities: Trauma Lens of Police

became convinced that it was vital for her story, in particular, to come forward.[3] Fortunately, McSpadden eventually wrote about the trauma of this incident and gave insight on how she survived in *Tell the Truth, Shame the Devil: The Life, Legacy, and Love of My Son Michael Brown*.[4] McSpadden's story forced me to look at Esther again. Her survival of loss and trauma brought to light for me the loss and trauma in Esther I had not previously considered. Recognizing there were a multiplicity of stories in Esther, I questioned if there were other stories of survival in Esther.

Subsequently, on October 15, 2017, actress Alyssa Milano took to Twitter and tweeted, "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted, write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet." Within the first twenty-four hours, the post had more than twelve million shares and responses on various social media platforms.[5] Many mistakenly believed the #MeToo campaign was born at that moment, although it had begun ten years prior in the work of a

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Violence Against Ethnic Minorities" *Journal of Social Issues* 73, no. 4 (2017): 852–71; Jacinda Townsend, "Families of African Americans Killed by Police Talk of Trauma," *Aljazeera*, November 22, 2019. Accessed March 1, 2020. https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/families-african-americans-killed-police-talk-trauma-191122063150679.html.

[3] See Stacie Selmon McCormick, "Birthrights and Black Lives: Narrating and Disrupting Perverse Inheritances," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (2020); Lezley McSpadden, "It's Been 5 Years since a Police Officer Killed My Son, Michael Brown. Nothing Has Changed: Police Are Still Executing Black and Brown Young People," *Washington Post*, August 13, 2019. Accessed February 17, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/its-been-5-years-since-a-police-officer-killed-my-son-michael-brown-nothing-has-changed/2019/08/13/a478b3ae-bde1-11e9-9b73-fd3c65ef8f9c_story.html; Danielle Fuentes Morgan, "Visible Black Motherhood is a Revolution," *Biography (Honolulu)* 41, no. 4 (2018); Jason Pollock, Brittanie McSpadden, Lezley McSpadden, Michael Brown Sr, Kanopy, and Gravitas. "Stranger Fruit." Video/DVD. (San Francisco: Gravitas, 2018); Kaila Adia Story, "Mama's Gon' Buy You a Mocking Bird: Why #Blackmothersstillmatter: A Short Genealogy of Black Mothers' Maternal Activism and Politicized Care," *Biography* 41, no. 4 (2018); Shari J. Stenberg and Charlotte Hogg, "Lezley McSpadden," in *Persuasive Acts* (*Women's Rhetorics in the Twenty-First Century* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020); and Kimberly Killen, "'Can You Hear Me Now?' Race, Motherhood, and the Politics of Being Heard," *Politics & Gender* 15, no. 4 (2019).

[4] McSpadden and Leflore, *Tell the Truth & Shame the Devil.*

[5] Sandra Garcia, "The Woman Who Created #MeToo Long Before Hashtags," *New York Times*, October 20, 2017. Accessed March 5, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/20/us/me-too-movement-tarana-burke.html.

Black woman, Tarana Burke.[6] As the movement quickly gained momentum, stories of abuse—in Hollywood, politics, schools, and U.S. gymnastics programs—began to flood social media and news outlets, offered by women all over the world. Shortly after, #ChurchToo began to trend as women and men came forward with accounts of abuse endured in the church. In many of these cases, the women and men had not told their stories previously.[7] These were survivors of sexual abuse of all ages whose stories were being concealed to the brink of erasure. These survivors, finally telling their story, reminded me of Maya Angelou writing about being sexually abused as a young girl in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.*[8] I contemplated how they all survived traumatic experiences and what that survival entails.

As a self-identified womanist, I am committed to the survival and thriving of all people. In each of the instances above, I witnessed Black women endure communal and interpersonal trauma, struggle to survive, and fight for their voices to be heard. I think about how often victims of trauma do not have the opportunity to speak of their own experiences, especially when they are from marginalized communities. Stories of abuse and stories of trauma are intertwined and too often suppressed. When these stories are told, what, if anything, can be ascertained from the survival stories to help identify and communicate other incidents of

[6] Tarana Burke, "#MeToo Was Started for Black and Brown Women and Girls. They're Still Being Ignored," November 10, 2017. Accessed September 15, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/11/09/the-waitress-who-works-in-the-diner-needs-to-know-that-the-issue-of-sexual-harassment-is- about-her-too/.

[7] On November 20, 2017, Emily Joy posted about an experience of sexual abuse in the church. Her friend Hannah Paasch added #ChurchToo to a post and the hashtag garnered thousands of stories of sexual harassment and abuse in the church. See Emily Joy, Twitter, 7:55 PM, November 20, 2017. Accessed September 15, 2019. https://twitter.com/emilyjoypoetry/status/932789409551929345 and Hannah Paasch, Twitter, 10:33 PM, November 21, 2017. Accessed September 15, 2019. https://twitter.com/hannahpaasch/status/932859489442656256.

[8] Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (New York: Bantam Books, 1997).

surviving trauma? How can Black women's survival narratives give insight into Esther? What trauma is present in the book besides that of Jewish communities? How can careful consideration of trauma expand views on Esther? I contend that these are necessary components for me looking at Esther anew.

The Book of Esther

Esther's story is that of a young Jewish girl named Hadassah, who is taken to the palace in the search for a new queen after the Persian king Ahasuerus banishes the first queen, Vashti. Hadassah is instructed to hide her Jewish identity and is then renamed Esther and crowned as queen. Esther's uncle Mordecai compels her to help save her people from Haman's annihilation plot. Throughout the book, the king hosts and attends numerous banquets. There is deception, revenge, kidnapping, sex, danger, and murder told through a series of twists and turns in between the king's parties. The book has all the makings of a remarkable story. It is often studied and interpreted throughout the centuries, yet there is still more to say.

After witnessing Lezley McSpadden and the women and men of the #MeToo movement begin to narrate their survival, I chose Esther for my research because it is an account of survival. The book tells the story of how the Jewish people survived a plot of annihilation. Simultaneously, the story includes an array of characters, such as the young girls taken to the palace, Zeresh, Haman's wife, and the Jewish people's enemies, who face traumatic experiences. What is their survival story? Esther is a resource for survival that can help identify various abuse scenarios and those who endure them and conceptualize a

womanist model of surviving—and living beyond—trauma.[9]

Textual Variations

The story of Esther is told in several different manners across separate textual versions.[10] The manuscripts provide variations that differ in vocabulary, length, ideology, and theology. The MT version is the shortest text of the three, wherein King Ahasuerus rules, there is no mention of God, and Esther and Mordecai seek to save the Jewish people from genocide. King Xerxes is the ruler in the two Greek versions, which depict Esther as more religious with the addition of her prayers to God.[11]

The LXX includes a colophon and 107 verses in the six Additions (A-F) for which there are no equivalents in the MT.[12] The Additions were not a unified collection initially and vary in date, authorship, and original language.[13] Carey Moore contends that the original language of Additions A, C, D, and F was Hebrew or Aramaic, and B and E were initially composed in Greek.[14] Michael Fox asserts that the Additions were written in different languages, including

[9] I want to thank Oluwatomisin Oredein for helping me gain the clarity to articulate this point through our many conversations.

[10] The Masoretic Text (MT) preserves the Hebrew version; there are two Greek versions, one from the Septuagint (LXX) referred to as the 'B-Text,' and the other referred to as the Alpha Text (AT). Additionally, there are two expanded Aramaic translations contained in the *Targum Rishon* and *Targum Sheni*, the Latin translations of *Vetus Latina* and *The Vulgate*, a Syriac translation in the *Peshitta,* and Aramaic, Ethiopian, and Slavonic translations.

[11] In Esther's Prayer in Addition C, Esther prays to the God of Israel, speaks about her tribe and kindred, and states she has not eaten at Haman's table or honored the King's feast, which imply her fidelity.

[12] Esther is the only book in the Jewish canon that has a colophon. See Carey A. Moore, "On the Origins of the LXX Additions to the Book of Esther," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92, no. 3 (1973): 583.

[13] See Lisa M. Wolfe, *Ruth, Esther, Song of Songs, and Judith* (Eugene: Cascade, 2011), 68.

[14] Carey A Moore, "On the Origins of the LXX Additions to the Book of Esther," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92, no. 3 (1973): 384.

Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic, at different times.[15] Linda Day maintains that the Greek version amplifies the book's theological concerns by writing God into the story and making Esther and Mordecai pious.[16] The word "God" appears over fifty times in the Additions, and there are several prayers included. Jews and some Protestants refer to the Additions as apocryphal. However, the LXX is the source for the Catholic and Greek Orthodox canon. Another significant difference is that the LXX refers to Esther as Mordecai's "wife" instead of "daughter."[17]

The Alpha Text (AT) is only preserved in four medieval manuscripts: 19, 93, 108, and 359. The AT manuscripts date from the tenth to the thirteenth century C.E. The AT relays the same basic story but uses different words, omits some names and dates, and changes some of the details. For example, the AT does not have the same ending as the LXX and MT; this tradition resembles the LXX but is much shorter. Uniquely, the AT is the only version that includes the letter of Mordecai.[18] David Clines, the first to translate AT manuscripts into English, argues that the AT was initially independent of the LXX and based on a different Hebrew *Vorlage* than that of the MT.[19]

Similarly, Michael Fox argues that the AT is a variant Greek version based on a proto-AT, which is earlier than and independent of the MT.[20] André Lacocque maintains the LXX

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[15] Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 265.

[16] Linda M. Day, *Esther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 17; Jonathan Magonet, "The God Who Hides: Some Jewish Responses to the Book of Esther," *European Judaism* 47, no. 1 (2014): 110.

[17] See Barry Walfish, "Kosher Adultery? The Mordecai-Esther-Ahasuerus Triangle in Midrash and Exegesis," *Prooftexts* 22, no. 3 (2002): 305-33; Tal Davidovich, *Esther, Queen of the Jews: The Status and Position of Esther in the Old Testament, Series?* vol. 59 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013): 50.

[18] Kristin De Troyer, *Rewriting the Sacred Text*, vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 60.

[19] David Clines, *The Esther Scroll: The Story of the Story*, The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 30 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984).

[20] Fox, *Character, and Ideology in the Book of Esther*, 9.

differs from the AT because the LXX was intended for Jewish use and the AT for non-Jewish communities.[21] Kristin De Troyer contends that the AT's vocabulary indicated a reworking of the LXX and was probably developed around 40–41 CE in Rome when Philo was attempting to convince Agrippa to allow Jewish Alexandrians to live according to their laws.[22]

The *Vetus Latina* (VL), the Old Latin version of Esther, is known through twenty manuscripts; however, only four contain the complete book (VL 109, VL 123, VL 130, and VL 151). This account differs from the MT, LXX, and Aramaic. One distinct difference is the active role of God in saving the Jewish people from annihilation. Another variance is that the VL omits the massacre episode.[23] Jean-Claude Haelewyck, who provided a critical edition of the VL, contends that the Greek *Vorlage* of the Old Latin was the first Greek translation of Esther and is older than the LXX.[24] This witness to a Greek model demonstrates significant divergences from the LXX. For example, it does not include the colophon that is in the LXX. Haelewyck's position is that study of the Old Latin of Esther is essential in analyzing the Greek tradition of the book. He criticizes Moore, Tov, Clines, Fox, Jobes, and De Troyer for their lack of engagement with the text in their analysis of the LXX and AT.[25] There is a continued need for scholarship on the Old Latin version.

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[21] André Lacocque, "The Different Versions of Esther," *Biblical Interpretation* 7, no. 3 (1999): 301–22.

[22] De Troyer, *Rewriting the Sacred Text*, 89.

[23] Simon Bellmann and Anathea Portier-Young, "The Old Latin Book of Esther: An English Translation," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 28, no. 4 (2019): 17–21.

[24] Jean-Claude Haelewyck, "The Relevance of the Old Latin Version for the Septuagint, with Special Emphasis on the Book of Esther," *Journal of Theological Studies* 57, no. 2 (2006): 439-73. See also, Lisbeth S. Fried, "Towards the Ur-Text of Esther," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25, no. 88 (2000).

[25] Haelewyck, "The Relevance of the Old Latin," 455.

Josephus retells the story of Esther in *The Antiquities of the Jews* book 11. His version of the story is widely believed to be based upon the LXX and Targums, although De Troyer asserts Josephus follows the AT.[26] Josephus' version includes Additions B, C, D, and E and evinces a more religious component. The *Antiquities* paints a picture wherein the Jewish people face danger and appear more heroic.[27]

Ample scholarship exists for all three texts; however, most scholars have focused on the MT.[28] This dissertation will focus primarily on the MT as it is the version most ecclesial communities engage.[29] My vocational commitment to the church compels me to use the MT to both challenge and encourage my ecclesial community through engagement with this sacred text.

Authorship, Dating, and Genre

Scholarly positions vary on the authorship, date, style, interpretation, and other formal issues surrounding Esther. The author or authors of the book and the Additions are unknown. The setting of the book is fifth-century Persia. The Babylonian Exile has long ended; two of

[26] De Troyer, *Rewriting the Sacred Text*, 83.

[27] See Adele Berlin, *Esther: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001), *liii*, Paul Spilsbury, "Esther," in *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture*, ed. Louis Feldman, Jamie Kugel, et al. (Lincoln: Jewish Publication Society, 2013), Adele Reinhartz, "LXX Esther: A Hellenistic Jewish Revenge Fantasy," in *Early Jewish Writings*, ed. Eileen Schuller and Marie-Theres Wacker (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017).

[28] For more on the LXX see Hanna Kahana, *Esther: Juxtaposition of the Septuagint Translation with the Hebrew Text* (Dudley: Peeters, 2005); Kristen De Troyer, "An Oriental Beauty Parlour: An Analysis of Esther 2.8-18 in the Hebrew, the Septuagint and the Second Greek Text," in *Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith, and Susanna*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995). For more on AT see Kay Fountain, *Literary and Empirical Readings of the Books of Esther* (New York: P. Lang, 2002). For examination of all three texts see: Linda Day, *Three Faces of a Queen: Characterization in the Books of Esther* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995); Timothy Beal, "Tracing Esther's Beginnings," in *Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995).

[29] One of the common tenets of womanist biblical interpretation is that the fruit of scholarship should be accessible to the worshiping community. See Wilda C. M. Gafney, "A Black Feminist Approach to Biblical Studies," *Encounter* 67, no. 4 (2006): 391–403 (392).

the main characters, Esther and Mordecai, represent a well-established Jewish diasporic community in Susa, the Persian capital. The actual composition of the book occurred much later than the events supposedly depicted. However, the book's version as reflected in the MT is generally dated to the fourth or third century B.C.E. The LXX is dated to the second century or first half of the first century B.C.E.[30]

Various genre proposals include a historical novel,[31] work of fiction,[32] wisdom literature,[33] festival etiology,[34] diaspora tale,[35] and revenge fantasy.[36] Biblical scholars even contend that Esther represents the genre of comedy or carnivalesque with its larger-than-life pageantry and parody.[37] Nicole Duran does not see as much humor in the story.[38] Ericka Dunbar

[30] Martien A. Halvorson-Taylor, "Secrets and Lies: Secrecy Notices (Esther 2:10, 20) and Diasporic Identity in the Book of Esther," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131, no. 3 (2012): 467–85, 469.

[31] Richard Gordis, "Religion, Wisdom and History in the Book of Esther: A New Solution to an Ancient Crux," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100 (1981): 359–88; Carey Moore, "Archaeology and the Book of Esther," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 38, no. 3/4 (1975), 79; Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 145.

[32] Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 96; Jeremiah Cataldo, "Remembering Esther: Anti-Semitism and the Conflict of Identity," *The Bible & Critical Theory* 8, no. 1 (2012): 18.

[33] Shemaryahu Talmon, "Wisdom in the Book of Esther," *Vetus Testamentum* 13, no. 1 (1963): 419–55 (426).

[34] Day, *Esther*, 12.

[35] Ellen F. Davis, *Opening Israel's Scriptures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 380.

[36] Reinhartz, "LXX Esther," 12.

[37] Berlin, *The JPS Commentary Esther*, xxii; Kathleen M. O'Connor, "Humor, Turnabouts, and Survival in the Book of Esther," in *Are We Amused? : Humour about Women in the Biblical World*, ed. Athalya Brenner-Idan and William R. Farmer (London: Bloomsbury 2004); Melissa A. Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible: A Subversive Collaboration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Alexander Green, "Power, Deception, and Comedy: The Politics of Exile in the book of Esther " *Jewish Political Studies Review* 23, no. 1/2 (2011); Athalya Brenner, "Who's Afraid of Feminist Criticism? Who's Afraid of Biblical Humour? the Case of the Obtuse Foreign Ruler in the Hebrew Bible," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 19, no. 63 (1994): 48.

[38] Nicole Duran, "Who Wants to Marry a Persian King? Gender Games and Wars and the Book of Esther," in *Pregnant Passion: Gender, Sex, and Violence in the Bible*, ed. Cheryl Kirk-Duggan (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 71-84; 74.

has made a convincing argument that the book should be read as a biblical horror to help focus on the violence, exploitation, trafficking, and trauma endured by many in the book.[39]

Esther: Contested Canonization

Esther's canonization was contested among Jewish leaders primarily because there is no direct mention of God in the text. Esther is the only book in the Hebrew Bible of which no manuscripts were discovered at Qumran. Further, while scholars believe the community was familiar with the story, Purim was not included in the Qumran community's liturgical calendar, suggesting that this Jewish community did not view Esther as canonical.[40] Early rabbinic sages were reluctant to canonize the book because they believed it might be misunderstood by Gentiles, primarily since Esther provided support for a festival in which they did not partake. Further to the point, the Talmud indicates that these debates among the rabbis included the question of whether Esther "defiled the hands," that is, whether the book qualified as holy Scripture, which was believed actually to make one's hands unclean by its perfect holiness.[41] Still, scholars disagree whether the phrase "defile the hands" might have a different meaning. Broyde asserts that sages disputed whether Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs "defile the hands," as each of these books does not include the Tetragrammaton.[42]

Esther's earliest appearance on a canonical list is a Talmudic work from the second

[39] Ericka Dunbar, "For Such a Time as This? #Ustoo: Representations of Sexual Trafficking, Collective Trauma, and Horror in the Book of Esther," *Bible and Critical Theory* 15, no. 2 (2019): 29–48.

[40] See David J. Zucker, "The Importance of Being Esther: Rabbis, Canonicity, Problems and Possibilities," *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 47, no. 1 (2014): 102–8 (105); Jonathan Ben-Dov, "A Presumed Citation of Esther 3:7 in 4qdb," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 6, no. 3 (1999): 282–84.

[41] See *b. Megillah* 7a.

[42] Michael J. Broyde, "Defilement of the Hands, Canonization of the Bible, and the Special Status of Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs," *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 44, no. 1 (1995): 65–79.

century C.E., *Baraitha* in *Baba Bathra* 14b-15a.[43] Esther is not mentioned or even alluded to in the Second Testament.[44] Early church fathers rarely mentioned Esther. The Western church fathers held a positive view of the text and regarded it as canonical, while the Eastern church did not. The book was not unquestioned in canonicity until the Councils of Hippo in 393 and Carthage in 397.[45] At the Council of Carthage, Esther and the Additions were officially endorsed as part of the Christian Scriptures.[46]

Jewish Interpretation

The Megilloth (properly the *Hamesh Megilloth*, "Five Scrolls") are part of the Ketuvim and include Esther, Ruth, Song of Songs, Lamentations, and Qoheleth. The Megilloth are read on the five major holidays of the Jewish liturgical calendar.[47] *Megillat Esther* is the scroll that contains the MT version of the story. This scroll is read on Purim as it recounts Purim's purported origins, a festival included in the Jewish calendar not established in Torah. Likewise, the lack of mention of God, the temple, prayer, Jewish practices like *kashrut,* and exogamous marriage in the book set it apart from other biblical texts and Jewish diaspora stories.[48] Consequently, early Rabbinic writings are abundant within Esther. Rabbinic writings on Esther

[43] Carey A. Moore, *Esther: Introduction, Translation and Notes, The Anchor Bible Series.* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1971), *XXII*.

[44] Jo Carruthers, *Esther Through the Centuries* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), 8.

[45] Timothy S. Laniak, *Shame and Honor in the Book of Esther* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 2.

[46] Bernhard W. Anderson, "The Place of the Book of Esther in the Christian Bible," *The Journal of Religion* 30, no. 1 (1950): 32–43 (33).

[47] Avigdor Herzog, "The Five Scrolls," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007).

[48] Daniel, Judith, and Tobit are also viewed as Jewish Diaspora stories. See Berlin, *The JPS Commentary Esther*, xv. Max Rogland argues terminology in Esther that evokes imagery of the Temple. Max Rogland, "The Cult of Esther: Temple and Priestly Imagery in the Book of Esther," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 44, no. 1 (Jan 2019).

expanded and reworked the story. As Adele Berlin states, "midrashim on Esther seek to weave a particular passage, character, or episode into the fabric of the entire Bible and to make the meaning of the passage congruent with the values and practices of rabbinic Judaism."[49] *Esther Rabbah, BT Megillah, and Midrash 'Abba Gurion* are some midrashim on Esther.[50]

In these early sources, ancient rabbis and sages often transformed Esther into a pious Jewish woman through their interpretations. Throughout discussions on Esther, the issues that arise include why Esther has two names,[51] her beauty,[52] and her being a prophet.[53] Leila Bronner argues that Esther's rabbinic transformation made the book more acceptable and helped popularize the festival of Purim.[54] Katheryn Pfister Darr states the rabbis can take a story with no apparent religious elements and read and understand it as a religious story.[55] The anti-Semitism contained within Esther is a focal point of rabbinic writings.[56]

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[49] Berlin, *The JPS Commentary Esther*, *lii*.

[50] See Jacob Neusner, *Esther Rabbah I: An Analytical Translation*, vol. no. 182 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989); Eliezer Segal, *Vol. 1 The Babylonian Esther Midrash: A Critical Commentary* (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2020); Leila Leah Bronner, "Esther Revisited: An Aggadic Approach," in *Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith, and Susanna* ed. Athalya Brenner (1995); Naomi M. Hyman, *Biblical Women in the Midrash: A Sourcebook* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1997).

[51] Esther is referred to as Hadassah in Esth 2:7 and Esther throughout the book. Rabbis discuss her name, etymology, and virtues associated with her names. See *B Meg. 13a, Panim Aḥerim* 63, and *Second Targum* 2.7.

[52] Esther is one of four women in the Hebrew Bible that are described as very beautiful. Sarah, Rahab, and Abigail are the other three. *B. Meg. 15 a*.

[53] Sages considered Esther a prophet. In *B. Megillah 14a* there were seven female prophets: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther. Esther is considered a prophet based upon Esth 5:1 "on the third day she clothed herself in royalty" which is interpreted as the spirit of prophecy. See Leila Bronner, "Esther Revisited: An Aggadic Approach," in *Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith, and Susanna*, 193.

[54] Bronner, "Esther Revisited," 197.

[55] Katheryn Darr, *Far More Precious Than Jewels: Perspectives on Biblical Women* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 187.

[56] Joshua Berman explains how Midrash focuses on Haman's words in 3:8 as the focal point for attacks against Jewish people, and further, that Rabbis throughout history have used Haman to illustrate the anti-Semitism of their time. Joshua Berman, "Aggadah and Anti-Semitism: The Midrashim to Esther 3:8," *Judaism* 38, no. 2 (Spring 1989). For more on antisemitism see Timothy Beal, *The Book of Hiding: Gender, Ethnicity, Annihilation,*

Christian Interpretation

The character of Esther's interpretation among Christians across the centuries varies. Typically, Esther is relegated to passing comments, such as Clement of Rome's acknowledgment of Esther (alongside Judith) as a brave, godly woman.[57] The first known Christian commentary on the book, by Rabanus Maurus, was not written until 836 C.E.[58] Martin Luther is a prime example of how the view of Esther among Christian interpreters has fluctuated: early in his career, he viewed the book positively; as a Reformer, he condemned it.[59]

Notably, Esther has been engaged in many ways outside of scholarship. For instance, it

and Esther (New York: Routledge, 1997); Joseph Fleishman, "Why Did Ahasuerus Consent to Annihilate the Jews?," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 25, no. 2 (1999): 41-58; Jon D. Levenson, "Is There a Counterpart in the Hebrew Bible to New Testament Antisemitism?," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22, no. 2 (1985): 242-60.

[57] Clement I, *Clement, First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 29.

[58] Carey A. Moore, *Studies in the Book of Esther* (New York: Ktav Pub. House, 1982), XXV.

[59] Martin Luther, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther* (New York: G. Bell and Sons, 1895), 11. Luther transitioned into an extreme antisemitic position in which he advocated the burning of synagogues and Jewish schools as well as banning Jewish religious texts. See "On the Jews and Their Lies" in Martin Luther and Tryntje Helfferich, *The Essential Luther* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2018). See also Isaac Kalimi, "Martin Luther, the Jews, and Esther: Biblical Interpretation in the Shadow of Judeophobia," *Journal of Religion* 100, no. 1 (2020): 42-74.

has found new life as the basis for novels,[60] plays,[61] poetry.[62] These creative offerings also include interpretations of the characters and the story that can shape one's view of the text.[63] Specifically, Esther and Vashti's complimentary presentation appears in different writings, highlighting their positive attributes and actions. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's 1871 poem "Vashti" emphasizes the strength and pride of the character.[64] Angelina Grimke looked to Esther as a model for her speech before the Massachusetts legislative committee on the status of slavery in 1838.[65] It was only later interpretations that consistently pitted the two women against each

[60] Maria Poggel-Degenhardt, *Königin Vasthi* (Hildesheim: Borgmeyer, 1928); Emily Barton, *The Book of Esther: A Novel* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2016); India Edghill, *Game of Queens: A Novel of Vashti and Esther* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015); Rebecca Kohn, *The Gilded Chamber: A Novel of Queen Esther* (New York: Rugged Land, 2004).

[61] One of the most notable plays is Jean Racine's, *Esther* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1886). The play was commissioned by Madame de Maintenon, the wife of Louis XIV, who established a school that ensured girls were instructed in theology and doctrine, along with the social responsibilities and expectations of noble wives. Timothy Pyles argues, "Racine embodies moral and theological truth in Esther…" See Timothy Pyles, "Bodies of Theology: Racine's *Esther* and *Athalie* as Embodied Theology," *Theatre Symposium* 27 (2019): 24–38 (26). Racine's play has been adapted numerous times, such as in *Esther, oder di belohnte Tugend*, by Joseph Herz (1827), and *Esther* by John Masefield (1922). Other plays on Esther include three tragedies by Antoine de Montchrétien, *Esther*, *Vashti*, and *Aman*: *Esther*, Sonia V. Daugherty (1929). See Elimelech Epstein Halevy, "Esther," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 515–18; Elizabeth Polack, *Esther, the Royal Jewess, or, the Death of Haman!: An Historical Drama in Three Acts* (London: J. Duncombe, 1835); Izak Goller, *A Purim-Night's Dream: A Phantasy of Esther, Queen of Mede and Persia, Some 2,400 Years Ago, in Rhythm, Rhyme and Fourteen Winks* (London: Ghetto, 1931); Grace Emma Barney, *A Study of Biblical References in French Classic Tragedy: With Reference to the Aman of Montchrestien and the Esther of Racine* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota., 1926).

[62] See Francis Quarles, *Divine Poems, Containing the History of Jonah, Esther, Job, Sampson Together with Sions Sonets, Elegies/Written, and Newly Augmented, by Fra. Quarles* (London: E. M. for Samuel Lownes, 1664); John Henley, *The History of Queen Esther: A Poem in Four Books* (Fleetstreet: A. Bettesworth, in Pater-Noster-Row E. Curll, and J. Pemberton, 1715); Frances Ellen Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader* (New York: Feminist Press at CUNY, 1990), 181–83; Kathryn Hellerstein, "Beyond the Purim-Shpil: Reinventing the Scroll of Esther in Modern Yiddish Poems," in *Culture Front: Representing Jews in Eastern Europe*, eds. Benjamin Nathans and Gabriella Safran (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 241–66.

[63] See Joyce Zonana, "Feminist Providence: Esther, Vashti, and the Duty of Disobedience in Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics," in *Through a Glass Darkly: Essays in the Religious Imagination*, ed. John C. Hawley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 228–49.

[64] Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day*, 181–83.

[65] Phyllis M. Japp, "Esther or Isaiah?: The Abolitionist-Feminist Rhetoric of Angelina Grimké," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 71, no. 3 (1985).

other.

Studies compare the characters and motifs within Esther to those of numerous other biblical texts and characters. For example, Esther has been compared to Daniel as both are tales of diaspora life, with the protagonist a part of the royal court.[66] Scholars likewise note the allusions in Esther to 1 Samuel, specifically related to Benjamite leadership.[67] Jonathan Grossman raised similarities and connections between Esther and the stories of Joseph, Esau and Jacob, Ahab and Jezebel, and Joshua.[68] M. E. Andrews surveys the parallels in the Exodus and Esther.[69] Several scholars consider how the author describes Esther's beauty in a comparable way to that of Joseph, Rachel, Abigail, Saul, and David.[70] Klara Butting maintains the Joseph story is the model for Esther.[71] Jonathan Thambryraja compares Mordecai's dream

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[66] See Mary Mills, "Household and Table: Diasporic Boundaries in Daniel and Esther," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (2006): 408–20; W. Lee Humphreys, "A Life-Style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92, no. 2 (1973); Michael Matthew, "Daniel at the Beauty Pageant and Esther in the Lion's Den: Literary Intertextuality and Shared Motifs between the Books of Daniel and Esther," *Old Testament Essays* 29, no. 1 (2016): 116–32; and John Dunne, *Esther and Her Elusive God: How a Secular Story Functions as Scripture* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014).

[67] Yitzak Berger, "Esther and Benjaminite Royalty: A Study in Inner-Biblical Allusion," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, no. 4 (2010): 625–44.

[68] Jonathan Grossman, "'Dynamic Analogies' in the Book of Esther," *Vetus Testamentum* 59, no. 3 (2009): 394–414.

[69] M. E. Andrew, "Esther, Exodus and Peoples," *Australian Biblical Review* 23 (1975): 25–28.

[70] See Anne-Mereike Wetter, "Bodies, Boundaries, and Belonging in the Book of Esther," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 255–65; Rebecca Hancock, *Esther and the Politics of Negotiation: Public and Private Spaces and the Figure of the Female Royal Counselor* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 18; Berger, "Esther and Benjaminite," 625–44; Jonathan Magonet, "The God Who Hides: Some Jewish Responses to the Book of Esther," *European Judaism* 47, no. 1 (2014): 109–16, 113.

[71] Klara Butting, "Esther: About Resistance Against Anti-Semitism and Sexism," in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*, eds. Luise Schottroff, Marie-Theres Wacker and Martin Rumschidt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 209. Bronner, "Esther Revisited: An Aggadic Approach," 182. David J. Zucker, "Reading Esther as Abigail Redux," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 52, no. 3 (2022). For other comparisons of Esther and Joseph see also Eliezer Segal, "Human Anger and Divine Intervention in Esther," *Prooftexts* 9, no. 3 (1989): 247–56, 250; Greg Schmidt Goering, "Intersecting Identities and Persuasive Speech," *Biblical Interpretation* 23, no. 3 (2015): 340–68; Grossman, "Dynamic Analogies"; Jonathan Jacobs, "Characterizing Esther from the Outset: The Contribution of the Story in

to the dreams of Daniel and Joseph. He asserts that Daniel, Joseph, and Esther's stories were produced in the same literary tradition and are best understood in light of one another.[72] Pamela Kirk Rappaport discusses the Catholic tradition of Esther as a prototype to the Virgin Mary.[73] Leonard Greenspoon surveys connections in the books of Esther and Ruth.[74] William Phipps also compares Esther and Ruth observing how both are books named for women who marry men of other cultures, and the writer of Ruth is more inclusive than the writer of Esther because tolerance is promoted in Ruth and intolerance in Esther.[75] Lastly, Esther has been viewed together with Judith due to the similarities in their stories.[76]

Feminist Approaches to Esther

Esther is one of two women in the Hebrew Bible with books named after them.[77] Early feminists looking to recapture women's role in the Bible examined the two books using similar

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Esther 2:1–20," *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures: Archives* 8 (2008): 2–13; and Linda Day, *Esther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 18.

[72] Jonathan Thambyrajah, "Mordecai's Dream in Esther: The Greek and Latin Versions, Character, and the Tradition of Interpretation," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 43, no. 3 (2019): 479–90, 482.

[73] Pamela Kirk Rappaport, "Another Esther: Sor Juana's Biblical Self-Portrait," in *The Bible and Feminism*, ed. Yvonne Sherwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 102. See also Carruthers, *Esther through the Centuries*, 16.

[74] Leonard Greenspoon, "Esther, Vashti, Ruth, and Naomi: Kindred Heroines in Megilloth," in *Megilloth Studies: The Shape of Contemporary Scholarship*, ed. Brad Embry (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2016), 20–29.

[75] William E. Phipps, *Assertive Biblical Women*, vol. no. 128 (Westport: Greenwood, 1992), 103.

[76] See Sidnie White Crawford, "Esther and Judith: Contrasts in Character," in *The Book of Esther in Modern Studies*, eds. Sidnie White Crawford and Leonard Greenspoon (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 61–76; Nicole Duran, "Having Men for Dinner: Deadly Banquets and Biblical Women," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 35, no. 4 (2005): 117–24; Gur Klein, *Sexual Hospitality in the Hebrew Bible: Patronymic, Metronymic, Legitimate and Illegitimate Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Lewis Paton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1908), 75–76; Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther*, 138.

[77] Ruth is the only other book in the Hebrew Bible canon named after a woman; Judith is deuterocanonical.

literary approaches. Mary Gendler approaches Esther with the question of what, if any, type of model she could be for women, ultimately concluding that Vashti is a better model for feminists.[78] Leila Bronner disagrees with Gendler and insists that Esther exhibits the qualities of boldness and directness while embodying wisdom.[79] However, Alice Laffey labels Esther as weak and submissive and asserts that Esther reinscribes patriarchal values.[80] Day contends that while Esther does conform to patriarchal expectations, she can subvert those standards in many ways to accomplish her goal.[81] Susan Zaeske notes how Jewish feminists wrestle with the notion that *Megillat* Esther includes a destabilization of patriarchal words while simultaneously seeming to reinscribe the idea that a beautiful woman competes with other women to gain power in a male-dominated world.[82] This body of scholarship has continuously pitted Vashti against Esther, arguing that Vashti resembles feminist ideals while Esther is simply a beauty queen.[83] However, Katheryn Darr asserts that although Esther achieves her status from working within the patriarchal culture, there is something to be learned from both Vashti and Esther.[84]

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[78] Mary Gendler, "The Restoration of Vashti," in *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives*, ed. Elizabeth Koltun (New York: Schocken, 1976), 241–47.

[79] Leila Bronner, "Reclaiming Esther: From Sex Object to Sage," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 26 (1998): 3-11, 9.

[80] See Alice Laffey, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); Esther Fuchs, "Status and Role of Female Heroines in the Biblical Narrative," *Mankind Quarterly* 23 (1982): 149–60.

[81] Day, *Esther,* 102.

[82] Susan Zaeske, "Esther's Book: A Rhetoric of Writing for Jewish Feminists," in *Jewish Rhetorics: History, Theory, Practice,* ed. Michael Bernard-Donals and Janice W. Fernheimer (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2014), 181.

[83] David Clines, "Reading Esther from Left to Right: Contemporary Strategies for Reading a Biblical Text," in *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield*, ed. David J. A. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl, and Stanley E. Porter (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 3–22. It must be noted that non-feminist scholars also pit Vashti and Esther against each other. See Andre Lacocque, *Esther Regina: A Bakhtinian Reading* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 52.

[84] Pfister Darr, *More Precious than Jewels*, 192.

The Esther-versus-Vashti binary is problematic because it presents both characters as flat and two-dimensional when there is much more depth to each of them. Further, while most feminist studies focus on gender implications, there are implications for many more issues that arise from careful analysis of these two characters, other characters, and the story as a whole. In particular, feminist scholarship has primarily ignored Zeresh, the wife of Haman and the other named female character.[85] This project seeks to address this issue.

Beyond comparing Esther and Vashti, feminist scholarship has often compared Esther to other female biblical characters. Linda Day studies Naomi, Ruth, Esther, and Judith. She observes how each of these female characters is forced to act independently to accomplish their goals because God is not apparently present in their stories.[86] Sidnie White Crawford argues that Esther is included in the Hebrew canon, but Judith is not because she is a dangerous woman who subverts power; Esther, however, never challenges the status quo.[87] Yael Shemesh calls attention to how feminist scholarship has evolved around these three characters and how there is still room for more study on "the topic of lifesaving women in the Hebrew Bible."[88]

Other Interpretative Questions and Approaches

Another major issue in Esther's narrative that feminists and other scholars highlight is

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[85] Alice Laffey offers a brief treatment of Zeresh and notes the lack of scholarship on her in *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 216–17. Bronner also notes the absence of Zeresh in feminist scholarship. Bronner, *Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith, and Susanna,* 191.

[86] Linda Day, "Power, Otherness, and Gender in the Biblical Short Stories," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 20, no. 1 (1998): 109–27, 123.

[87] Sidnie White Crawford, "Esther Not Judith: Why One Made It and the Other Didn't," *Biblical Review* 18 (2002): 21–31.

[88] Yael Shemesh, "The Stories of Women in a Man's World: The Books of Ruth, Esther, and Judith," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Retrospect*, ed. Susanne Scholz (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013), 248–67, 266.

sexual abuse. Upon the suggestion of his advisors, the king issues orders for Esther and many other young girls to be taken to the palace in order for him to select a new wife. Several young girls are taken to the king's bedroom as he decides who will be queen. Randall Bailey, who asserts that sexuality is an organizing theme for Esther, sees in this episode an example of child sexual abuse that is too often overlooked. Further, he raises the pointed question of why churches do not address this problematic aspect of the story.[89] Juliana Claassens maintains sex with these women was not likely consensual because of the king's position of power.[90]

Sarojini Nadar affirms that by shifting focus from Vashti to Esther and not paying attention to King Ahasuerus' selection process, "we 'erase' from our awareness the sexual violence against women that occurs."[91] She also contends that, since the king had women brought in his bedroom for three years as he looked for a new queen, there were possibly thousands of unknown young girls and women who could have been impacted.[92] For Nadar, this text normalizes sexual violence against girls and women. Dunbar identifies the actions in the narrative as sex trafficking and exploitation of Africana girls.[93]

In contrast, Day argues that it is not clear from the text that what happened with the

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[89] Randall Bailey, "That's Why They Didn't Call the Book Hadassah! The Interse(ct)/(x)ionality of Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexuality in the Book of Esther," in *They Were All Together in One Place?: Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*, ed. Randall C. Bailey, Tat-Siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2009), 227–50.

[90] Julianna Claassens and Amanda Gouws, "From Esther to Kwezi," *International Journal of Public Theology* 8, no. 4 (2014): 471–87, 477.

[91] Sarojini Nadar, "'Texts of Terror' Disguised as the Word of God: The Case of Esther 2:1–18 and the Conspiracy of Rape in the Bible." *Journal of Constructive Theology: Gender, Religion and Theology in Africa* 10, no. 2 (2004): 59–79.

[92] Nadar asserts that in Esth 1:3 the text opens in the third year of the reign of King Ahasuerus, which is when Vashti was deposed. In chapter 2 it is the seventh year of his reign when Esther finds his favor. There were four years between these two-time markers and one year was spent preparing the virgins with cosmetic treatments, leaving three years for the king to have girls brought into his bedroom.

[93] Dunbar, "For Such a Time," 29.

girls and the king was sexual; in other places in the Hebrew Bible, the sexual nature of certain situations is clear and expressly stated, but not here.[94] Naomi Steinberg considers abuse in her comparative study of Esther with other biblical texts in her gender and genocide study, also called gendercide.[95] Non-feminist scholars also address the theme of sexual abuse in Esther. David Zucker contends, "Esther is a victim of state-sponsored abuse…Esther is raped."[96] Equally important is the assessment by numerous scholars that Esther's use of sexual relations represents a means of survival.[97] Claassens rightly notes that Esther's narrative can help raise awareness of how women and men are violated and the part that patriarchal structures play in those violations.[98]

The term לקח rendered "taken" in many English translations of Esther generates a good deal of debate in biblical scholarship. Adelman notes that Esther is לקח three times by possibly by force yet acknowledges לקח also connotes marriage.[99] Duran maintains that Esther and the girls have no choice.[100] Wolfe contends this could have looked like

[94] Day, *Esther*, 52.

[95] Naomi Steinberg, "Social Death as Gendered Genocide: The Fate of Women and Children," *Biblical Interpretation-A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* 26, no. 1 (2018): 23–42. For more on gendercide see Mary Anne Warren, *Gendercide: The Implications of Sex Selection* (Totowa: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985).

[96] See Zucker, "Importance of Being Esther," 106.

[97] Johnny Miles, "Reading Esther as Heroine: Persian Banquets, Ethnic Cleansing, and Identity Crisis," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 45, no. 3 (2015): 131–34.

[98] Claassens and Gouws, "From Esther to Kwezi," 474.

[99] Esth is לקח in 2:7, 2:8, and 2:16. Deut 14 is the example she gives as לקח referencing marriage. See Rachel Adelman, "'Passing Strange'–Reading Transgender Across Gender: Rabbinic Midrash and Feminist Hermeneutics on Esther," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, no. 2 (2014): 81–97, 87; Jonathan Jacobs, "Characterizing Esther from the Outset: The Contribution of the Story in Esther 2: 1–20," *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures: Archives*, vol. 8 (2008): 2–13, 6.

[100] Duran, "Who Wants to Marry a Persian King?," 77.

kidnapping and sexual slavery with the woman with the best sex named as queen.[101] In particular, Fox argues in agreement with Day that one should not assume Esther or the other women are forced, and they may want to go to the harem in the king's palace.[102] Similarly, in agreement with Carey Moore, Baldwin states that "taken" does not suggest "anything unpleasant," but she notes there is likely no right for the girls to exercise any choice in the matter.[103]

The absence of any direct reference of God in Esther has been deliberated throughout the centuries. As discussed above, early Jewish and Christian interpreters wrestled with the book.[104] Even without any direct mention of God, God's presence is interpreted in Esther.[105] Jonathan Magonet contends the Tetragrammaton is formed acrostically in Esther 5:4.[106] Many suggest מקום in 4:14 is an allusion to God.[107] Others interpret the book to see God as working through human actions.[108] John Dunne conversely asserts that too many readers import God, theology,

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[101] Lisa Wolfe, *Ruth, Esther, Song of Songs, and Judith* (Eugene: Cascade, 2011), 86.

[102] Fox, *Character, and Ideology in the Book of Esther*, 34.

[103] Joyce G. Baldwin, *Esther: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984), 66.

[104] See David Blumenthal, "Where God Is Not: The Book of Esther and Song of Songs," *Judaism* 44, no. 1 (1995): 80–92.

[105] Ronald W. Pierce, "The Politics of Esther and Mordecai: Courage or Compromise?," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* (1992): 75–89, 77; Orlando Costas, "The Subversiveness of Faith: Esther as a Paradigm for a Liberating Theology," *The Ecumenical Review* 40, no. 1 (1988), 66–78, 67; David Beller, "A Theology of the Book of Esther," *Restoration Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (1997).

[106] Magonet argues the initial letters in the phrase *yavo ha-melech v'haman ha-yom* spell the Tetragrammaton. See Magonet, "The God Who Hides," 110.

[107] Mordecai tells Esther if she remains silent, relief for the Jewish people will come from another place. See Day, John M. Wiebe, "Esther 4:14: 'Will Relief and Deliverance Arise for the Jews from Another Place?'," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (1991): 409–15, Carey Moore, "Eight Questions Most Frequently Asked About the Book of Esther," *Bible Review* 3 (1987) 16–31, 21; Iain Duguid, "But Did They Live Happily Ever After? The Eschatology of the Book of Esther," *Westminster Theological Journal* 68, no. 1 (2006): 85–98.

[108] Marvin A. Sweeney, "Absence of G_D and Human Responsibility in the Book of Esther," in *Reading the Hebrew Bible for a New Millennium: Form, Concept, and Theological Perspective. Volume 2: Exegetical and*

piety, religion, and devotion into the text. Further, readers should accept the "divine blanks" as the author's intention and not attempt to fill them in.[109] David Clines maintains that there is a systematic attempt to remove religious language in the MT. That is to say, the absence of the name of God is intentional.[110]

The amount of violence in the book has garnered increasing attention in the last thirty years. Haman is the only enemy of the Jews named for the first eight chapters of the book, and then their enemies become plural.[111] At the behest of Esther and Mordecai, the king issues an edict that calls for Jews to kill, destroy, and annihilate anyone who might attack them, their children, and their women, and to plunder their goods. After the Jewish people are no longer in danger, the king again offers Esther whatever she desires; she now requests that the Jewish people have the opportunity for the second day of killing and Haman's sons' bodies be hanged. The MT and LXX differ drastically on the number of people killed on the second day of the killing spree, but the range is 15,000–75,000.

Tricia Miller believes the killings are justified, while others find them to be excessive.[112] Shirley Bahar asserts that this is unnecessary violence and an instance of the

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Theological Essays, ed. Wonil Kim, Deborah Ellens, Michael Floyd, et al. (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000).

[109] Dunne, *Esther, and Her Elusive God,* 4.

[110] Clines, *The Esther Scroll*, 110–12. See also Karen Jobes, *Esther* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 205.

[111] Clines, *The Esther Scroll*, 42.

[112] See Tricia Miller, *Jews and Anti-Judaism in Esther and the Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2015), Sweeney, "Absence of G_d," 273; Butting, "Esther," 216; Day, *Esther*, 21; Edward L. Greenstein, "A Jewish Reading of Esther," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Baruch A. Levine (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 236; Yoram Hazony, "Mordecai's Challenge: An Essay on War, Leadership, and Purim: An Argument for the Morality of the Controversial Climax of the Book of Esther," *Commentary* 141, no. 3 (2016): 28–38, for arguments that the violence was justified. In opposition to the violence see Fox, *Character, and Ideology*, 203.

victim becoming the victimizer.[113] Robert Gordis argues that the verse "has been badly misunderstood," and the Jews are finally empowered to defend themselves.[114] Joyce Baldwin contends that נקם is often translated as "take revenge" instead of "avenge themselves," which has a different connotation, and thus condemnation of the Jews' actions is misplaced. Further, this episode should not be taken seriously as a historical occurrence.[115] Fox views the request for the second day of killing their enemies and impaling the bodies of Haman's sons as "literally overkill."[116] Bruce Jones asserts the number of people killed is hyperbole because the author was writing it as humor; for this reason, it should not be read more seriously than intended.[117] However, as our society is filled with violence that includes mass murders and targeted hate crimes against particular groups of people, the violence perpetrated in this text cannot be ignored. Eliot Horowitz uses Esther and the festival of Purim as a foundation to link violence in the book with acts of violence committed by Jewish people from the fifth to the twenty-first centuries.[118] Alternatively, Jeremiah Cataldo attesting to the pervasiveness of anti-Semitism compares Esther to first-person Holocaust accounts to demonstrate that "anti-Semitism is a conflict over identity that produces behavioral patterns consistent with deep-

[113] Shirley Bahar, "Coming Out as Queen: Jewish Identity, Queer Theory, and the Book of Esther," *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 13 (2012): 167–78.

[114] Robert Gordis, *Megillat Esther: The Masoretic Hebrew Text, with Introduction, New Translation, and Commentary* (New York: Ktav, 1974).

[115] Baldwin, *Esther*, 100–102.

[116] Fox, *Character and Ideology*, 203.

[117] Bruce Jones, "Two Misconceptions About the Book of Esther," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (1977): 171–81, 180–81.

[118] Elliot Horowitz, *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

rooted prejudices."[119]

More recent years witnessed a proliferation of methodological and hermeneutical approaches to Esther, including Bakhtinian,[120] intertextual,[121] empathetic,[122] and more. Scholars examining Esther give attention to a range of topics.[123] Alyssa Henning offers Esther as a model for action in combating climate change.[124] Timothy Beal and Anne-Marieke Wetter both examine gender performance and ethnicity in Esther.[125] Joshua Berman explores Esther as ""Other"" and argues that she transitions from object to subject.[126] In comparison, Joseph Quayesi-Amakye considers the sociopolitical context of the book and raises the issue of

[119] Cataldo, *Remembering Esther*, 16.

[120] Lacocque, *Esther Regina*; Trisha Wheelock, "Drunk and Disorderly: A Bakhtinian Reading of the Banquet Scenes in the Book of Esther" (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008), Accessed October 2, 2020. https://www.proquest.com/docview/304690005?parentSessionId=GTsjJQCyaxTGaEIO6JsVCuPIRfgiy4Lh%2BCr8j8u2pXY%3D&pq-origsite=summon&accountid=7090.

[121] Matthew, "Daniel at the Beauty Pageant and Esther in the Lion's Den;" Noah Hacham, "3 Maccabees and Esther: Parallels, Intertextuality, and Diaspora Identity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 4 (2007): 765-785; Gerhard Swart, "Rahab and Esther in Josephus—an Intertextual Approach," *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 17, no. 1 (2006): 50–65; David G. Firth, "When Samuel Meets with Esther: Narrative Focalisation, Intertextuality, and Theology," *Southeastern Theological Review* 1, no. 1 (2010); 15-28.

[122] Angeline Song, "Heartless Bimbo or Subversive Role Model? A Narrative (Self) Critical Reading of the Character of Esther," *Dialog* 49, no. 1 (2010): 56–69.

[123] Meredith J. Stone, *Empire and Gender in LXX Esther* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018). Lilian Klein, *From Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan, "Diasporic Reading of a Diasporic Text: Identity Politics and Race Relations," in *Interpreting Beyond Borders* ed. Fernando F. Segovia (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 161–73; Betty Rojtman, "Towards a Hermeneutics of Ambiguity: The Book of Esther and the Silence of Signs," *Partial Answers* 10, no. 1 (2012): 1–10; Catherine Brown Tkacz, "Esther, Jesus, and Psalm 22," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (2008): 709–28; Elsie Stern, "Esther and the Politics of Diaspora," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 100, no. 1 (2010): 25–53; Amy Erickson and Andrew Davis, "Recent Research on the Megilloth (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther)," *Currents in Biblical Research* 14, no. 3 (2016): 298–318.

[124] Alyssa Henning, "Learning from Esther at the Last Well on Earth," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 33, no. 2 (2017): 170–75.

[125] Beal, *The Book of Hiding;* Anne-Mareike Wetter, *"On Her Account": Reconfiguring Israel in Ruth, Esther, and Judith* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

[126] Joshua Berman, "Hadassah Bat Abihail: The Evolution from Object to Subject in the Character of Esther," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120, no. 4 (2001): 647–69.

class.[127] Denise Flanders asserts the need to liberate Ahasuerus, Haman, and Mordechai from patriarchy.[128] J. C. Siebert-Hommes examines the numerous banquets held in Esther and argues they are linked to love, erotics, power, and control.[129] Rebecca Hancock focuses on the private and public spaces that Esther navigates while arguing against the idea of gendered spaces.[130] South African scholars such as Madipoane Masenya, Gerrie Snyman, and Itumeleng Mosala provide contextual interpretations.[131] For example, Mosala argues that one must approach Esther with caution; if the book is not read within an intentional liberative hermeneutic, interpretations will continue to be oppressive for South African women.[132] South African womanists such as Masenya hold up Vashti as a model of courage for women in South Africa in the HIV AIDS pandemic.[133]

Womanist scholars in the United States, such as Renita Weems and Cheryl B. Anderson, offer brief analyses of Esther and Vashti. Weems notes that Vashti's story is told

[127] Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, "'Beneath Religious Claims': Reading the Book of Esther from a Sociopolitical Context," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 28, no. 1 (2018): 29–41, 35.

[128] Denise Flanders, "Freeing Ahasuerus, Haman, and Mordechai: Liberating the Oppressor in the Book of Esther," *Journal of Theological Studies* 71, no. 1 (2020): 33–61.

[129] J. C. Siebert-Hommes, "Come to the Dinner I Have Prepared for You: Story of Love or Struggle for Power," in *The Rediscovery of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. J. W. Dyk (Maastricht: Shaker, 1999), 99.

[130] Hancock, *Esther, and the Politics of Negotiation*.

[131] Madipoane Masenya, "Esther and Northern Sotho Stories: An African-South African Women's Commentary," in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and The Bible*, ed. Musa Dube (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2001), 27–49; Gerrie Snyman, "Race in South Africa: A Hidden Transcript Turned Public? The Problem of Identifying with Esther/Mordecai or Haman in the Book of Esther," *Scriptura: Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa* 84, no. 1 (2003): 438–52.

[132] Itumeleng J. Mosala, "The Implications of the Text of Esther for African Women's Struggle for Liberation in South Africa," *Semeia* 59 (1992): 129–37.

[133] Madipoane Masenya, "'Limping, Yet Made to Climb a Mountain!' Re-Reading the Vashti Character in the HIV and AIDS South African Context," in *The Bible and Feminism: Remapping the Field*, ed. Yvonne Sherwood, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 534–47.

through Esther's story. For this reason, women today must remember those who came before them and cleared the path, risking sanity, health, safety, reputation, family, comfort, and marriage.[134] Anderson contends that Esther features some positive images of women, and young girls' sexual exploitation must be addressed. Further, Ruth and Esther both demonstrate the urgent need for marginalized groups who experience exclusion and violence to speak out.[135] Dunbar rightly argues that scholars pay close attention to the sexual exploitation of Vashti, Esther, and the other virgin girls, but not to the role of ethnicity in the story. Dunbar further draws attention to the collective trauma experienced by the girls, women, eunuchs, Diaspora Jews, and their enemies in Esther.[136] All of these engagements with Esther offer diverse and helpful perspectives, furthering the text's lively conversation. Still, something is lacking in that conversation.

The Three Key Components of this Study

Survival

There is extensive scholarship on Jewish survival in the diaspora, which has two primary focal points. First, Jewish survival in the diaspora is achieved through integration and

[134] Renita Weems, *Just a Sister Away: Understanding the Timeless Connection Between Women of Today and Women in the Bible* (San Diego: LuraMedia, 2007), 108.

[135] Cheryl J. Anderson, *Ancient Laws and Contemporary Controversies: The Need for Inclusive Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 74.

[136] Ericka Shawndricka Dunbar, *Trafficking Hadassah: Collective Trauma, Cultural Memory, and Identity in the Book of Esther and in the African Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2021).

participation.[137] Second, Jewish survival happens through secrecy and crafty manipulation.[138] Esther is typically placed within one of these views.[139] In each of these studies, the focus remains on the collective survival of the Jewish people.

Scholars argue that the story of Esther is a story of survival.[140] For instance, Daniel Smith-Christopher affirms that "the story as a whole takes up questions of strategy and survival."[141] Shirley Castelnuovo contends that the story appears to show a court Jew orchestrating successful survival; in reality, the Jews' survival is dependent on Esther's political obligation to the king.[142] More specifically, Esther's rape is requisite for Jewish survival.[143] Thus, Quaysi-Amakye correctly states, "beneath what seems to be a religious conflict are matters of politics and social survival."[144] Kathleen O'Connor suggests humor is used as a

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[137] See Susan Niditch, "Esther: Folklore, Wisdom, Feminism and Authority," in Brenner, *Feminist Companion to Esther*, 26–46; Steed Davidson, "Diversity, Difference, and Access to Power in Diaspora: The Case of the Book of Esther," *Word & World* 29, no. 3 (2009): 280–87; W. Lee Humphreys, "A Life-Style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92, no. 2 (1973): 211-23, 216. Shirley Castelnuovo, "The Jewish Experience of Oppression as Portrayed in the Hebrew Bible: Leadership and Survival Strategies," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 3, no. 1/2 (1991): 33–47; Butting, "Esther: About Resistance," in Brenner, the *Feminist Companion to Esther*, 207-220; Klein, *From Deborah to Esther*, 114.

[138] Greenstein, "A Jewish Reading," 234–37; Talmon, "'Wisdom' in the Book of Esther," 449; Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Berman, "Hadassah Bat Abihail."

[139] David Clines argues there are mixed messages for Jews in Esther because the book is from the standpoint that Jews must maintain their racial identity, but denial of that identity and integration is how they achieved victory. See Clines, "Reading Esther from Left to Right," 47–48.

[140] Andre Lacocque, *The Feminine Unconventional: Four Subversive Figures in Israel's Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 67–68.

[141] Daniel Smith-Christopher, "Esther on Trial: Resistance or 'Collaboration Horizontale?'," *Postcolonial Commentary and the Old Testament* (2018): 209–29; 219.

[142] Castelnuovo, "The Jewish Experience," 45–46.

[143] Berel Dov Lerner, "No Happy Ending for Esther," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2001): 11.

[144] Quayesi-Amakye, "Beneath Religious Claims," 29.

political weapon and act of survival that critiques the Persian empire.[145] Nevertheless, it is infrequent to find the word *survival* in the index of most books on Esther.[146] Still more rare are studies that treat the individual experiences of survival depicted in the book. One such treatment comes from White, who holds up Esther's character as a model for diaspora Jews as she faces many crises and still endures.[147] However, interpreters view the story as a survival story for the Jewish community; these readings bring the genuine threat the Jewish community faced in this text into conversation with the adversity Jews face in the modern era.

Apropos to this observation of the preference for the communal over the individual in accounts of survival is the assertion of Cheryl Anderson that in crises, national survival may be most pressing; however, marginalized groups and individuals are continually struggling for survival. These challenges often intersect with issues surrounding gender, particularly in the way that girls are mistreated and/or abused. The addressing of their concerns becomes infinitely deferred. For this reason, concern for the survival of women and girls must become part of the considerations of national survival.[148] Mitzi Smith maintains that questions of survival (primarily related to the experiences of Black people in the United States), alongside an interrogation of race/racism and the intersection of class, gender, and sex, have not been

[145] O'Connor, "Humor, Turnabouts, and Survival in the Book of Esther." 62.

[146] In my research I have noted books on Esther frequently do not include an index of subjects. While scholars address *survival* in their works, the books that do incorporate indexes do not include a *survival* entry. See Fox, *Character, and Ideology*, 306; Moore, *Studies in the Book of Esther*, 134, 437; Walfish, *Esther in Medieval Garb*; Tod Linafelt and Timothy Beal, *Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry: Ruth and Esther* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1999); Edith Lubetski and Meir Lubetski, *The Book of Esther: A Classified Bibliography* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008). Timothy Beal includes an entry for *survival* in *The Book of Hiding*, and Jo Carruthers has an entry for Jewish survival in *Esther Through the Centuries*.

[147] Sidnie White Crawford, "Esther: A Feminine Model for Jewish Diaspora," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy Day (Minneapolis, Fortress, 1989), 161–77.

[148] Anderson, *Ancient Laws and Contemporary Controversies*, 65.

considered in malestream historical Jesus studies, biblical interpretation, or theology unless done by nonwhite scholars.[149] Along these lines, I contend that there is more at stake in Esther than Jewish survival at large. There is a severe threat to Esther and other young Jewish girls' safety and well-being, and that of non-Jewish women, men, and children, which must be addressed.

As Steve Gronert Ellerhoff observes, "survival must be one of the oldest subjects of storytelling."[150] For this reason, survival is a theme taken up regularly within analyses of literature. A recent example is the volume *Critical Insights: Survival*, which comprises essays that query survival in various literary genres (except for autobiography). In this edited volume Christopher Baker, reading Acts 2 as literature, examines the Apostle Paul's shipwreck survival in contrast to Homer's *Odyssey.* Baker identifies the quality of *polytropos,* that is, "many minded," as key in both Odysseus' and Paul's ability to survive.[151]

Survival has been examined in other biblical texts. Laurel Koepf Taylor offers a child-centered study in which she argues that children were needed for communal survival in the agricultural economy. Koepf Taylor also discusses how particular biblical texts place children at risk and present broad implications for communal survival.[152]

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[149] Mitzi J. Smith, "Howard Thurman and the Religion of Jesus Survival of the Disinherited and Womanist Wisdom," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 17, no. 3 (2019): 271–91, 280.

[150] Steve Gronert Ellerhoff, "An Evolution of Survival in American Short Fiction: Stories by Jack London, Ray Bradbury, Octavia E. Butler, and George Saunders," in *Survival,* ed. Robert C. Evans (Ipswich: Grey House, 2018), 36.

[151] Christopher Baker, "The Apostle Paul as Odyssean Survivor," in *Survival,* 75–90, 83.

[152] Lauren Taylor, *Give Me Children or I Shall Die: Children and Communal Survival in Biblical Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013).

Louis Stulman and Hyun Chul Paul Kim survey Ezekiel as survival literature, contending that while Ezekiel is disaster literature, it is a witness to survival and is thus survival literature as well.[153]

Christina Garcia-Alfonso explores survival in the stories of Rahab, Jael, and Jephthah through what she terms a hermeneutic of *resolviendo,* which she contends is not just survival, but survival that has been shaped by the context of Cuban struggle. She deploys this hermeneutic to offer a fresh perspective on ancient texts and draw out a reading that might provide insight into contemporary Cuban situations. She concludes that though all texts cannot be read through a lens of survival, "the main criterion as to whether this hermeneutic can be used is simply whether the 'text' or situation being 'read' is one in which people or nations are faced with a limit[ed] situation where the highest priority is preserving life at any cost."[154]

Smith-Christopher studies the Babylonian exile from the perspective of those who have known exile in more contemporary situations. He states that when there is an unequal distribution of power, minority groups have to use creative mechanisms other than violence or escape to secure their identity. Using the religious responses to Apartheid in South African Bantustans, African-American slavery, Japanese-American Internment during World War II, and Bikini Island as case studies, he notes the responses of these minority groups. He develops what he calls "mechanisms for survival."[155] The "mechanisms of survival" include structural

[153] Louis Stulman and Hyun Chul Paul Kim, *You Are My People: An Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010).

[154] Cristina Garcia-Alfonso, "'Resolviendo': Narratives of Survival in the Hebrew Bible and in Cuba Today" (Ph.D. diss, Texas Christian University, 2008), 187–88.

[155] Daniel L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: A Sociology of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington: Meyer-Stone, 1989), 74

adaptation, split in leadership, the creation of elaborate ritual, and the creation of folk literature, which he uses to apply to various biblical Hebrew Bible texts associated with exile.

Each of these projects assesses survival in different trauma narratives within the biblical text and contemporary settings. This study will explore the sites of struggle, trauma, and survival in Esther in a similar vein while also adding to the book's current sexual abuse and violence conversation. The lack of God's presence in the text is another critical issue for consideration. Further, this project will expand the womanist biblical interpretation library so necessary for biblical studies. This project's interpretive strategy places womanist discourse in an intentional conversation with trauma theory to map a motif of survival in the book; in other words, I will employ a trauma-informed womanist hermeneutic.[156]

Womanism

Alice Walker first used the term *womanist* and provided the definition of the term in her 1980 essay "Coming Apart," as she declares, "a womanist is a feminist only more common."[157] Her definition was later expanded in *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens,* where Walker writes that a womanist, among other things, is a feminist who is Black or of color, audacious and courageous, and committed to the survival and wholeness of all people.[158] There is nothing

[156] Irie L. Session discusses trauma-informed womanist bible teaching in "HERStory: Trauma Informed Bible Teaching with Prostituted Women," January 2017. Accessed June 7, 2017. ttps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXBlpCJXGj4&feature=youtu.be. She later discusses womanist trauma-informed hermeneutic in the presentation "Mental Health: Creating an Effective Congregational Mental Health Ministry," 2019 General Assembly of Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), July 2019, Des Moines, IA.

[157] Alice Walker, "Coming Apart," in *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography*, ed. Laura Lederer (New York: Morrow, 1980), 100.

[158] "Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden: Womanist Prose* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1983), xi-xii.

explicitly theological or spiritual in Alice Walker's definition of womanist outside of "loves the Spirit."[159]

Chikewenye Okonjo Ogunyemi also used the term *womanist* in her 1985 article "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English."[160] In this article, Ogunyemi examines the novels of African and Black women writers and notes that Black women writers are more likely to be "womanist," who recognize racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations in addition to sexual issues. She explains she arrived at the term independently and acknowledges that Walker also used the term and their work overlaps. For Ogunyemi, "[B]lack womanism is a philosophy that celebrates [B]lack roots, the ideals of [B]lack life, while giving a balanced presentation of [B]lack womanhood. . . its aim is the dynamism of wholeness and self-healing that one sees in the positive, integrative endings of womanist novels."[161]

Black women scholars of religion Jacquelyn Grant, Katie Cannon, Delores Williams, and Kelly Brown Douglas began to use Alice Walker's definition of womanist shortly after publishing. In 1985, Katie Cannon first used the terms *Black womanist* and *womanist* in the religious discipline while speaking about Black women's interpretive tradition of addressing oppression and racism in "The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness."[162] Delores Williams' 1987 essay "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices" was the earliest use of the

[159] While the term 'Spirit' does not necessarily denote a theological or Christian meaning, it could be interpreted to have theological or Christian connotation.

[160] Chickweneye Okonjo Ogunyemi, "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 11, no. 1 (1985): 63-80.

[161] Ogunyemi, "Womanism," 72.

[162] Katie G. Cannon, "The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness," in *Feminist Interpretations of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 30–40.

term "womanist theology" when she identified the methods and sources for womanist theological inquiry.[163] Subsequently, Jacquelyn Grant released the first book on womanist theology.[164]

In biblical studies, coinciding with Grant, Canon, and Williams' adoption of the term womanism for use in religion and ethics, Renita Weems embraced it for her work. In *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible,* she considers a select group of biblical women in Hebrew Bible text in the first womanist biblical interpretation published by a biblical scholar.[165] Clarice Martin then names the "quadrocentric" interests of womanist biblical interpretation and translation in her article.[166] After that, Valerie Bridgman wrote the first womanist titled dissertation in biblical studies.[167] Raquel St. Claire published the first womanist monograph in biblical studies, *Call and Consequence: A Womanist Reading of Mark.*[168]

Historically many womanists are rooted in Christianity and the Black Church, and have encountered the biblical text in both inspiring and injurious ways.[169] For these reasons,

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[163] Delores Williams, "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices," Christianity and Crisis 47 (1987): 66–70.

[164] Jacqulyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989).

[165] Renita Weems, *Just a Sister Away.*

[166] Clarice Martin, "Womanist Interpretations of the New Testament: The Quest for Holistic and Inclusive Translation and Interpretation," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 6, no. 2 (1990): 41–61.

[167] Valerie Bridgeman-Davis, "A Womanist Reading of the Book of Micah" (Ph.D. dissertation, Baylor University, 2002). Accessed November 11, 2018. https://www.proquest.com/docview/275862439/3F074DDEFB464CC4PQ/1?accountid=7090

[168] Raquel St. Clair, *Call and Consequences: A Womanist Reading of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

[169] As noted by Delores Williams, 'Black Church' does not have a precise definition and does not exist as an institution. Dolores S Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-talk* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2013), 206. The term 'Black Church' is used to describe churches where there is a historical and traditional connection to the larger Black community in the worship life and cultural sensibilities. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas,

womanists in various fields provide womanist biblical interpretations interrogating the biblical text and advancing alternative paradigms.[170] One such example is *Sisters in the Wilderness* with Williams' womanist interpretation in her reading Hagar through the lens of Black women's surrogacy experience, mainly through Black women's enslavement.[171]

Womanism brings Black women's experiences to the foreground, focusing on questions of sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, and other oppressive "-isms." Additionally, womanists address the environment's issues as a part of creation through an ecowomanist focus on environmental justice.[172] Notably, while a good number of womanists identify and operate out of a Christian context, womanist scholarship also includes Muslims, Buddhists, and humanists.[173] Regardless of the discipline within which one works, a womanist is "committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female."[174] In addition

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Black Church Studies: An Introduction (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 36. However, the Black Church is not a monolith and is an institution that includes many traditions and expressions. Keri Day, *Unfinished Business: Black Women, the Black Church, and the Struggle to Thrive in America* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2012), 16. For more on 'Black Church' see James H Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church*, vol. 1 (Orbis, 1984); Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Black Church: This is Our Story, This is Our Song* (New York: Penguin, 2021); C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).

[170] Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, "Divine Puppeteer: Yahweh of Exodus," in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, ed. Athalya Brenner-Idan (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 75–102; Toinette M. Eugene, "A Hermeneutical Challenge for Womanists: The Interrelation between the Text and Our Experience," *Perspectives on Feminist Hermeneutics*, ed. Gayle Gerber Koontz and Willard M. Swartley (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies), 20-28.

[171] Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenges of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993).

[172] See Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, *The Sky Is Crying: Race, Class, and Natural Disaster* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), Melanie L. Harris, *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2017).

[173] Monica A. Coleman, ed., *Ain't I a Womanist, Too?: Third Wave Womanist Religious Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013); Melanie Harris, "Womanist Humanism: A Deeper Look," *CrossCurrents* 57, no. 3 (2007): 391–403; Pamela Ayo Yetunde, *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue, U.S. Law, and Womanist Theology for Transgender Spiritual Care* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

[174] Bridgeman Davis, *A Womanist Reading of the Book of Micah*, 25.

to "womanist," there are Black women scholars in various disciplines who choose the term "Black feminist."[175] To be clear, not all Black women scholars self-identify as Black feminist or womanist.[176]

The use of the term womanist in biblical studies (or other fields) is not limited to the United States. Madipoane Masenya notes that South African women's economic, social, and political realities are not like those of white women. She chooses to identify as a womanist and employs an African womanist hermeneutic. It considers the complexity of South African women's lives while remaining accountable to their African culture and multifaceted oppression. She declares that she must read the text through African eyes and South African women's, not Eurocentric eyes.[177] Masenya terms this the *bosadi* approach.[178] Sarojini Nadar also chooses to identify as a womanist because, as a South African Indian woman, class and color issues are essential to address.[179]

As issues impacting the Black community change, womanist scholarship seeks to speak to pressing needs. Specifically, in biblical studies, Cheryl Anderson offers womanist

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[175] Patricia Hill Collins, "What's in a Name? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond," *The Black Scholar* 26, no. 1 (1996): 9–17.

[176] Clenora Hudson-Weems takes issue with both terms. Writing close to the time of Walker and Ogunyemi, she argues that Black feminism is aligned with feminism and its problematic racist history. Likewise, she claims that Walker's definition of womanist is a variant of mainstream feminist thought; holding together the concerns of gender and sexuality with a focus on her culture, Hudson-Weems adopts the term "Africana womanist." For Hudson-Weems, Africana womanism differs from womanism because it foregrounds racial oppression, whereas in her reading womanists tend to emphasize gender issues. See Clenora Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

[177] Madipoane Masenya, "African Womanist Hermeneutics: A Suppressed Voice from South Africa Speaks," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 11, no. 1 (1995): 149–55, 153.

[178] Madipoane Masenya, "A Bosadi (Womanhood) Reading of Proverbs 31: 10-31," in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, ed. Musa W. Dube Shomanah (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2001), 145–57.

[179] Sarojini Nadar, "A South African Indian Womanist Reading of the Character of Ruth," in Dube Shomanah, (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2001), 159–75.

interpretations that address HIV/AIDS.[180] Mitzi Smith addresses the lack of access to clean water for residents of Michigan.[181] Angela Parker attends to the subject of the devaluation of Black and brown bodies.[182] People in the Black community are continually forced to witness the murders of Black and brown women,[183] men,[184] children,[185] and trans people,[186] often at the hands of those hired to protect them.[187] Thus, in the age of #BlackLivesMatter, womanist

[180] Musa Dube, "Go Tla Siama. O Tla Fola: Doing Biblical Studies in an HIV and AIDS Context," *Black Theology: An International Journal* 8, no. 2 (2010): 212–41; Cheryl Anderson, "The Song of Songs: Redeeming Gender Constructions in the Age of AIDS," *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, ed. Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 73–92.

[181] Mitzi J. Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social (in)Justice, Intersectionality, and Biblical Interpretation* (Eugene: Cascade, 2018), 7–21.

[182] Angela Parker, "One Womanist's View of Racial Reconciliation in Galatians," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 34, no. 2 (2018), 23–40.

[183] Eugene Robinson, "Our Justice System Values Wallboard Over Black Lives: If We Can't Have a Murder Trial, at Least Breonna Taylor's Death Shows Us Where to Target Our Anger," *The Washington Post*, September 24, 2020. Accessed November 20, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/our-justice-system-values-wallboards-over-black-lives/2020/09/24/d8ff20d6-fe95-11ea-b555-4d71a9254f4b_story.html. "A Senseless Police Shooting in Fort Worth: What Prompted an Officer to Kill Atatiana Jefferson?," *The Washington Post Editorial Board*, Oct 14, 2019. Accessed November 20, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/a-senseless-police-shooting-in-fort-worth/2019/10/14/56ef3a94-eeb1-11e9-b648-76bcf86eb67e_story.html. Sharon LaFraniere, et al., "Texas County's Racial Past is Seen as Prelude to Sandra Bland's Death," *New York Times*, July 26, 2015. Accessed November 20, 2020. www.nytimes.com/2015/07/27/us/racial-divide-persists-in-texas-county-where-sandra-bland-died.html?partner=bloomberg.

[184] Voices of America (VOA) News, "George Floyd Remembered as Good Father and Family Man," June 4, 2020. Accessed September 21, 2021. https://www.voanews.com/a/usa_nation-turmoil-george-floyd-protests_george-floyd-remembered-good-father-and-family-man/6190548.html; Lester Holt and Gadi Schwartz, "Protests Erupt Following Fatal Shooting by Dallas Police Officer," (New York; NBCUniversal Media, LLC, 2018); Nancy C. Marcus, "From Edward to Eric Garner and Beyond: The Importance of Constitutional Limitations on Lethal Use of Force in Police Reform," *Duke Journal of Constitutional Law & Public Policy* 12, no. 1 (2016), 53–106.

[185] "Activist Says Tamir Rice Grand Jury Decision 'Devastating' for Family," (National Public Radio, Inc. (NPR), 2015); Charlie LeDuff, "What Killed Aiyana Stanley-Jones?," *Mother Jones* 35, no. 6 (Nov/Dec 2010), 34–50.

[186] Bryan Mealer, "'It's Like We're Not Even Human': The Reality of Being a Trans Black Woman in America; a Spate of Murders in Texas Has Triggered Old Traumas and the Harsh Reminder of Just How Dangerous Being Trans Black Woman Is," *The Guardian (London)*, June 27, 2019. Accessed November 20, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/jun/27/texas-trans-black-women-murders-reality.

[187] Laurence Ralph, "To Protect and to Serve," *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 5 (2020), 192–202.

interpreters bring that movement's urgent concerns to bear on biblical interpretation.[188] Besides attending to these horrendous experiences while reading the biblical text, I maintain that the trauma present in both recent experiences and the biblical text should also be addressed.

Womanist thought and methodologies have continued to expand over the last thirty years. The womanist body of religious work has continuously added to conversations in theology,[189] ethics,[190] homiletics,[191] pastoral care,[192] and biblical interpretation.[193] In biblical

[188] Valerie Bridgeman, "Interpreting the Bible in the Age of #Blacklivesmatter the Gideon Story and Scholarly Commitments," in *Second Wave Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Marianne Grohmann and Hyn Chul Paul Kim (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019), 311–26, Wil Gafney, "A Reflection on the Black Lives Matter Movement and Its Impact on My Scholarship," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136, no. 1 (2017), 204–207.

[189] JoAnne Marie Terrell, *Power in the Blood?: The Cross in the African American Experience*, vol. 15 (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998); Stephanie Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002); Monica Coleman, *Making a Way out of No Way: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008); Phillis Sheppard, *Self, Culture, and Others in Womanist Practical Theology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Pamela Lightsey, *Our Lives Matter: A Womanist Queer Theology* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2015); Chanequa Walker-Barnes, *I Bring the Voices of My People: A Womanist Vision for Racial Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2019).

[190] Katie G. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988); Katie G. Cannon, Emilie Maureen Townes, and Angela D. Sims, *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011); Eboni Marshall Turman, *Toward a Womanist Ethic of Incarnation: Black Bodies, the Black Church, and the Council of Chalcedon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[191] Melva Sampson, "Digital Hush Harbors: Black Preaching Women and Black Digital Religious Networks," *Fire* 6, no. 1 (2020): 45–66; Kimberly Johnson, *The Womanist Preacher: Proclaiming Womanist Rhetoric from the Pulpit* (Lanham: Lexington, 2017); Donna E. Allen, *Toward a Womanist Homiletic: Katie Cannon, Alice Walker, and Emancipatory Proclamation* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013).

[192] Marsha I. Wiggins and Carmen Braun Williams, "Pastoral Care with African American Women Womanist Perspectives and Strategies," in *Injustice and the Care of Souls*, ed. Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook and Karen B. Montagno (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 45–58; Myrna Latrice Thurmond-Malone and Pamela Ayo Yetunde, *Midwifing–a Womanist Approach to Pastoral Counseling: Investigating the Fractured Self, Slavery, Violence, and the Black Woman* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2019).

[193] Stephanie R. Buckhanon Crowder, *When Momma Speaks: The Bible and Motherhood from a Womanist Perspective* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016); Phoebe Dickerson, *Luke, Widows, Judges, and Stereotypes* (Lanham: Lexington/Fortress Academic, 2019).

studies, the womanist hermeneutics developed questions,[194] challenges,[195] and reimagines[196] interpretations and translations of biblical texts.[197] Womanist interpretation expands its interrogation of the text far beyond issues of gender, employing at least a ""quadrocentric"" interest of gender, race, class, and language that stands in front of translation and exegetical questions.[198] As Black women's experiences shape womanist hermeneutics, it is far from monolithic, engaging a wide range of methodologies such as the subversive use of malestream tools,[199] literature,[200] and engagement with postcolonial thought.[201] In centering Black women's experiences, womanist interpreters draw on an assortment of hermeneutic resources from Black women's experiences and culture. As a result, Black literature, music, art, biography, activism, and intellectual artifacts are integral to womanist biblical interpretation.[202] There is no one particular way in which to engage in womanist interpretation. What is essential in this undertaking, as Toinette Eugene declares, is that when womanists connect the text with

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[194] Lynne St. Clair Darden, "A Womanist-Postcolonial Reading of the Samaritan Woman at the Well and Mary Magdalene at the Tomb," in *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutic Reader*, ed. Mitzi J. Smith (Eugene: Cascade, 2015), 183–202.

[195] Shively T. J. Smith, *Strangers to Family: Diaspora and 1 Peter's Invention of God's Household* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016).

[196] Weems, *Just A Sister Away*, Kindle location 1844.

[197] Martin, "Womanist Interpretations;" Wil Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

[198] Martin, "Womanist Interpretations," 42.

[199] Wilda C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017).

[200] Shively T. J. Smith, "One More Time with Assata on My Mind: A Womanist Rereading of the Escape to Egypt (Matt 2:13–23) in Dialogue with an African American Woman Fugitive Narrative," in *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible*, ed. Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace, 139–64.

[201] Shanell Smith, *The Woman Babylon and the Marks of Empire: Reading Revelation with a Postcolonial Womanist Hermeneutics of Ambiveilence* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).

[202] Shively Smith, "One More Time," 159.

their experience and critically engage the biblical text, there is an opportunity to create a new biblical shalom.[203]

Trauma

To read any text from a person on the margins perspective and to give space to voices that have been rarely attended to and/or silenced, as I intend, one must consider the role of trauma in the experience of marginalization. Thus, I will engage trauma studies to inform my reading to foster sensitivity to trauma victims in the text and victims who read the text. Trauma studies affirms victims' experiences by creating trauma narratives that enable victims to move past the trauma; further, these narratives help construct solidarity and identity and restore healthy self-thought in relation to the world.[204] I anticipate that considering Esther in such a light will yield new perspectives on its meanings and implications.

Jo Carruthers notes that early Jewish interpreters identified trauma in the first words of Esther, *wayyehi,* "there is a woe."[205] Sarah Emanuel argues that though the "Esther scroll is bound up in trauma," scholars often do not directly engage trauma theory when discussing Esther but somewhat indirectly speak of the trauma.[206] The centrality of trauma to the narrative, and the importance of our taking it seriously to understand better both the narrative and the purpose of this biblical work is stated by Linda Day. She rightly argues that after the Shoah, we

[203] Toinette M. Eugene, "A Hermeneutical Challenge," 24.

[204] Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta: SBL Press), 2016.

[205] Carruthers, *Esther Through the Centuries*, 52. ויהי is often translated in midrashic writings as "now it came to pass." However, "there is a woe" is a common rabbinic interpretation of *wayyehi.* In the Mishnah's *Megillah* there is a parallel drawn from Ruth 1:1 and Genesis 6:1 with this phrase that rabbis believed signify distress.

[206] Sarah Emanuel, "Trauma and Counter-Trauma in the Book of Esther: Reading the Megillah in the Face of the Post-Shoah Sabra," *Bible and Critical Theory* 13, no. 1 (2017): 23–42, 23, 29.

can no longer read Esther as pure fiction because Jewish people actually faced total annihilation.[207] The near-death experience in Esther was traumatizing, which can be minimized or disregarded if read like pure fiction. As Daniel Smith-Christopher states,

> "We simply cannot dismiss the stories of Daniel or Esther or Judith as not expressing historically significant experiences of the writers or early readers of these works simply because they are fictional stories. We must ask: What traumas, angers, or creative testimonies are latent in these tales? And are the tales themselves an attempt to heal and adapt?"[208]

While this sobering recognition must be kept in mind, I expect that a trauma-informed womanist reading will identify survival motifs in Esther. The survival motifs will help frame a survival narrative, which may constitute supplemental narratives to the collective narrative of Jewish survival. These as-yet unheard stories have the potential to contribute to the fields of biblical studies and trauma theory and aid survivors. As Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frenchette assert, trauma survivors can draw upon biblical resources to tell or interpret their own stories.[209]

Trauma theory emerged in the 1990s with Cathy Caruth, Shoshanna Felman, Dori Laub, Geoffrey Hartman, Dominick LaCapra, and Judith Herman. Caruth explores the relationship between texts of theory and literature, questioning how the wound could speak, arguing that listening to the accounts of others' trauma could contribute to cross-cultural solidarity and form new communities.[210] Felman and Laub examine the relationship between

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[207] See Day, *Esther*, 21. It is important to acknowledge that some Jewish people have a current fear of total annihilation.

[208] Daniel Smith-Christopher, "Trauma and the Old Testament: Some Problems and Prospects," *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond,* ed. Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn, and Else Kragelund Holt (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 223–43, 238.

[209] Boase and Frechette, *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, 16.

[210] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 11.

speech and survival while reviewing the testimony of Holocaust survivors.[211] LaCapra also considered the Holocaust in his work while including perpetrators' trauma, as he maintains that historical studies must center trauma theory.[212] Hartman, alternatively, analyzes the use of trauma theory in literary studies. He notes that trauma studies not only focus on acts of violence such as war and genocide but on "familiar" violence such as rape and the abuse of women and children as well.[213] Judith Herman contends that the study of psychological trauma has forgotten history. In *Trauma and Recovery,* she outlines the history of trauma studies and offers three stages of recovery for survivors of trauma: 1) establishing safety, 2) reconstructing the trauma story, and 3) restoring the connection between survivors and their community.[214]

Trauma studies offers no single definition for "trauma." A single coherent definition of "trauma" is still an elusive goal in trauma studies. Bessel Van de Kolk notes that trauma happens to all types of people, and "trauma, by definition, is unbearable and intolerable."[215] As Jeffrey Alexander elaborates, "trauma is not something naturally existing, it is something constructed by society."[216] For Caruth, "trauma is always the story of a wound that cries out,

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[211] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

[212] Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

[213] Geoffrey H. Hartman, "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies," *New Literary History* 26, no. 3 (1995): 537–63.

[214] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence–From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic, 1992), 3.

[215] Bessel A. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Viking, 2014), 2.

[216] Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 2.

that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available."[217] Thema Bryant-Davis narrows her focus to interpersonal trauma. She defines interpersonal trauma as "a physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional violation of one person or group of people that is perpetrated by another person or group of people when that violation results in feelings of intense fear, powerlessness, hopelessness, or horror."[218]

It is essential to recognize that individual trauma is different from collective trauma. Kai Erickson defines individual trauma as a blow to the psyche that breaks through a person's defenses suddenly and with brute force, and they cannot effectively react. Collective trauma is a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds that attach people together.[219] Jan Dietrich understands cultural trauma as centering on disastrous events that are continually recalled in cultural memory in such a way that the wounds are not directly or indirectly revealed and not healed by time.[220] Michael Rothberg criticizes trauma theory for remaining within Eurocentric conceptual and historical frameworks, which distort histories and may lead to the reproduction of Eurocentrism.[221] He rightly contends that trauma theory entails a Eurocentric event-based conception of trauma, too-narrow focus on Freudian psychoanalysis, and deconstructionist approach that closes off other approaches to literary trauma. The work

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[217] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, 4.

[218] Thema Bryant-Davis, *Thriving in the Wake of Trauma: A Multicultural Guide* (Westport: Praeger, 2005), 2.

[219] Kai Erickson, *Everything in its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976) 153–54.

[220] Jan Dietrich, "Cultural Traumata in the Ancient near East," in *Trauma and Traumatization*, 141–61.

[221] Michael Rothberg, "Decolonizing Trauma Studies: A Response," *Studies in the Novel* 40, no. 1/2 (2008): 224–34 (225).

being done with postcolonial trauma aims to correct this issue.[222] This project also seeks to address this point. As seen above, there are distinctive types of traumas that often get clumped together in trauma discussions. I find Bryant-Davis's definition to be the most helpful for this project. Breaking from the dominant focus on the Jews' collective trauma, I will examine interpersonal trauma in Esther.

The study of trauma has been used in multiple disciplines in the last twenty years. Dominic LaCapra confirms that "no genre or discipline 'owns' trauma as a problem or can provide definitive boundaries for it."[223] In theology, Shelly Rambo argues that theology and psychology are attempting to talk about human suffering and maintains that trauma studies expand questions surrounding theodicy.[224] Serene Jones contemplates how trauma and grace relate to one another. For Jones, trauma studies suggest numerous ways a person learns to survive and even flourish after traumatic violence. She pairs trauma theory with stories of traumatic experiences of people known and unknown to her and within Scripture and other theological writings.[225] Jones creates a narrative in which Mary, mother of Jesus, meets Rachel, an imagined mother of a son killed during the Slaughter of the Innocents.

In the early 1990s, biblical interpreters engaged trauma theory while primarily examining texts addressing the experiences reflected in exilic and prophetic literature. Elizabeth Frechette and Christopher Boase argue that "trauma hermeneutics is used to understand texts in

[222] See Abigail Ward, *Postcolonial Traumas: Memory, Narrative, Resistance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[223] LaCapra, *Writing History*, 96.

[224] Shelly Rambo, "'Theologians Engaging Trauma' Transcript," *Theology Today* 68, no. 3 (2011): 224–37.

[225] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009).

their historical contexts and as a means of exploring the appropriation of texts, in contexts both past and present."[226] As Alphonso Groenewald shows, a biblical trauma perspective allows the interpreter to "identify several aspects of trauma, including not only the ongoing effects of the traumatic event or 'wound,' but also those skills that can facilitate survival, recovery, and resilience."[227] The recognition of the usefulness of trauma studies by biblical scholars has led to growth in trauma hermeneutics.

In Kathleen O'Connor's study on Jeremiah, she claims that trauma theory and disaster studies allowed her to see the book as a work of resilience.[228] Others such as L. Juliana Claassens, Christl Maier, and David Janzen also engage trauma studies in their readings of Jeremiah and the Deuteronomist History and advocates further use in biblical studies.[229] Shifting the perspective on the relationship between the two disciplines, David G. Garber, Jr. encourages consideration of what biblical scholarship and biblical texts can contribute to the study of trauma in general.[230] Tamar Kamionkowski states that cultural trauma is not examined in Ezekiel. She explores marriage in Ezekiel, focusing on the victims' trauma rather than the

[226] Boase and Frechette, *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*, 2.

[227] Alphonso Groenewald, "'Trauma is Suffering that Remains.' The Contribution of Trauma Studies to Prophetic Studies," *ACTA Theologica* 38, no. 26 (2018): 88–102; 196.

[228] Kathleen O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 135.

[229] See L Juliana Claassens, "The Rhetorical Function: The Woman in Labor Metaphor in Jeremiah 30-31: Trauma, Gender and Postcolonial Perspectives," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 150 (2014); Christl M Maier, "Listening to the Trauma of Refugees in Jeremiah 40–44," *Lectio Difficilior* 1 (2017). David Janzen, *The Violent Gift: Trauma's Subversion of the Deuteronomistic History's Narrative* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2012).

[230] David G. Garber, Jr., "A Vocabulary of Trauma in the Exilic Writings," in *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritchel Ames, and Jacob T. Wright (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), 309–22.

book's writer.[231] Ingeborg Löwisch provides an interdisciplinary study utilizing gender studies, archive theory, and trauma theory in her intertextual reading of Chronicles with the post-Holocaust documentary film *My Life Part 2.*[232] Recently, Lily An Kim examined trauma-informed intersectionality and gendering in Esther with the use of Holocaust survivors' narratives.[233]

James Yansen, Jr. offers a noteworthy example of a trauma-informed biblical hermeneutic in his reading of Lamentations. Yansen focuses on psychological trauma to argue that Lamentations can be read as a type of history rather than a creative poetry void of historical references. His approach demonstrates how trauma-informed readings take critical considerations such as historicity seriously, not replacing them but building upon them to develop further insights.[234] On a related point, Garber contends that the use of trauma theory constitutes not so much a method of interpretation but a frame of reference. When coupled with interpretive methodologies such as poststructuralism and postcolonialism, trauma theory yields innovative results.[235]

More recently, Julia Claassens uses trauma as she probes the narratives of Rachel,

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[231] S. Tamar Kamionkowski, *Gender Reversal and Cosmic Chaos: A Study on the Book of Ezekiel* (New York: Sheffield Academic, 2003).

[232] Ingeborg Löwisch, *Trauma Begets Genealogy: Gender and Memory in Chronicles* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015).

[233] Kim observes that post-Holocaust literature is missing personal representations of the victims themselves, particularly the voices of Jewish women. She argues the four essential elements of trauma narration are present in Esther: the nature of suffering; the nature of victimhood; the relationship between trauma victim and audience; and attribution of responsibility. See Lily An Kim, "Reframing the Book of Esther as a Case of Spiritual Mutism," *Practical Theology* 13, no. 3 (2020): 246–58, 248.

[234] James W. S. Yansen, Jr., *Daughter Zion's Trauma: A Trauma Informed Reading of Lamentations*, (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2019), 21.

[235] David G. Garber, "Trauma Theory and Biblical Studies," *Currents in Biblical Research* 14, no. 1 (2015): 24–44.

Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah in Genesis in conversation with *The Handmaid's Tale*.[236] Claussen concentrates on ongoing traumatizing experiences that primarily affect minoritized people who endure systematic racism, sexism, and poverty, which Maria Root designates as "insidious trauma."[237] Claassens underscores the importance of trauma narratives by identifying three key benefits: 1) communal trauma narratives help individuals and the community cope with trauma; 2) trauma narratives document the suffering that is seen or unseen and validate the experiences of others who have similar situations of abuse or torment; and 3) trauma narratives help readers make sense of trauma. Additionally, Claassens notes that while the use of trauma theory has been growing in biblical studies, the intersection of trauma and theory has not been as prominent in the field. Thus, she states that feminist perspectives are critical because they recognize the reality of racism, sexism, homophobia, and inequality. She correctly argues that "womanist biblical interpreters offer a crucial corrective when it comes to exploring the intersection of gender and trauma."[238]

Smith-Christopher raises four concerns with using trauma literature in biblical studies, the first being that scholars depend on Westernized notions of trauma that are influenced by the colonial experience of the seventeenth through twenty-first centuries.[239] He notes that most

[236] Julia Claassens, "Reading Trauma Narratives: Insidious Trauma in the Story of Rachel, Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah (Genesis 29-30) and Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale," *Old Testament Essays* 33, no. 1 (2020): 10–31.

[237] Maria Root, "Reconstructing the Impact of Trauma on Personality," in *Personality and Psychopathology: Feminist Reappraisals*, ed. Laura Brown and Mary Ballou (New York: Guilford, 1992).

[238] Claassens, "Reading Trauma Narrative," 16.

[239] Smith-Christopher's four areas of concern are: 1) the use of Westernized notions of trauma; 2) ways in which the work on transgenerational trauma and the idea that trauma can transfer across many generations (a process termed "chosen trauma") can impact biblical studies; 3) that trauma may not be explicit and it is important to examine the artistic expressions or storytelling around the trauma; and 4) that there must be a challenge to the set boundaries of biblical studies and other disciplines. Smith-Christopher, "Trauma in the Old Testament," 230–41.

trauma theory is based upon the work of Sigmund Freud, who theorized psychic trauma. Thus, most trauma theorists focus on Western ideas of trauma, which are presented as the universal norm. To this point, I contend that frequently excluded from the discussion on trauma are Black writers such as Ida B. Wells, Anna Julia Cooper, and W. E. B. DuBois. They were writing about Black women's and men's lived traumatic experiences, both events and systemic/institutional trauma around the same period Freud was theorizing trauma.[240] I assert Black writers' writings, such as these, provide insight and considerations that should be included in trauma theory. For this reason, I will utilize these authors' writings to supplement areas such as systemic/institutionalized trauma when lacking in trauma theory discourse.

As Beverly Wallace contends, trauma imposed by systems and institutions must be unpacked because these experiences give insight into understanding lived experiences.[241] I seek to add to the wide-ranging body of work on trauma, marginal voices, and the biblical text by expanding space to Black women's lived experiences. Another potential contribution of this project is to fill the gap suggested by Stef Craps' critique of Caruth's work. In particular, it lacks cross-cultural engagement, and in general trauma theory needs to become more inclusive and culturally sensitive by acknowledging the suffering of non-Westerners and minoritized people.[242] I hope to address this oversight by engaging the trauma of Black

[240] See Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Jacqueline Jones Royster, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900* (Boston: Bedford, 1997); Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (Xenia: Aldine, 1892); and W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Study of the Negro Problems," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (1898): 1–23.

[241] Beverly Wallace, "A Womanist Legacy of Trauma, Grief, and Loss: Reframing the Notion of the Strong Black Woman Icon," in *Women out of Order: Risking Change and Creating Care in a Multicultural World,* ed. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner and Teresa Snorton (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 43–56.

[242] Stef Craps, "Beyond Eurocentrism: Trauma Theory in the Global Age," in *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant, and Robert Eaglestone (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 45–61 (51).

women in Lezley McSpadden and Maya Angelou's autobiographical writings.

By its nature, womanist interpretation often addresses trauma issues by centering Black women's experiences which share in the collective memory of slavery and systemic oppression such as racism, sexism, and classism, and ongoing social trauma, frequently paired with violence and sexual abuse.[243] Margaret Aymer asserts that race, gender, and class oppression cause Black women's trauma collectively.[244] Womanist interpreters glean from traumatic experiences for their interpretive work. For example, Mitzi Smith's use of enslaved Black women's experiences,[245] or Weems' use of the experiences of Black female survivors of domestic violence,[246] illustrate how experiences of trauma are integral to womanist biblical interpretation. Placing womanist interpretation in conversation with trauma studies, I will explore what other possible womanist interpretations of Esther can be derived. I contend that this interpretive approach constructs a survival framework upon which one can build survival narratives. I suggest using the survival framework in other biblical texts can enrich biblical studies and diversify the current body of survival literature. This work may also aid survivors

[243] Lorena Anton states, "cultural memory is understood as the social memory of collectivities (i.e., individual memories collectively shared) transmitted via cultural artifacts, and in this form, available to people to construct and (re)define their relation to the past, the present, and, sometimes, the future." Lorena Anton, "Cultural Memory," in *Protest Cultures: A Companion*, ed. Kathrin Fahlenbrach, Martin Klimke, and Joachim Scharloth (New York: Berghahn, 2016), 130–36. Yanick St. Jean and Joe Feagin view collective memory as "how people experience their present in light of their past." They argue Black women's responses to racism and other social barriers often come from their collective memory. St. Jean and Feagin, *Double Burden: Black Women and Everyday Racism* (London; Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), x. For more on collective memory see also, Ron Eyerman, "The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory," *Acta Sociologica* 47, no. 2 (2004): 159–69; and Kimberly Juanita Brown, *The Repeating Body: Slavery's Visual Resonance in the Contemporary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

[244] Margaret Aymer, "Outrageous, Audacious, Courageous, Willful: Reading the Enslaved Girl of Acts 12," in Byron and Lovelace, *Womanist Interpretations*, 265–90 (268).

[245] Mitzi J. Smith, "Fashioning Our Own Souls: A Womanist Reading of the Virgin-Whore Binary in Matthew and Revelation," in Smith, *I Found God in Me*, 158–83.

[246] Renita Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

of abuse and/or violence in addressing their own trauma and allowing them to communicate their experiences with fresh articulations.

Methodology

In 1993, Delores S. Williams published *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* and provided a foundation for building womanist discourse in religious studies. In her womanist interpretation of Hagar's story in Genesis, she presents a hermeneutic of ascertainment-identification and hermeneutic of survival/quality of life.[247] The hermeneutic of ascertainment-identification involves subjective, communal, and objective modes of inquiry, which she argues allow liberation theologians to understand at what points they and the community should be critical of the biblical text. Williams grounds her argument in Black women's experience and uses a hermeneutic of survival/quality of life to interpret the Hagar episode, and surmises that God is not always a God of liberation but sometimes a God of survival and quality of life. This conviction becomes her hermeneutical principle. She holds that there is a connection between promise and covenant in the Hebrew Bible and Christian scriptures on the one hand and survival and quality of life on the other.[248] Thus, it may be possible to identify a survival tradition in the scripture, similar to liberation and prophetic traditions.

This dissertation seeks to build upon Williams' hermeneutic of survival and examine

[247] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 150.

[248] Kathrine Dobb Sakenfeld draws on Williams' hermeneutic of survival while interpreting Ruth. Sakenfeld argues that "Ruth was a survivor in the midst of suffering" who did what was deemed necessary for her and Naomi to survive. She does not expound upon the hermeneutic in this essay. See Katharine Dobb Sakenfeld, "At the Threshing Floor: Sex, Reader Response, and a Hermeneutic of Survival," *Old Testament Essays* 15, no. 3 (2002): 164–78.

what a careful consideration of the biblical text that also accounts for womanist and trauma-informed concerns can show about survival. I assert that a hermeneutic of survival allows one to reevaluate the biblical text not only to examine how one sees God but how one sees other people and possibly oneself. I will also explore how the hermeneutic of survival may look different when there are no words from God in the text. I propose building this hermeneutic by creating a lexicon of survival.

Lexicon of Survival

Francisco-Javier Ruiz-Ortiz identifies what he calls a "vocabulary of violence" in Esther. He highlights terms that he contends indicate violent or aggressive actions as well as hostile feelings.[249] Ruiz-Ortiz's vocabulary of violence in Esther helps draw attention to much of the violence done in particular towards those considered Jewish people's enemies. Susanne Scholz searches several passages looking for "terminological, literary, and hermeneutical clues" to identify verbs that indicate sexual coercion.[250] Smith-Christopher creates lexicography of trauma: "selections from the harsh vocabulary of defeat" using terms for chains and bonds that are often associated with Babylonian conquest in selected Hebrew Bible text and Babylonian tradition.[251] I propose to develop such a lexicon with which to read Esther, within my reading, which includes and builds upon the vocabulary of violence, terminology that indicates sexual

[249] Francisco-Javier Ruiz-Ortiz, *The Dynamics of Violence and Revenge in the Hebrew Book of Esther* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 52–84.

[250] Susanne Scholz, *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 90.

[251] Daniel Smith-Christopher, "Reassessing the Historical and Sociological Impact of the Babylonian Exile (597/587 - 539 BCE)," in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions*, ed. James M. Scott (New York: Brill, 1997), 7–36, 28–31.

coercion, and language associated with people who are vulnerable to physical abuse and abuse of power in the previous work.[252]

By way of example, in Williams' interpretation of Genesis, she argues Hagar, a שפחה, "a virgin, dependent maidservant," was forced to lie with Abram and had no choice and no agency over her body.[253] Aligning with Williams, I identify particular words that carry violent or abusive connotations and seek to highlight situations in the biblical text that are violent, traumatic, and/or life-threatening. In consideration of McSpadden's and Angelou's writings, I also seek out people in the text who may be vulnerable and/or marginalized due to their status in their culture. In many instances, they have no agency over their bodies. I argue that these particular situations are sites of trauma where one might locate various expressions of survival experiences; from this interpretive basis, I will undertake to identify and describe what survival looks like in these contexts.

I have generated a lexicon of survival by building on Ruiz-Ortiz. I specifically examine the passages in Esther that include: בתולה ("young woman or virgin"),[254] לקח ("to take"), תלה ("hang"), שמד ("destroy"), אבד ("die, be destroyed"), הרג ("kill"), מלט ("escape"), and הצלה ("deliverance").[255] These words are often used throughout the Hebrew Bible in situations where

[252] Timothy Beal also examines vocabulary in the book of Esther in comparison to other Hebrew Bible terms in order to identify literal metaphorical conceptualizations of self. See Timothy Beal, "'Who Filled His Heart to Do This?' Conceptual Metaphors of the Self in the Book of Esther," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 40, no. 1 (2015): 97-111.

[253] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 17.

[254] There is debate as to whether בתולה indicates a young woman, virgin, or young girl of marriageable age. See Hilary Lipka, *Sexual Transgression in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006) and Ken Stone, *Sex, Honor and Power in the Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996); and Peggy Day, "From the Child Is Born the Woman: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress,1989), 58–74.

[255] Unless otherwise noted, all lexical work in the MT and LXX was performed in Accordance 12.3.6 for Macintosh by Oak Tree Software ver. 13.3.4, October 2022. I have consulted the *Hebrew and Aramaic*

people are raped, killed, kidnapped, and sometimes when potential victims escape from these heinous acts.[256] I acknowledge that there are several other words in Esther and throughout the Hebrew Bible that could be included in the lexicon. I chose to begin this lexicon using terms that are only in Esther and where women or girls are possible victims. I will catalog each term in order of its appearance in Esther and analyze the terms. I assert that these particular words may indicate dangerous situations. The episodes in which they appear must be examined more closely to determine whether a given passage constitutes an account of trauma. For example, לקח, when used to speak about what is being done to a girl or woman, frequently indicates they are being taken without their consent by a male; sexual contact may be involved.[257] There are instances in Esther and other texts where לקח does not denote force, but there are quite a few instances where it does.[258] One of the most prominent examples considered above is when the young girls are gathered along with Esther and taken from their homes to the king's palace and eventually to his bedroom. The young girls have no agency in this situation; others are overpowering them and moving their bodies. I read this as a clear case of the use of force over vulnerable individuals and view the king's bedroom as a site of danger and, thus, trauma.

Also, frequently when a biblical text speaks directly in the language of survival, it is in

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Lexicon of the Old Testament, Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, and *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*.

[256] הצלה the feminine noun is only used in Esth 4:14. In Dan 3:29 it is used in construct as an Aramaic haphel infinitive verb.

[257] Rachel Adelman, "'Passing Strange'—Reading Transgender Across Genre: Rabbinic Midrash and Feminist Hermeneutics on Esther," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 30, no. 2 (2014): 81–97 (87).

[258] John Dunne asserts that Esther is one case where the term should not be read as "taken by force" and that there is no indication of protest by Esther or Mordecai. See *Esther and Her Elusive God: How a Secular Story Functions as Scripture* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 29. In Gen 34:2 Shechem יקה Dinah. It must also be noted that there are instances when women are תקה by other women and given to a man for sexual intercourse, such as Gen 16:3 and Gen 30:9.

the context of God saving in some way.[259] However, there is no mention of God in the MT version of Esther. A lexicon of survival may go some way toward resolving the tension of the lack of God's presence by helping us classify survival achieved through human agency. In the purview of scripture, God's saving acts do not always need to be pronounced for God's people to survive; often, the initiative of determined actors constitutes salvation and survival. The implications for the ability of the text to empower survivors of trauma are clear.

Identifying Strategies for Survival

Howard Thurman explains that socially and politically disinherited people must always discern "under what terms is survival possible."[260] In this project, a hermeneutic of survival reexamines Esther 2 and Esther 8:1-9:15 from the perspective of the person in peril, whose voice may not be heard, such as the other girls who are gathered, and Zeresh, whose actions may not be understood. The trauma-informed hermeneutic of survival considers the trauma of characters in the text and seeks to analyze the actions and strategies of persons taken to survive during and after the traumatic event. I maintain that survival is something one learns differently through experience than study or observation. Teresa Fry Brown declares that "life experience teaches us how to survive."[261] As noted above, for centuries, Black women experience multiple forms of oppression—racism, sexism, classism—and are forced to figure out ways to survive. As Yolanda Norton affirms, for Black women, trauma is the byproduct of our identities.[262]

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[259] For example, see Joel 2:32, Job 22:30, and Ps 22:5 where the term מלט is used in a context of God's salvation/deliverance; Isa 46:4, Jer 39:18, Ps 107:20 use שריד.

[260] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon, 1996), 20.

[261] Teresa L. Fry Brown, "Avoiding Asphyxiation: A Womanist Perspective on Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Transformation," in *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation and Transformation*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 72–94, 74.

[262] Yolanda Norton, "Silenced Struggle for Survival: Finding Life in Death in the Book of Ruth," in Smith, *I Found God in Me*, 265–79 (271).

Hence, within the frame of a trauma-informed womanist hermeneutic of survival, I will engage the trauma and experiences of oppressed Black women to examine survival experiences in Esther 2 and 8:1-9:15 and Black women's autobiographies to create a survival framework and narratives.

Operating under the second part of Walker's definition of womanism, that such a perspective "appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility, and women's strength," womanists often engage the literary writings of Black women authors.[263]

Katie Cannon names Black women's literary tradition as a source of ethics.[264] Emilie Townes focuses on the use of Black women's autobiographies, declaring that "when the autobiographies of Black women are carefully considered, a larger worldview is apparent." For Townes, autobiographies help reconstruct views that were previously lost or obscured.[265] Shively Smith uses Assata Shakur's autobiography and reads it in conversation with the Egyptian narrative in Matthew 2:13-23.[266]

Exploring the experiences and writings of Black women led to the identification of

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[263] See Karen Baker-Fletcher, "Tar Baby and Womanist Theology," *Theology Today* 50, no. 1 (1993): 29–44. Specifically in womanist interpretation, womanists use Black women's literature in their biblical interpretations. See Kimberly Russaw, "Wisdom in the Garden. The Woman in Genesis 3 and Alice Walker's Sophia," in Smith, *I Found God in Me*, 222–34. It must be noted that Black women's literature is also used in other biblical interpretations outside of the womanist mode. For example, both Hugh Page and Harold C. Washington use Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountains* in their Africana and feminist interpretations of Exodus. Hugh Page, *Israel's Poetry of Resistance: Africana Perspectives on Early Hebrew Verse* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 21–28; Harold C. Washington, "Signifying on Exodus: Reading Race and Culture in Zora Neale Hurston's Moses, Man of the Mountain," in Brenner-Idan, *A Feminist Companion to Exodus*, 41–58.

[264] Cannon identifies invisible dignity, quiet grace, and unshouted courage as three womanist virtues found in Black women's writings. See Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 75. See also Stacey Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2006).

[265] Emile Townes, *Womanist Justice, Womanist Hope*, (Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 27.

[266] Shively Smith, "One More Time," 139–63.

particular strategies used for survival.[267] Delores Williams examines the work of Zora Neale Hurston, Margaret Walker, and Alice Walker, and argues that the writings are religious narratives that include political strategies she terms "lifeline politics." The four strategies she identifies are: 1) developing a defiant attitude and physical strength; 2) developing strong bonds with other women and men; 3) challenging the governing authority; and 4) examining and changing their consciousness about values fundamental to Black women's early conditioning under certain ethical, moral, and religious foundations.[268] I engage these strategies as part of the survival framework.

Survival accounts in literature are often associated with works of fiction. Nevertheless, the ability of one to narrate their own experiences carries something of a different power. A trauma-informed womanist hermeneutic holds in tension the reality of Black women's lived traumatic experiences and Black authors' writings with trauma theory. I will use Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Birds Sings*[269] and Lezley McSpadden's *Tell the Truth and Shame the Devil: The Life, Legacy, and Love of My Son Michael Brown.* Reading Esther with these autobiographical works, I will create the lexicon of survival to identify instances where survival is at stake in Esther and these books. I will examine each of the survival instances to see if Williams' four survival strategies are present and any other strategies. Using a hermeneutic of recovery and in conversation with the autobiographical accounts of Angelou and McSpadden, I will develop a survival narrative for the instances wherein trauma is overcome in

[267] Similarly, Mélanie Grué examines at the narrative in *Bastard Out of Carolina* for survival strategies and narratives. See Mélanie Grué, "Trauma and Survival in Dorothy Allison's Bastard Out of Carolina, or the Power of Alternative Stories," in *Trauma Narratives and Herstory* (Manhattan: Springer, 2013).

[268] Delores S. Williams, "Women's Oppression and Lifeline Politics in Black Women's Religious Narratives," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 1, no. 2 (1985): 59–71.

[269] Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.*

Esther. I contend that a different picture of Esther will be created with these components.

Proposed Outline

Chapter 2: Lexicon of Survival

This chapter introduces the *Lexicon of Survival*, its forebears, its methodology, and selection criteria. I will take a close look at the trauma-related terms I have identified in Esther, and more broadly throughout the Hebrew Bible. I will engage the autobiographies of McSpadden and Angelou, womanist discourse, and trauma studies to provide clear working definitions of "survival," "survivors," "safety," and other relevant terms. Using these terms in the lexicon of survival, I identify survival experiences in Esther. Next, I use Williams' four strategies of survival to build the survival framework for this project. Lastly, I offer recommendations for adding other words to the lexicon of survival and using the survival framework with other biblical texts.

Chapter 3: Our Girls Are Not Safe

Kimberly Russaw contends that a בתולה is a young girl in a certain stage of life, often entering into marriage, and that the term does not always signify sexual chastity.[270] To that point, Ken Stone notes that the young girls in Esther 2:17-19 are called בתולות after they have spent the night with the king and had sexual relations.[271] Margaret Talbot argues that while scholars acknowledge בתולה as a certain stage of life, there is a child-adult binary which focuses on adult women and neglects transitioning girls. She contends that if interpreters consider the inward and

[270] Kimberly Russaw, *Daughters in The Hebrew Bible* (Lanham: Lexington), 53–55. See also Wenham, "Betulah, 'a Girl of Marriageable Age'," *Vetus Testamentum* 22, no. 3 (1972): 326–48.

[271] Ken Stone, *Sex, Honor and Power in the Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996), 108. Likewise, Peggy Day argues a girl can still be included in the category of בתולים after marriage and intercourse. See Peggy Day, "From the Child Is Born the Woman" 59, 69.

outward effects of changes during their pubescence and examine בתולה as a transitioning girl, it could impact interpretations as scholars see this impact on the text.[272] In this chapter, I will establish the classification of בתולה for this project in light of this area of scholarship.[273] Using the lexicon of survival from chapter 2 with the survival framework, I will demonstrate how a בתולה is frequently placed in perilous positions which she must attempt to survive. I argue that the king's plan to take young girls and/or virgins to have sex with them at his pleasure constitutes rape and sexual exploitation.[274] Not even a father in a patriarchal system can protect his daughter from the king's decree.[275]

The king forcing Esther into marriage is what Wil Gafney calls "rape-marriage." She defines rape-marriage as "forcible conjugal cohabitation. In the Israelite context, it is typified by the seizing of sexually immature and inexperienced girls as conjugal partners, particularly, although not exclusively, in the course of armed conflicts."[276] The king's seizure of these girls— having them taken to his bedroom at night, forcing himself on them, and then taking

[272] Margaret Murray Talbot, "Bat-Yiphtach and Her Bleeding Body: A Child-Oriented Reading of Judges 11:29-40" (Dissertation, Texas Christian University, 2020), 143. Talbot also explains how the term has expanded in scholarship to include "broader developmental reproductive capacities" including but not limited to virginity and menstruation and is associated with a stage of life.

[273] A full review of בתולה is beyond the scope of this project.

[274] I acknowledge that my use of the terms *rape* and *sexual exploitation* follows a more modern understanding and would not necessarily be understood this way in the ancient context. Hilary Lipka offers a biblical lexicon of sexual transgressions as well. See Lipka, *Sexual Transgression in the Hebrew Bible*, 248–54. Further, as Sandie Gravett states, "rape might not have existed as a legal category, but gender, class, social and ethnic preference did. The erasure of women's voices, the suffering of a defeated nation, the humiliation of men who failed their mighty God, all peek through this word." Sandie Gravett, "Reading 'Rape' in the Hebrew Bible: A Consideration of Language," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28, no. 3 (2016): 279–99, 298

[275] Kandy Queen Sutherland, "Naming the Enemy: Esther and the Prophets," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 35, no. 2 (2008): 179–83.

[276] Wilda C. Gafney, "Mother Knows Best: Messianic Surrogacy and Sexploitation in Ruth," in *Mother Goose, Mother Jones, Mommie Dearest: Biblical Mothers and Their Children*, ed. Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan and Tina Pippin (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2009), 23–36, 27.

them into his second harem—constitutes rape-marriage.

Using a trauma-informed hermeneutic of survival and reading the young girls' seizure and rape with Maya Angelou's childhood rape narrative in *I Know Why the Caged Birds Sing*, I will illustrate how Esther and other young girls are forced into traumatic situations where they had to discover how to survive. Utilizing the survival framework, I will query both the Esther text and Angelou's story for Williams' four survival strategies and other survival strategies. I then offer a survival narrative that establishes these biblical actors' actions as a model for contemporary abuse survivors.

Chapter 4: Zeresh, The Struggle of an Implied Survivor

In this chapter, I will investigate the passages wherein the Jewish people commit violent acts against others based upon Esther and Mordecai's orders, thereby identifying another occurrence of trauma and survival, but this time from a non-Jewish perspective. The story of Zeresh, the wife of Haman, is given close attention. At the orders of the king, Zeresh's husband and ten her sons are hung on the gallows. All of her property is then given to Mordecai and Esther. As a particularly vulnerable survivor of the two-day killing spree, hers is a survival experience that needs examining.

I also read this passage together with McSpadden's autobiographical account of the state-sanctioned murder of her son Michael Brown with a trauma-informed hermeneutic of survival. I again use the survival framework to survey both texts to ascertain if any of Williams' strategies for survival or other strategies present. I will offer any strategies present in her survival narrative. Connecting these passages to other violent events and presenting her survival narrative in tension with Esther and the Jewish girls' preceding survival narratives, I suggest the shifting paradigms of the categories of those who suffer abuse and those who administer it.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

This chapter summarizes my findings and provide a conclusion that demonstrates the importance of survival narratives. I will argue that identifying and reading survival narratives such as these may generate tools for learning and healing from trauma. Survivors can draw on biblical texts such as Esther to tell or interpret their own stories and construct their own survival narratives. Through the characters' survival narratives in the biblical text, current narratives wherein survivors' voices have been silenced or ignored can be amplified. Further, scriptural survival narratives offer a promising foundation and frame for conversations about abuse and violence to happen more often and carefully in worshiping communities.

CHAPTER 2. LEXICON OF SURVIVAL

In *Sisters of the Wilderness,* Delores Williams introduces the "hermeneutics of ascertainment-identification and survival/quality of life."[277] In this pioneering womanist book, Williams argues God is not always a God of liberation but is sometimes a God of survival and quality of life. She asserts it may be possible to identify a survival tradition in scripture. The purpose of this chapter is to identify and analyze those survival experiences throughout the Hebrew Bible that I consider belonging to the survival tradition. Using Williams' hermeneutic of survival as a foundation, I employ the trauma-informed approach of my womanist lens to build a lexicon of survival as a means of locating survival experiences in the Hebrew Bible. With regard to the seven terms used by Esther that indicate possible violence or traumatic events, I analyze how the terms are used throughout the Hebrew Bible and catalogue each occurrence in search of possible survival experiences.

First, I examine biblical scholarship to cull how and whether *survival* and *survivor* are defined and addressed. Esther has been categorized as communal survival and biblical scholars provide ample discussion on survival, whether it is Israel's survival, communal survival, [278] text survival,[279] or survival literature. I examine Esther through the lens of individual survival. However, though Esther is viewed as a survival story, survival is written about in general terms, and there is no definition provided to state what it means to survive.[280]

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[277] Dolores S Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-talk* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2013), 150.

[278] Taylor, *Give Me Children,* 33.

[279] See Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[280] Edward L Greenstein, "A Jewish Reading of Esther," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*. ed. Neusner and Levine (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Smith-Christopher, "Esther on Trial,"; Linda Day, *Esther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 2. Orit Avnery, "Ruth and Esther: A Journey Through Gender, Ethnicity and Identity"

Then, in reading the Hebrew Bible and Black women's literature intertextually, I determine what it means to survive–how is *survival* defined? For this project I define *survival* as the struggle for continued existence after a traumatic event that threatens the safety and well-being of a person or people. Viewing trauma sites as places where decisions, actions, and reactions will affect the ability to live in the future. In short, survival is *a way of keeping alive*; thus, being the essential precedent to thriving. With this premise, I am correlating what is survival in biblical literature and in Black women's literature.

Tod Linafelt derives his definition from *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* and defines survive as "to remain alive or in existence."[281] In his work on Lamentations, Linafelt suggests the book is part of the literature of survival as he draws on the literal and metaphorical sense of the word. Linafelt insists one must look closely at the realities of death and suffering before interpreting survival. Still, there is often no expressed definition of survival, while sometimes it is generally discussed. For example, Danna Nolan Fewell and R. Christopher Heard examines Genesis and claims it is a dialogic narrative that is a matter of survival.[282]

Thomas Wetzel, in his dissertation *Violence and Survival in the Book of Esther* does not define *survival* or *survivor* in reading of violence in Esther; however, he asserts that the children of Israel will persevere because they are the Lord's chosen seed, the "seed of the land must survive," and the Lord will see to it.[283] Thus, he concludes Israel survives through divine

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in *Megilloth Studies: The Shape of Contemporary Scholarship*, ed. Brad Embry (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix. 2016).

[281] Tod Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 22.

[282] Danna Nolan Fewell and R. Christopher Heard, "Genesis of Identity in the Biblical World," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*. ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 109-124, 110.

[283] Thomas A. Wetzel, "Violence and the Survival of Israel in the Book of Esther" (Th.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2015) 126. Accessed December 1, 2020. http://library.tcu.edu/PURL/EZproxy_link.asp?/

presence. For Wetzel, readers must understand that Israel is called to obey and survive; thus, the violence in Esther, 1 and 2 Maccabees, and Psalm 17 may be moral and necessary. Although Wetzel's attention is on the children of Israel's survival, I still contemplate the survival of individuals included among them and the survival of non-Israelite people.

Julianna Claassens uses trauma theory and speaks of survival but does not define survival.[284] She does, however, convincingly argue the wailing women in Jeremiah 9 are a powerful symbol of survival because they take up the call to lament and name the tragic events experienced without avoiding the pain. The creativity and actions of these women move the community beyond the trauma they have endured.[285] Whereas Louis Stulman contends the prophetic corpus of the Hebrew Bible is war literature and speaks on behalf of the losers while bearing witness to their pain and imagining their survival. Explicitly focusing on Ezekiel, he views it as a diasporic text that consists of resistance in the struggle for community survival and part of the prophetic chorus of survival literature. Stulman notes, ""Life and death, survival and trauma, are always before us on the pages of Ezekiel."[286]

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[284] L. Juliana Claassens, "Reading Trauma Narratives: Insidious Trauma in the Story of Rachel, Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah (Genesis 29-30) and Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale," *Old Testament Essays* 33, No. 1 (2020): 10-31; L. Juliana Claassens, "Trauma and Recovery: A New Hermeneutical Framework for the Rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13)," in *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*, ed. Christopher G. Frechette (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016); L. Juliana Claassens and Amanda Gouws, "From Esther to Kwezi," *International Journal of Public Theology* 8, No. 4 (2014): 471-487.

[285] L. Juliana M. Claassens, "Calling the Keeners: The Image of the Wailing Woman As Symbol of Survival in a Traumatized World," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 26, No. 1 (2010): 63-77, 77.

[286] Louis Stulman, "Ezekiel as Disaster/Survival Literature: Speaking on Behalf of the Losers," in *The Prophets Speak on Forced Migration*, ed. Mark Boda, Frank Ritchel Ames, John J. Ahn and Mark Leuchter (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 133-145, 138.

I argue life, death, survival, and trauma are before the reader throughout the Hebrew Bible. However, if the focus is only on Israel's life, death, survival, and trauma, the experiences of non-Israelites will be missed. After all, womanists center the experiences of Black women and those on the margins, without neglecting the center. Recognizing "survival for most African-American women has been such an all-consuming activity that most have had few opportunities to do intellectual work as it has been traditionally defined."[287] However, one common theme of Black women's literature is survival. Black women's literature points to the truth of Black women's lives.[288] Reflecting on the survival of non-Israelites in the Hebrew Bible, I am also mindful of how Black women's survival is frequently rendered invisible. That said, I notice the common thread of *struggle* throughout Black women's literature and biblical scholarship on survival literature and that which speaks on survival. For example, Audre Lorde contends "survival is struggling for the future."[289] Hence, I turn to Black women's literature first to better understand survival.

Beginning with narratives of enslaved Black women detailing the tragedy and trauma of their life experiences and how they managed to survive, these writings present some of the first written accounts of Black women in the United States.[290] Throughout the centuries, the release of

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[287] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London: Routledge, 2000), 112.

[288] Toinette M Eugene, "'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot!': A Womanist Response to Sexual Violence and Abuse," in *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*. ed., Carol J. Adams and Marie Fortune (New York: Continuum, 1995), 185-200, 188.

[289] Audre Lorde, "Sisterhood and Survival," *The Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research* 17, No. 2 (1986): 5-7.

[290] See Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself.* (Boston: Published by the Author, 1861); The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers, *Collected Black Women's Narratives*, ed. Henry Louis Gates (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Sarah R. Levering, *Memoirs of Margaret Jane Blake of Baltimore, Maryland: And Selections in Prose and Verse* (Philadelphia: Innes & Son, 1897). Gabriel John Stedman, *Narrative of Joanna; an Emancipated Slave, of Surinam. From Stedman's Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838); Hiram Mattison, *Louisa Picquet: The Octoroon* (Philadelphia: Published by the Author, 1861); Old Elizabeth, *Memoir of Old*

more Black women's autobiographies recounts the survival experiences of its authors and even others in their community.[291] These personal accounts present a series of interwoven themes while sketching an illustration of survival.[292] The stories speak of the struggle to live in conditions that constantly threatened their lives and often attempted to deny their humanity. Additionally, through fictional characters, Black women writers illustrate and document survival in creative genres--novels, as well as, in poetry, theater, and song--that mirror the lived realities of Black women.[293] The main characters struggle to thrive despite life-threatening ordeals of sexual abuse, family dysfunction, and physical abuse while also surviving systemic oppressions

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Elizabeth, A Coloured Woman (Philadelphia: Collins Printer: 1863). Joanne Braxton makes the point that the first Black woman's autobiography was "Belinda, or the Cruelty of Men Whose Faces Were Like the Moon" in her short narrative petitioning the New York legislature for reparations in 1787. Joanne M. Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within a Tradition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 2.

[291] See Susie King Taylor, *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp: An African American Woman's Civil War Memoir* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006); Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* (New York: G.W. Carleton & Co., 1868). Jarena Lee, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee: Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Published for the author, 1849). Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade for Justice: the Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Jane Edma Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer* (Cleveland: Elli Kani, 1940); Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World* (Washington, DC: Ransdell, 1940); Elizabeth Laura Adams, *Dark Symphony, and Other Works* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co, 1996). Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road: an Autobiography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984). Era Bell Thompson, *American Daughter* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1946). Eva Rutland, *The Trouble with Being a Mama* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1964). Maya Angelou, *Gather Together in My Name* (New York: Random House, 1974); Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1997); Angela Yvonne Davis, *Angela Davis—An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1974); Gabrielle Union, *We're Going to Need More Wine: Stories that are Funny, Complicated, and True* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017); Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (New York: Dial, 1968). Cicely Tyson, *Just as I Am: A Memoir* (New York: HarperCollins, 2021).

[292] According to Braxton, there are themes in traditional Black women's autobiographies including the importance of family, nurturing children, quest for self-sufficiency, self-reliance, personal dignity, and self-definition. See Joanne M. Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition within a Tradition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989),127.

[293] Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1937); Harriet E. Wilson, *Our Nig: or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in a Two-story White House, North, Showing that Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1983); Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1982); Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993); Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Talents: A Novel* (New York: Seven Stories, 1998); Angie Thomas, *The Hate U Give* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017); Tara M. Stringfellow, *Memphis: A Novel* (New York: Random House 2022); Pearle Cleage, *What Looks Like Crazy On an Ordinary Day* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998); Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, (New York: Knopf, 1993). Each of these novels chronicles the life of a Black woman or girl living at the intersection of multiple oppressions and surviving traumatic events.

of racism and sexism. These authors make the experiences of the oppressed the starting point for rereading history.[294] They further detail the Black woman's struggle to survive that has become so normative it is often overlooked. An all-pervasive trope of *survival* emerges in reading explicit *struggle* narratives that frames what survival looks like for marginalized Black women.

Consequently, if one is able to endure the struggle of a traumatic event and live, they are a survivor. Christina Garcia-Alfonso asserts a survivor is "someone determined to do whatever it takes to survive."[295] In exploring the sites of trauma and those who are consigned to these sites, my language choice of "survivor" rather than "victim," is intentional.[296] Nancy Napels distinguishes between "survivor" and "victim", arguing a survivor has consciously redefined their relationship to the experience while women and girls in the Hebrew Bible were not privileged to redefine their relationship to violence. Therefore, I empower them by naming their experiences as survival, and in support of them and modern survivors of violence, I identify them as *survivors*.

Shirley Castelnuovo observes biblical stories illustrate how minoritized people survive.[297] I maintain the lives of Black women also epitomize survival. Black women living at the intersections of multi-layered oppressions are forced to develop ways of keeping alive that have

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[294] Toinette M Eugene, "'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot!': A Womanist Response to Sexual Violence and Abuse," in *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, ed. Carol J Adams and Marie Fortune (New York: Continuum, 1995), 189.

[295] Cristina Garcia-Alfonso, "'Resolviendo': Narratives of Survival in the Hebrew Bible and in Cuba Today" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Texas Christian University, 2008). Accessed September 15, 2020. https://www.proquest.com/docview/193732007?parentSessionId=tUfnkbLcEsKBolbP1vVsd5Go4tqYZoWkPFtqVZJoCoI%3D&pq-origsite=summon&accountid=7090.

[296] See Nancy Naples, "Deconstructing and Locating Survivor Discourse: Dynamics of Narrative, Empowerment, and Resistance for Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, No. 4 (2003): 1151-1185.

[297] Shirley Castelnuovo, "The Jewish Experience of Oppression as Portrayed in The Hebrew Bible: Leadership and Survival Strategies" in Jewish Political Studies Review, 3 no 1-2, 33-47.

given them epistemological insight grounded in their experience, tradition, critical engagement, and scripture. Therefore, I review the lives of Black women who are survivors to identify survival of traumatic events, understand survival, and provide survival strategies.

Womanists are committed to the survival of all people. Thus, survival is one of the principal issues addressed in their writings. Valerie Bridgeman notes questions that matter to womanists are power, language, gender, class, and *survival*.[298] She contends feminist interpreters have looked for women in the text without regard to survival issues for women of color or poor people. For Bridgeman, the negotiation of survival is a womanist principle, and she is more concerned with the impact on the modern reader than an ancient listener. She asks questions such as, "How does the oppressed resist their oppressor textually? How do the oppressed make it in spite of the odds? Searching for points of affirmation, critique, freedom, and hope when judging the value of texts for the twenty-first century. While also questioning what is happening to the less powerful people in the text with 'Who and how are victims victimized?'"[299] Using Bridgeman's questions as a contributing factor for my analysis, I use these questions and others to ascertain survival experiences within the biblical text.

I define survival as *continued existence after a traumatic event*. Because the impetus of this study is interpersonal trauma, I begin in Esther 2 and 8:1:9-15 with the sexual assault of young girls and further, violence against people throughout the chapter. Maya Angelou's writing of her sexual assault at a young age, and the prevalence of sexual violence and abuse against Black women and girls and those who survive it, remain at the forefront of my thoughts reading

[298] Bridgeman Davis, "A Womanist Reading," Italics mine.

[299] Bridgeman Davis, "A Womanist Reading," 50.

the book of Esther. [300] Thus, survival experiences from sexual violence and assaults are survival experiences I specifically discuss.

My womanist definition of sexual abuse is constructed in terms of the experiences of Black women within a historical context that considers the ethical, religious, and psychological issues regarding the sexual violation. Toinette Eugene asserts, "elements of sexual abuse are the violation of one's bodily integrity by force and/or threat of physical violence."[301] Reading past sexual trauma renders that person's struggle to survive invisible. Therefore, as I examine the biblical text, I will look for instances when girls and women experience sexual abuse and/or physical violence, or threats of violence, and see if they are able to survive this trauma.

Lacette Cross, studies sexuality and gender identity and focuses on the trauma experienced by Black women who are sexual assault survivors and how to help them heal. She suggests a womanist ethic of survival seeks to reconcile scripture, tradition, experience, and reason drawn from Black people's lives in Black women's literature, which privileges Black women's lived experience as a source for liberation.[302] For Cross, Black women must wrestle with the theology of sexuality to benefit from the womanist ethic of survival. Moreover, the womanist ethic of survival will allow Black women survivors to take seriously an ethical obligation to create and offer a safe space for Black girls to tell their stories. For me, as is with all womanists work, the womanist ethic of survival is beneficial beyond Black women sexual assault survivors and is helpful for all sexual assault survivors. Hence, identifying possible sexual assault survivors in the biblical text is critical in providing space for their stories to be

[300] Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (New York: Bantam, 1997), 76-79.

[301] Eugene, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot!," 187.

[302] Lacette Cross, "Frieda's Ruined Resistance: A Womanist Ethic of Survival," *Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships* 3, No. 3 (2017): 47-64, 50.

heard. Therefore, in building the lexicon of survival, I will look to traumatic incidents where the assault was sexual.

The other site of trauma I address is physical violence acted upon individuals by other individuals. In this study, I look for places where physical violence is happening against a person to see possible survivors of the attack. However, I am also cognizant that it is not only the person who is subject to violence that may endure trauma, but also those who are related to them or close to them are also impacted.[303] This extended trauma is evidenced in McSpadden's writing on her son being murdered through state-sanctioned violence.[304] As a result, in examining sites of trauma looking for survival experiences, I will include the family of a person who is the target of physical violence.

In addition, while considering Angelou's story of her sexual assault and McSpadden's loss of her son through state-sanctioned violence, I assert there is some loss of agency in the traumatic event. Therefore, when looking for survival instances, I pay attention to texts that illustrate a loss of agency, since those events and sites may include a survival experience. Finally, though I am particularly interested in sexual assault and other violent actions that happen to a person, I recognize that the range of traumatic events is much broader than this parameter and beyond this project's scope.

Methodology

There is no shortage of scholarship examining violence in the Hebrew Bible.[305] The biblical stories include community experiences, struggle, triumph, and defeat, which often have

[303] Bessel A. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Viking, 2014), 1.

[304] McSpadden, *Tell the Truth*, 13-14.

[305] Korzec Cezary, ed., *Bible Caught in Violence* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019); Jacques van Ruiten and Koert van Bekkum, ed. *Violence in the Hebrew Bible: Between Text and Reception*, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020); Cheryl

violence intertwined in their narrative. Intending to examine some of the violence in the biblical text to identify survival experiences, I narrow in on violent language, specific terms that denote violent actions. Furthermore, I explore the surrounding language to identify who is present in the passage and what transpires to extract survival experiences from the text.

For the context of ensuing discussion, my discoveries in *Table 2.1. Survival and Cluster Subfields* illustrate survival, the presence of the girls and women with the terms and surrounding language which I label cluster subfields. While this data nuances the overarching survey of survival, it is also the landscape upon which I posit that survival in the Hebrew Bible is androcentric by which women and girls are treated as mere props.

TABLE 2.1. Survival and Cluster Subfields

Data	לקח	שמד	תלה	הצלה	מלט	הרג	אבד
Survival of women	274	38	16	1	33	103	48
Survival of others	262	37	5	1	58	65	48
Women Explicitly	208	11	3	1	6	35	8
Women Implicit	218	56	2	1	30	54	65
Women explicit and read	29	2	0	1	30	10	6
Female relationship named	142	1	0	0	4	12	3
Women as metaphors	8	0	0	0	2	3	3
Loss of agency	218	0	0	0	87	3	6

B. Anderson, *Women, Ideology, and Violence: Critical Theory and the Construction of Gender in the Book of the Covenant and the Deuteronomic Law*, (New York; London: T & T Clark International, 2004); Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). Jerome FD Creach, *Violence in Scripture: Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013); Markus Philipp Zehnder, Hallvard Hagelia and Norway Norwegian Summer Academy for Biblical Studies. International meeting Kristiansand, *Encountering Violence in the Bible*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013).

YHWH harms	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
YHWH harms girls and women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Land	67	17	1	0	7	5	20
YHWH with land	5	1	0	0	0	0	8
Women and land	35	14	0	0	1	4	4
Miscellaneous							
Action	136	19	5	0	21	220	33
Weapon	47	3	10	0	11	37	4
Conflict	40	10	2	0	10	18	12
Other	191	23	0	0	32	47	52
Emotion	21	0	0	0	3	1	6

I argue each of these seven initial terms elicited from Esther indicate survival. I explored every place in the entire Hebrew Bible where each of the terms occur. After examining how the terms were used in Esther, I documented every entry of each term throughout the Hebrew Bible: לקח, 947 entries; 169, הרג; ninety-two, אבד ,183 ;שמד; twenty-eight, תלה; ninety-five, מלט; and הצלה has one entry as a noun. Starting my lexical analysis with DCH, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (HALOT), and *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (TDOT) I noted every use of the term and compiled a list of the semantic range of the terms. To collect a thorough semantic range, as a secondary source I also added the translations of every use of the terms in the *New Revised Standard* (NRSV), *Common English Bible* (CEB), and the *English Standard Version* (ESV) noticing how the terms are translated in different passages. Every instance of the terms throughout the Hebrew Bible was catalogued into a database containing this information for each term.

There are other studies on the language of violence and specific violent acts such as sexual abuse which are helpful for this project. David Clines gathers and analyzes words for *violence* in the Hebrew Bible.[306] However, Clines does not take into consideration the aggregate impact of violence in each occurrence. For example, the annihilation in Esther may be counted as one occurrence, but how many people were impacted by that one occurrence?[307]

Comparably, Matthew Lynch focuses on how biblical writers presented violence as a problem and critiqued the violence they deemed reprehensibly violent.[308] He explains ethical concerns are not part of his study and focuses on how the authors of the Hebrew Bible portray the acts and effects of behaviors they deem problematically violent, and which modern interpreters recognize as violent. In organizing the texts, Lynch offers four patterns of representation he calls *grammars* that he asserts are in the biblical rhetoric about the problem of violence, which are: ecology, moral speech, justice, and purity. In selecting passages for consideration, he intentionally targets what he deems value-laden semantic territory, which are terms that occur in text most modern readers recognize as violence and are part of an indigenous violence criticism.[309] Some of the terms he uses for his study are: חמס (violence), and דם (bloodshed), when present with שפך (to spill, pour out), or שמד (destruction). Other violent terms

[306] See David J. Clines, "The Ubiquitous Language of Violence in the Hebrew Bible" in *Violence in the Hebrew Bible: Between Text and Reception,* eds. Jacques van Ruiten and Koert van Bekkum (Leiden: Brill, 2020) 23-41. He identifies twenty-two most common words for *violence* and twenty most common words for *divine violence*--10,033 occurrences of violence, of which 1,865 are in reference to the deity. He concludes there of the 303,500 mentions of violence that the 10,033 occurrences only make up 3.3 percent of the terms. What is otherwise useful in my discussion is that Clines does suggest a semantic field for violence and identifies 345 sub-fields for violence and compiles twenty sub-fields of the forms of violence most common in the Hebrew Bible.

[307] Clines, "The Ubiquitous Language," 23-41.

[308] Matthew Lynch, *Portraying Violence in the Hebrew Bible: a Literary and Cultural Study* (New York; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[309] Lynch, *Portraying Violence*, 269.

Lynch uses for oppression are: עשק (oppress), ינה (tyrannize), ענה (afflict), and לחץ (afflict, torment).

As previously mentioned, Francisco-Javier Ruiz-Ortiz maintains his monograph *The Dynamics of Violence* is the first to study the role of violence and revenge in Esther.[310] He chronicles aggressive actions and feelings in the Megillah starting with the concept of enemy using the words צרר (attacker, enemy), שנא (one who hates), and איב (enemy) in the biblical corpus and specifically in Esther. He then turns to the feelings leading to violence, namely anger, before naming the violent acts that result. Finally, Ruiz-Ortiz identifies a vocabulary of violence, including terms that indicate violent or aggressive actions and hostile feelings in Esther: תלה (to hang), , שלח יד (to stretch out the hand), שמד (to exterminate), אבד (to [cause to] perish), הרג (to kill), and נקם (to take revenge).[311] He contends the authors of the biblical text insert the words included in the vocabulary of violence to point to the good of the Jewish people and their preservation. The author's use further indicates divine design for the Jewish people.

Looking at sexual violence, Susanne Scholz uses the biblical text as a sacred witness when she names rape as the offense with the aim of eradicating rape. Scholz uses what she calls a hermeneutic of meaning "that assumes all interpretation is perspectival, particular, and sociopolitically located, never objective, universal, and value-neutral."[312] She addresses various classifications of rape, including acquaintance rape, rape of enslaved women, and marital rape fantasies. She specifically points to the terms: נגע (to touch [a woman]), צחק (to fondle) and קרב

[310] Francisco-Javier Ruiz-Ortiz, *The Dynamics of Violence and Revenge in the Hebrew Book of Esther* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 6.

[311] Ruiz-Ortiz, *The Dynamics of Violence*, 67-82.

[312] Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 22.

(to approach), and argues they signify sexual coercion and are terminological clues. Moreover, צחק implies more than drawing near and suggests an explicit sexual encounter.

Further, the verb נגע is a euphemism for sexual relations. She also submits that צחק has sexual connotations that imply unwanted sexual advancements that could signify rape.[313] While I do not use any of the terms Scholz engages in her study, the premise of searching for terminological clues in places where rape may have occurred and not interpreted in that matter is valuable.

Another critical component of Scholz's work is her examination of how gender and class intersect with rape. Similar to Williams,[314] Scholz discusses the rape of enslaved Black women in the United States along with the enslaved women in the texts. Scholz notes how enslaved Black women survived numerous rapes from slaveholders, resisted their rapists, and offered strategies to others.[315] The recognition of rape and trauma experienced and survived by Black women is vital for me in exploring survival in the biblical texts. Experiences of rape that are survived have a narrative that should be heard while often not, especially if the rape is not named as such. Like the survival experiences of the enslaved Black women, there may be survival strategies in these instances as well. Hence, I agree with Scholz on the importance of naming rape and all forms of sexual violence in the biblical text to bear witness to the prevalence of rape in the lived experiences of people in the past and the present. Furthermore, there could be survival narratives embedded in these texts from which we could learn.

[313] Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 90-91.

[314] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 109-112.

[315] Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 55.

Lastly, in an edited volume, Jonneke Bekkenkamp and Yvonne Sherwood present a collection of essays examining the relationship between violence and the Jewish and Christian bibles. Beginning with violence in the biblical text they hold the premise "the biblical, Jewish, and Christian vocabularies are not sealed off in hermetic worlds unto themselves…but circulate as part of ongoing vocabularies."[316] Some essays look to see how these vocabularies "play out on the ground"[317] concerning specific events such as the violent attacks and genocides that occurred in Jedwabne, Poland 1941, New York 2001, and Rwanda 1994. I use this idea to examine the vocabulary of the biblical text alongside the vocabulary of Black women's literature, particularly Angelou and McSpadden.

The aforementioned studies are valuable in defining and critiquing violent occurrences in the Hebrew Bible and their possible implications. The words and concepts examined identify violent occurrences within the biblical text. However, I assert it is crucial to examine the violent occurrences and the characters impacted by the violence, both named and unnamed. I want to see where there are occasions where people could have possibly survived some of these violent incidents. Where is the survival, and who are the survivors? The various forms of the term עמד שאר, and מלט are translated as "survive."[318] The verb עמד in the Qal form, generally has a lexical meaning of "to stand," and can reference survival when speaking to someone who remains, endures, and survives.[319] The semantic range of the verb שאר includes "to remain, be left over,

[316] Jonneke Bekkenkamp and Yvonne Sherwood, *Sanctified Aggression: Legacies of Biblical and Post-Biblical Vocabularies of Violence* (London: Bloomsbury 2004), 3.

[317] Bekkenkamp and Sherwood, *Sanctified Aggression*, 3.

[318] The Hiphil of שאר is translated as survive in Josh 11:14 (NRSV). Yet, the idea of allowing a person or persons to remain after a massacre or traumatic event and thus survive is in 1 Kgs 19:18, 2 Kgs 25:22, Jer 50:20.

[319] See David Clines and David M. Stec, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Revised ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2018) which details usage of this word and provides Exod 21:21 as an example, 469.

escape or survive" and conveys survival in the text. Since מלט is a term used in Esther in reference to "escape," it was one of the terms I focused on for the study.

"Survive" is in the semantic range for מלט, though it is often translated as "escape." The term is present ninety-five times throughout the Hebrew Bible, and of these, sixty occurrences in Niphal form the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (DCH) records as "escape, flee, delivered." The *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (TLOT) lists fifty-six occurrences where there is escape, flee, saving of life, among other terms to denote a threat of life. Considering the lexical range of these terms, I seek to gather words that point to survival and survivors for this lexicon, however, I do not use every word translated as survive, survivor, and survival in the Hebrew Bible.[320]

Still, I recognized in order to identify as many survival experiences as possible; the search would have to be broader. As Clines noted, *The Semantic Dictionary of the Hebrew Bible* does not have a contextual domain for survival.[321] I expand my search by identifying words in Esther that include possible incidence of violence, including sexual assault or traumatic events. The seven words selected include לקח (to take), הרג (kill), שמד (destroy), אבד (die, be destroyed), תלה (hang), מלט (escape, or survive), and הצלה (deliverance).

Perceiving possible shortfalls in the data by only capturing the identified terms, I also look for terminological clues and examine the words surrounding these terms in context to see if there were any other indications of possible traumatic events. I speculated that capturing the surrounding words as a cluster subfield would increase the likelihood of detecting survival

[320] See *Appendix A. Survival Terms* for a complete list of the terms translated as survive, survivor, survival throughout the Hebrew Bible. I will only engage terms that are included in Esther.

[321] Clines, "The Ubiquitous Language," 24. See also https://semanticdictionary.org. Accessed May 24, 2021.

experiences. The cluster subfields were categories that indicated female relationships, conflict, weapons, emotions, actions and others.[322]

Excerpt: Appendix B. Cluster Subfield Categories

Relationships	**Conflict**	**Action**	**Weapon**	**Emotion**	**Others**
secondary wife[323]	ambush	abuse	armed	affliction	ashes
daughters in law	army	annihilate	arrow	anger	blood
daughters	battle	attacked	bow	anguish	bodies
maid	booty	attacks	gallows	cried	boils
married woman	captives	beat	hammer	crying	bones

The cluster subfield for words of conflict included terms such as: battle, army, war, siege, dispossess, raid, attack, plunder, or ambush. The term *war* is typically gendered and historically interpreted as an activity performed by males, although there is evidence this is not solely the case.[324] Harold Washington notes that *man* and *woman* are mobile constructs determined by their relationship to violence where violent power is masculine and subjugation and defeat are feminine in the biblical text.[325] Taking notice of the gendered language of the violence while also identifying who is the target of violence, I consider the impact of war on women, men, and children. Since violence is not limited to war, to identify other traumatic events, I included other cluster subfields. I specifically captured instances when weapons such as swords or spears are

[322] See *Appendix B: Cluster Subfields Categories* for a comprehensive list of all the terms in Cluster Subfields.

[323] I use the term *secondary wife* like CEB, although the NRSV and CEB use the more problematic term *concubine.*

[324] For more on women warriors in the biblical text, see Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam*, 153-156; Miriam Cooke, "Wo-Man, Retelling the War Myth" in *Gendering War Talk*, ed. Cooke and Woollacott (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[325] Harold C. Washington, "Violence and the Construction of Gender in the Hebrew Bible: A New Historicist Approach." *Biblical Interpretation* 5, no. 4 (1997): 324-363.

mentioned. Susan Thistlewaite Brooks notes how in the biblical text, war is often presented as the attempt to "achieve order out of chaos."[326] For her, biblical war is defined as the pursuit of YHWH's purposes, often with the help of YHWH.

Collateral damage of biblical war is rape as biblical rape is theft of property, when men are killed in the biblical war. Therefore, there is no "rape" as no male is present to offend. As such, in biblical war, the rape of women is defined as the use of "the spoils." Brooks does, however, recognize that although it is not what was considered rape by the biblical writers, women were violated against their will, and were therefore, raped. Because women were and still are raped and murdered in war, these scenes of war in the biblical text are places of trauma and possible survival experiences. Many of these survival experiences may not have been acknowledged or evaluated because the focus has primarily been on the experiences of the Israelite people as a community. Further, because war is the breaker of language, there are gaps in the narratives that may contain the traumatic experiences of many people and thus should be evaluated.[327]

To manage the breadth of meaning, words that reference actions such as kill, capture, burn, fled, or rescue are recorded as a cluster subfield. Many of the cluster subfields I noted are also included in Clines' twenty subfields. However, my cluster subfields include words that do not necessarily indicate violence because while many of the traumatic events one survives are one of violence, they are not all sexual or physical violence. Some are due to a loss of control

[326] Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, "'You May Enjoy the Spoil of Your Enemies;' Rape as a Biblical Metaphor for War," *Semeia* 61, No. 61 (1993): 59-75, 66.

[327] Thistlewaite, "You May Enjoy the Spoil of Your Enemies," 73.

and loss of agency.[328] For example, surviving famine or illness may be a traumatic event. It does not necessitate violence, yet there is a loss of control and agency because while one may be able to respond and act, how they can act has been inhibited by the fact there is no food available. Thus, I included the cluster subfields of sickness, famine, calamity, and disaster to reflect these incidents.

Gregory Cuéllar argues there is an "inextricable link between migration and survival in so far that survival often requires desperate fleeing, and by fleeing, the primary aim is to survive."[329] For this reason, I added the terms flee and escape in my cluster subfields. Lastly, I captured emotional terms such as cry, distress, anguish, and affliction because they indicate the possibility of a traumatic event and could also, therefore, be a survival experience. Although I realize other terms and categories could be included in these cluster subfields, for the purposes of this study, I limited it to these terms. Further, future study of survival in the Hebrew Bible could use the terms of the cluster subfields as primary terms. I argue the primary seven terms I compiled along with the terms of the cluster subfields are the genesis of a lexicon of survival.

In this study, I am curious to see how women and girls are impacted by traumatic experiences in the biblical text and whether there is more significant occurrence for them than that of males. Thus, it was essential to identify the incidents when women and girls are present in each of these biblical passages. Therefore, I recorded in each entry if there was a woman or girl stated explicitly in the text. I also detailed if a female relationship such as daughter, wife, or sister was named in the text, wondering if there was an increased likelihood of survival for these

[328] See McCauley where she argues the novella shows how trauma is linked to a loss of agency that follows from losing control. Natalie McCauley, "A Quiet Violence: Loss of Agency as Trauma in Petrushevkaia's Svoi Krug," *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* 49/50 (2015): 31-50, 33.

[329] 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, 501.

women or girls. In addition, Wil Gafney states the use of the Hebrew masculine plural can obscure the presence of women, so women cannot automatically be excluded.[330] Thus, in each incidence where there was masculine plural language such as בני ישראל, (children of Israel) I read the presence of women and girls in the text and recorded it as such.

Furthermore, I specifically record instances where women are explicitly present and included due to reading the masculine language inclusively. This more inclusive reading strategy allowed me to see clearly the possibility of a more significant presence of women and girls. Lastly, women are often referenced metaphorically within the Hebrew Bible and are targets of violent actions, particularly in the prophetic text.[331] For this reason, I documented if there is a metaphorical woman present in the text.

I used a trauma-informed womanist hermeneutic to survey what happens in the text where each term is present. I identified possible occurrences of survival where people may continue to exist after struggling through a traumatic event. I examined each passage to see if there is a possibility that someone has survived. I designate a survival experience when there is potential continuation of life after a traumatic event, a possible survival after loss of agency, or what I termed an implied continuation of life. When there is a loss of life, the deceased has family who survive their death unless otherwise stated. Thus, there is an implied continuation of life for the remaining family, which is often women and girls. As I survey the passages, the seven initial terms I have identified and the cluster subfields help narrow the focus, but ultimately what transpires in the verse(s) determines if there is a survival experience.

[330] Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam*, 128.

[331] See Weems, *Battered Love*, 30.

While inspecting the data from the seven keywords and the cluster subfields to determine if there was a survival experience, I also considered which category of survival it should be placed. I located 512 survival experiences of women and girls and 471 survival experiences of others from the passages with these seven terms. Given that לקח has more occurrences throughout the Hebrew Bible, it yields the most survival experiences. When examining the passages with לקח, I was attentive to passages where there was taking of people, land, and specific items. I assert when a person or land is taken this is a traumatic experience in which there is a loss of agency involved, and thus a survival experience in that passage.

When women and girls are *taken*[332] as wives or לקח is translated as marriage, each of these instances was counted as a loss of agency survival. Therefore, I included all loss of agency passages as a survival experience. Likewise, in the passages when men or servants are taken for battle (Josh 8:1) or other traumatic events (Gen 22:10), I included them as an implied survival of women and girls even when they are not present in the text.[333] In addition, I submit there are times when an item is taken that may relate to survival experience. For example, in Exodus 15:20, when Miriam takes a hand drum as a prophetic act in celebration, this is in response to a survival experience.[334] Similarly, when taking a weapon (Exod 4:25, Judg 15) or other items such as a potsherd (Job 2:8), these are included as they are related to survival experience. On the contrary, I excluded passages that specifically command something to not to be done like "do not

[332] I emphasize *taken* to include women and girls taken as wives as the spoils of war, as well as those in arranged marriages. In these instances, agency is absconded. However, I do not intend to imply that *all* marital unions are mere survival experiences marked as a total loss of agency, i.e., Rebekah's parents asked her if she wanted to marry Isaac, thereby allowing her agency to consent or refuse. What cannot be dismissed though is that Rebekah's story is the only such one in the Hebrew Bible.

[333] For example, I argue there is an implied survival after Abraham takes out a knife to kill Isaac because Sarah's death is not mentioned until chapter 21. Although there is no mention of her response surely, she was aware of the trauma her son faced which was likely traumatic for her as well.

[334] See Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam*, 77-81.

take," (Levi 18:18, Jer 16:2) "do not marry" (Deut 7:13), a hypothetical situation such as "if you take" (Levi 20:14), or if no one is spared (Isa 47:3).

Using the above-mentioned steps with each term I combined the information to create a database. The initial database included all 1,515 entries of the seven initial terms. I established the semantic range for each term, identified the passages with possible survival, and analyzed all the passages. Each term provided passages where there are possible survival instances and some insight on what survival in the Hebrew Bible means.

Analysis of Terms

לקח

My initial database included 947 uses of לקח. The aforementioned process yielded the following semantic fields for לקח: take, marry, bring, carried, put, captured, removed, placed, get, accept, obtain, and seize.[335] Though the semantic field indicates a range of uses of the term throughout the passages the most prominent is take. To narrow the passages to those pertinent to survival, I identified what was taken in the passages and examined texts where land, weapons, or people were taken.

In the forty-seven passages which include לקח and a weapon, there is a likely survival experience in more than half of the passages. What is noticeable is when weapons are taken it is primarily by males in killing other males. The women and girls in the passages are not the primary intended targets of the use of weapons. The secondary wife in Judges 19:29 was the one instance when a male took a weapon to specifically kill a woman. Nonetheless, women and girls are likely the ones to be left to survive when males are killing other males. Further, women also

[335] See *Appendix C. Semantic Range* of לקח for a comprehensive list of words and phrases.

take weapons in the passages. For example, Zipporah (Exod 4:25), and Jael (Judg 4:21) take weapons; however, their actions with these weapons are to help secure survival of others as well as themselves. Thus, when weapons are taken lives are usually taken, and survival is still plausible, especially for women and girls.

As I further explored the survival of women and girls, I pinpointed the respective occurrences where women and girls are present or possibly present in the text. I noted when it appears that a woman or girl survives or if others in the text survive. In determining survival instances, I considered loss of agency as a key factor which contributes to survival level trauma. As previously stated, I contend if a person has no control over something done to them, this is a traumatic event as they lose some agency in their life because their ability to make their own choice has been hindered.[336] For instance, while recording the occurrences of לקח every occasion when a woman or girl was *taken* by a male through forced marriage, rape, spoils of war, or kidnapped hostage, I considered this to be a loss of agency because the patriarchal culture placed the decision primarily with the males. Rebekah is an exception because she is asked if she wants to go with Abraham's servant in Genesis 24:58.

However, in general, women did not have input on whether they wished to go with a man when they were taken for marriage (Gen 12:19), in war (Deut 21:11), or taken otherwise (Gen 19:15). To this point, speaking to marital rape, Scholz notes the lack of consent of the women in the biblical text[337] which leads me to acknowledge the contemporary concept of consent in

[336] Manuel R. Vargus argues one must consider context when examining agency. "What people do is a matter of their circumstances…what powers a person has in a given situation are products of history and forces outside the control of the agent." Manuel R. Vargas, "The Social Constitution of Agency and Responsibility: Oppression, Politics, and Moral Ecology," in *Social Dimensions of Moral Responsibility* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 112.

[337] Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 91.

marital rape. I question how many women who are *taken in marriage* could speak to marital rape or other rape survival experiences. I assert when a person experiences a loss of agency, the actions following the traumatic event where the loss of agency occurs are often necessary for their survival.

In examining the various texts while documenting the occurrences of לקח, I also noted who *takes* according to DCH. Throughout the passages, there are 375 instances when a male *takes*, of which forty-three passages where there are women or girls are explicitly in the text. Eighty-seven additional passages include the possibility of women and girls present. Males in these passages take land (Josh 11:23), weapons (Judg 2:21), spoils (2 Sam 2:21), and women and girls. There are ninety-five passages where women and girls are taken by males, primarily to become wives. The table below is a sample of the texts where women and girls are taken.[338]

Table 2.2. Biblical texts where women and girls are taken[339]

Verse	NRSV	Cluster words	Woman or girl in text
Gen 12:15	When the officials of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was **taken** into Pharaoh's house.		Sarai
Gen 16:3	So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, **took** Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife.	land, wife, slave girl	Sarai and Hagar
Gen 29:23	But in the evening he **took** his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her.	daughter	Leah
Gen 30:9	When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she **took** her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife.	maid, slave, wife	Leah, Zilpah

[338] See *Appendix D. Women and Girls Taken* for a full list of these texts.

[339] While not used in my initial analysis, I noted that JPS did not add any significant nuances to these terms or cluster words.

Gen 34:2	When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the region, saw her, he **seized** her and lay with her by force.	force, humiliated	Dinah
Gen 34:26	They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword, and **took** Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went away.	killed, sword	Dinah
Exod 4:20	So, Moses **took** his wife and his sons, put them on a donkey and went back to the land of Egypt; and Moses **carried** the staff of God in his hand.	wife, land	wife, possibly daughters
Lev 20:14	If a man **takes** a wife and her mother also, it is depravity; they shall be burned to death, both he and they, that there may be no depravity among you.	wife, mother, burned, fire	woman, mother
Lev 21:7	They shall not **marry** a prostitute or a woman who has been defiled; neither shall they **marry** a woman divorced from her husband. For they are holy to their God,	prostitute, promiscuous, defiled	prostitute, woman, promiscuous woman, defiled woman
Num 12:1	While they were at Hazeroth, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had **married** (for he had indeed **married** a Cushite woman);		Miriam, Cushite woman
Deut 21:11	suppose you see among the captives a beautiful woman whom you desire and want to **marry**,	captives, wife	beautiful woman, wife
Judg 3:6	and they **took** their daughters as wives for themselves, and their own daughters they gave to their sons; and they worshiped their gods.	daughters, wives	wives, daughters, women and girls of Israel
Judg 19:1	In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite, residing in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, **took** to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.	concubine	concubine, secondary wife
1 Sam 25:43	David also **married** Ahinoam of Jezreel; both of them became his wives.	wife	Ahinoam
2 Sam 5:13	In Jerusalem, after he came from Hebron, David **took** more concubines and wives; and more sons and daughters were born to David.	concubines, wives	concubines, secondary wives, wives, daughters
Jer 29:6	**Take** wives and have sons and daughters; **take** wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear	wives, daughters, marriage	daughters and wives

	sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease.		
Ezek 23:10	These uncovered her nakedness; they **seized** her sons and her daughters; and they killed her with the sword. Judgment was executed upon her, and she became a byword among women.	nakedness, killed, daughters, sword	Oholah, daughters; women
Hos 1:2	When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, ““Go, **take** for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.”“	wife, whoredom, land	wife, daughters included in children
Ruth 4:13	So, Boaz **took** Ruth, and she became his wife. When they came together, the LORD made her conceive, and she bore a son.	wife, conceive, pregnant, conception	Ruth
Esth 2:7	Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, which is Esther, his cousin, for she had neither father nor mother; the girl was fair and beautiful, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai **adopted** her as his own daughter.	mother, girl, daughter	Hadassah (Esther)
Esth 2:8	So, when the king’s order and his edict were proclaimed, and when many young women were gathered in the citadel of Susa in custody of Hegai, Esther also was **taken** into the king’s palace and put in custody of Hegai, who had charge of the women.	custody	Hadassah (Esther), young women
Ezra 2:61	Also, of the descendants of the priests: the descendants of Habaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai (who had **married** one of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called by their name).	wife	daughter(s) of Barzillai
Neh 6:18	For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had **married** the daughter of Meshullam son of Berechiah.	daughter, wife	daughter of Meshullam
1 Chr 7:15	And Machir **took** a wife for Huppim and for Shuppim. The name of his sister was Maacah. And the name of the second was Zelophehad; and Zelophehad had daughters.	wife, sister, daughters	wives of Huppim and Shuppim, Maacah, Zelophehad's daughters

2 Chr 11:18	Rehoboam **took** as his wife Mahalath daughter of Jerimoth son of David, and of Abihail daughter of Eliab son of Jesse.	wife, daughter	Mahalath, Abihail, and Eliab

More than one-third of these passages are contained in Genesis as daughters are taken and made into wives, secondary wives, or enslaved. Thus, it is clear males in that culture *take* women and girls quite often, and if the women and girls lived through the struggle of being taken, there is a survival experience. There are only seventeen instances where women are the actors *taking.* However, I argue even when women are taking, these too can be places where survival is still at stake for women, girls, and men.

Hence, throughout the Hebrew Bible when people, land, and weapons are taken, survival is an issue. Unfortunately, survival is more of an issue for women and girls in these passages. Women and girls are taken and must figure out how to navigate after they are taken as wife, secondary wife, captive, or slave. They must also find a way to survive when the males who are responsible for their care in the patriarchal society are murdered or captured. It seems, when people, land, and weapons are taken, women and girls have multilayers of victimization.

שמד

The passages with שמד provided a semantic range that included destroy, exterminate, demolish, cut off, eliminate, and more.[340] The most common usage for the term is destroy. To better understand the destruction in these passages I gave close attention to what or who was being destroyed and who was destroying. Nations (Zech 12:9), inhabitants (Josh 9:24), towns (Mic 5:13), specific people (Amos 2:9, Jer 48:42), high places (Levi 26:30), Israelites (Deut 6:15), and Jewish people (Esth 3:6) are destroyed. People are the main actors of the destruction while YHWH destroys in thirty-five passages.

[340] See *Appendix E. Semantic Range for* שמד for a complete list of the semantic range.

As noted in the passages, in using the term שמד the destruction it refers to is generally directed to groups of people and not individuals. At times, the Israelite people are the ones being destroyed (Deut 4:26, 28:63) as they also destroy others (Deut 2:21). In the ninety-three times the term is used all but one of the passages are referring to the destruction of more than one person. It is only the passage with the wise woman of Tekoa (2 Sam 14: 7,11, and 16) who pleads for the life of her son to the king when an individual is the focus of the destruction. Even as he is the target of the destruction, the likely assailants are a group of relatives, which once again brings groups into the narrative. In addition, it seems as though since the survival of the group, typically the Israelites, is the focus, the destruction that occurs by a group is for the survival of the group. Therefore, the survival of individuals is not part of the narratives. This is most often where there is the survival of women and girls. I identified thirty-eight passages where the survival of women and girls is possible. However, there are only two passages when women speak and in each of these instances, they are speaking for their survival but not about their survival.[341] So, as destruction occurs all around them the women and girls in these passages are left silent among the debris of the destruction.

אבד

An analysis of the term אבד offers additional details on the destruction which occurs within these passages. The semantic range for the term includes destroy, exterminate, eliminate, perish, and annihilate.[342] The first of its 182 appearances is in Exodus when Egypt is being destroyed. There is destruction of groups of people (Deut 7:20, 2 Kgs 9:8), people's images and altars (Num 33:52, 2 Kgs 21:3), and cities (Jer 46:8). Again, the destruction and perishing are not

[341] See the Wise Woman of Tekoa (2 Sam 14: 7) and Esther (Esth 7:4).

[342] See *Appendix F. Semantic Range for* אבד for a complete listing of the semantic range.

done by or toward individuals. Esther 4:16 is the only passage that communicates concern about an individual being destroyed. However, YHWH is a destroyer as nearly every occurrence of the first-person use of the term is when YHWH destroys.[343] Moreover, when YHWH destroys in this form the "you" is typically referencing an entire nation (Eze 25:7 and Zeph 2:5). As destruction happens to groups of people in different ways the aftermath for the people who remain is left unaddressed. Who survives the destruction? What happens to these people after the destruction?

There are forty-eight passages with the term אבד where survival experiences are likely present. What was noticeable in these passages is the survival of women and girls is tied to the survival of males in these passages. In all but two of the forty-six passages where women and girls are surviving, there is also a male survival.[344] Reviewing this collection of passages reinforced the notion that survival of women and girls in the Hebrew Bible is primarily tethered to the survival of males. In addition, survival is about certain groups of males surviving so the experience of the individual male is inconsequential, and the experiences of individual women and girls is deemed irrelevant.

הרג

The term חרג produced the second most survival experiences of all the terms. Using the same process with הרג, it became evident the term suggests physical violence. The semantic range of the term included: kill, murder, slay, assassination, execute, slaughter and other violent words.[345] The verses with this term portray primarily males as both victim and perpetrator of the killings. Women who are not virgins are the object of the murder commandment in Leviticus

[343] Psalm 119:92 and Esther 4:16 are the only two instances where YHWH is not the first-person subject.

[344] See Jonah 1:6, 14.

[345] See *Appendix G. Semantic Range for* הרג for a complete listing of the semantic range.

20:16, and Jezebel is the only named woman who kills. There are a total of 103 passages with survival experiences of women and girls and sixty-five survival experiences of others.

Surveying the passages which include הרג throughout the Hebrew Bible demonstrated the vastness of killings. While women are not typically the target of this violence they remain at risk. Since primarily males are murdered, this indicates more women and girls are forced to find a way to keep alive after the death of the male.[346] There were more passages where women and girls had likely survival experiences. Whether the term הרג was alone in a passage or with a cluster subfield term women and girls had more likely survival experiences.[347] Yet, there is no detailing of these experiences.

תלה

The term תלה appears less frequently in the Hebrew Bible than לקח and מלט. The primary act conveyed with the term is to hang.[348] There is not a significant presence of women in the passages with this term. Women and girls are explicitly in the text three times and read inclusively another four times when someone is being hanged. There were not any actions or conflicts in these passages. However, there were six times a weapon was referenced in the passages when women and girls are included. Women and girls are not the named object of the hangings when they are present in the passages. Thus, as males are primarily being hanged and these killings are usually a move of power because the hanging is ordered by a person of authority

[346] I acknowledge there is also a standard practice of captivity and enslavement for the economic survival of the family at the initiation of the father.

[347] When הרג is with a cluster subfield term there are seventy passages with survival of women and girls and forty-four passages with the survival of others.

[348] See *Appendix H. Semantic Range for* תלה for a more complete listing of the semantic range.

to kill or shame.[349] Regardless of whether the hanging is done to kill or shame, the act of the hanging is a traumatic experience for the family of the person hanged. It is foreseeable the hanged male will leave behind women and girls in their families as survivors of their deaths. Though the act of violence is aimed at individual males who are being put in their place by someone in authority, the impact of the violence can reach many others. I recorded sixteen passages where women and girls are ostensibly needing to survive. These women and girls must then figure out how to live in a patriarchal culture requiring male protection and provision, after they have lost a male.

מלט

The attempts of people trying to find safety was illustrated in the passages I surveyed with the term מלט. I found the semantic range for מלט to include words such as escape, flee, save, deliver, and defend.[350] I probed to see who was escaping, being saved, or delivered and from whom or what were they trying to obtain safety. In the ninety-five passages which include מלט, people are fleeing for safety in times of war (Gen 19:17), attacks (1 Sam 19:10, 2 Sam 4:6, Job 1:15-17), and there are times when no one escapes (Judg 3:29). These passages have predominantly all males fleeing for safety with David fleeing the most. Women and girls are typically not the focus of the rescue or deliverance as their rescue only happens when it is tied to that of males. Bathsheba (1 Kgs 1:12) and Esther (Esth 4:13) are the only two women mentioned in the passages and spoken to about their safety by males. There are thirty-three passages with the term מלט where there is likely a survival experience for women and girls. Each of these

[349] For example, Pharaoh hanging the cupbearer (Gen 40:22), King Ahasuerus ordering the hanging of the two eunuch's conspiring to kill him (Esth 2:23) and Haman (Est. 7:10). The hanging was an act of shaming when Joshua orders the hanging the five kings in Makeddah (Josh 10:26), David orders the hanging of Rechab and Baanah (2 Sam 4:12), and the Philistines hanging Saul and Jonathan (2: Sam 21:12).

[350] See *Appendix I. Semantic Range for* מלט for a full list of the semantic range.

occurrences are instances where the survival of women and girls arises from the need to continue to live on after a traumatic event that involves a male.

הצלה

The final word reviewed was הצלה. The word is only found in Esther in the nominal form. The Aramaic Haphael infinitive form of the word is used in Daniel 3:29 to speak of how no other god can rescue like the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The complete semantic range for the term consists of deliverance, rescue, stand, and arises.[351] Deliverance is denoted in both passages the term is used. Interestingly, these two novellas with similar royal court settings use this term, one directly references God, and the other makes a possible allusion to God. Thus, raising the question, who delivers or saves in times of peril? In the one passage that occurs in Esther with the term, there will be deliverance for the Jews, but not for Esther and her father's house. I noted this one passage as a possible survival account for women and girls as well as others. Once again, the safety and survival of the group precedes the individual or smaller familial group. The safety and survival of women and girls is also tied to that of males. Though it is not clear in this passage who will deliver, it is clear the Jewish people will be saved.

These results indicate a substantial amount of trauma within the biblical text in which people are struggling to continue to exist and thus survive. The survival experiences detected in these passages are sites of trauma extending beyond the people named in the text. Therefore, it is essential to read inclusively to capture other narratives. Further, recognizing the value in giving serious consideration to the numerous forms of trauma, I propose there is much that can be gleaned from the 983 survival experiences chronicled, namely what is survival in the Hebrew Bible, survival strategies, and narratives.

[351] See *Appendix J. Semantic Range for* הצלה for a full list of the semantic range.

Survival Passages

After examining every single occurrence in the Hebrew Bible and the surrounding narratives, I reduced the list of passages to those indicating a possible survival experience for each of the initial seven terms. Further, for each term I separated the survival texts for women and girls from the survival texts for others. The table below illustrates the number of survival passages for each term.

Table 2.3. Survival by the Numbers

Term	Women and Girls Explicit	Women and Girls Read	Survival of Women and Girls	Survival of Others	Implied Survival of Women and Girls	Survival Loss of Agency
לקח	208	218	274	262	78	158
חרג	35	51	103	65	93	4
שמד	8	59	38	37	17	5
אבד	8	65	48	48	15	5
תלה	3	4	16	5	16	0
מלט	7	29	33	58	1	0
הצלה	1	1	1	1	0	0

I identified nearly 1000 instances of likely survival experiences by using the lexical process detailed above. *Appendix K. Survival Texts* is a listing of the Hebrew Bible texts that likely include a survival experience which has not been previously offered. This collection of texts demonstrates how widely the survival trope occurs in the Hebrew Bible and provides the reader a comprehensive list of texts where survival is at stake regardless of nationality or gender. The collection also provides a better understanding of survival in the Hebrew Bible and could be used for further study.

I argue survival in the Hebrew Bible occurs when there is a traumatic event such as acts of sexual and physical violence against individuals and groups of people, the loss of life of a relative or someone close, and when there is a loss of agency, and one must figure out how to continue to live. Frequently, survival is due to loss of agency as people and land are seized;

thereby resulting in the loss of identity. Hence, survival is not always about fight or flight, frequently it is about figuring out how to make it given the current predicament. Those who survive after the loss of agency do so either through accommodation or through reasserting some type of agency. The need to survive an incident of loss of agency occurs most often for girls and women who are left to survive being taken as a wife, secondary wife, captive, or slave. These women and girls must then survive the trauma of being taken that is usually coupled with sexual assault.

Survival in the Hebrew Bible does not typically get chronicled unless it is the experience of an Israelite male or told by an Israelite male. There is no focus on the survival of girls and women, their survival is secondary to that of males. If women and girls happen to survive with a male good for them. If not, they are collateral damage. Although the writers of the Hebrew Bible ignore the survival of those who are not male or Israelite, it is there entwined in the narratives. To locate the survival of women and girls in the Hebrew Bible there must be inclusive reading strategies done or much of their survival will be missed. Individual survival is not a concern, to find individual survival one must look at individuals within the group and it may only be implied survival.

Survival Strategies

A survivor is typically one who makes a choice to live through a traumatic experience. The lexicon of survival identified 983 possible instances in the Hebrew Bible. I turn to my secondary cannon to the writing of Lezley McSpadden, mother of Michael Brown, the unarmed young Black man slain in Ferguson, MO by police in 2014. McSpadden explains she did not finish high school because she had to provide for her family and survive and did not know how she could do

all of this and finish high school.[352] In the book, she foregrounds telling the story of her son by telling her own to provide the social context.[353] McSpadden speaks of her first–hand experience of growing up in poverty in St. Louis, MO, and thus living at the intersection of race, gender, and class. Black women and girls who experience this intersection of oppression in their quest to survive find themselves making choices, which does not necessarily include a benign option, leaving one to feel as if there is no other choice. As traumatic events could be over a short span or an extended period, once one is met with a situation that threatens their safety, the decision on how to respond must be made.

Black women's experiences of finding a way of keeping alive repeatedly have catalyzed their need for survival strategies. Recognizing the need to ensure their survival and the survival of others, Black women understand "survival is only part of the task. The other part is teaching."[354] Identifying survival skills and strategies and teaching them to others, particularly children, become a part of communal survival. Womanists identify survival strategies in various contexts where the lives of Black women have intersected with traumatic experiences that threatened their well-being and safety. LeRhonda Manigault-Bryant and Yolanda Pierce write about the strategies their grandmothers passed down to them to teach them to survive living in the south.[355] Iesha and Trachette Jackson explain how their mother taught them survival

[352] McSpadden and Leflore, *Tell the Truth & Shame the Devil,* 5.

[353] Stacie Selmon McCormick, "Birthrights and Black Lives: Narrating and Disrupting Perverse Inheritances," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 48, No. 1 (2020): 201-217, 206.

[354] Lorde, *Cancer Journals*, 40.

[355] LeRhonda Manigault-Bryant, "'I Had a Praying Grandmother' Religion, Prophetic Witness, and Black Women's Herstories," in *New Perspectives on the Black Intellectual Tradition*, ed., Keisha N. Blain, Christopher Cameron, and Ashley D. Farmer (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 115-130. Yolanda Pierce, *In My Grandmother's House: Black Women, Faith, and the Stories We Inherit* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf, 2021).

strategies through womanist mothering.[356] Black mothers have passed on wisdom for survival throughout the generations.[357]

In evaluating their lives and the experiences of other Black women, survival strategies are culled and offered as blueprints to survive for others. For example, as a Civil Rights activist planning and protesting in the United States in the 1960s, womanist theologian, preacher, and activist Prathia Hall faced many life-threatening events in her lifetime. Drawing from these experiences, she maintained, a "survival kit of oppression includes humor, faith, and music."[358] Delores Williams exploring the work of Black women writers, deduces lifeline politics in these narratives she categorizes in four strategies: 1) developing a defiant attitude and physical strength; 2) developing strong bonds with other women and men; 3) challenging the governing authority; and 4) examining and changing their consciousness about values fundamental to Black women's early conditioning under certain ethical, moral, and religious foundations.[359] Rosita Matthews identifies three ways to survive living in systems of oppression: 1) change the system, 2) do not enter the system, and 3) work prophetically within the system.[360]

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[356] Iesha Jackson and Trachette Jackson, "Educated Black Women as Conscious Resisters: How Our Mother's Love Made A Way," in *Womanish Black Girls: Women Resisting the Contradictions of Silence and Voice*, ed. Smith, et al. (Gorham: Myers Education, 2019), 133-46.

[357] Williams, "Womanist Theology," 67.

[358] Courtney Pace, *Freedom Faith: The Womanist Vision of Prathia Hall* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019), 49.

[359] Williams, "Women's Oppression and Lifeline Politics," 65-66.

[360] Rosita Matthews, "Using Power from the Periphery: An Alternative Theological Model for Survival in Systems," in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie Townes (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 92-108, 198.

Additionally, Hugh Pyper who maintains the Bible offers a variety of strategies for survival.[361] Cuéllar questions whether biblical stories of migration, deportation, and exile serve as a survival handbook for present-day migrants and asylum seekers.[362] His migrant-centric reading of Exodus 2 uses the story of baby Moses' migration to the Pharaoh's palace with a view toward the mass migration of unaccompanied minors to the United States from Central America. He contends the biblical and contemporary stories are similar because of the human will to survive in both. While Cuéllar does not define survival, he does identify the theme of migration survival in biblical stories like Moses in Exodus, Isaac, and Rebekah at Gerar (Gen 26), and Jacob and his sons in Egypt (Gen 42). He maintains themes in migration-survival stories are the scarcity of materials and circumventing power dynamics. Cuéllar's work helps identify survival experiences in the biblical text that stem from migration, diaspora, and exile and creates survival narratives.

Each of these survival strategies addresses the numerous instances of survival identified and can aid in looking more closely at the survival experiences to ascertain if any of the strategies are included. I submit that once a possible survival experience is identified, surveying the passage for any strategies will help develop a necessary survival narrative. Since the writers were not interested in the stories of survivors who were non-Israelite or not male, their narratives were omitted. In the following two chapters, I will use the survival experiences identified in Esther 2:17–19 and 9:14 to look for any of the survival strategies listed above. I read these passages in conversation with Black women's autobiographies, the initial seven terms and cluster subfields of the lexicon of survival, and my assessment of survival in the Hebrew Bible. I will

[361] Hugh S. Pyper, "The Selfish Text: The Bible and Memetics," *A Memetics Compendium* (2008): 1294-1317, 1299.

[362] Cuéllar, "A Migrant-Centric Reading of Exodus 2," 499-514.

start with Williams' lifeline politics she extracted from Black women's literature. These strategies and the narratives of Angelou and McSpadden will provide the frame for which I will build a survival narrative.

CHAPTER 3. OUR GIRLS ARE NOT SAFE

The Lexicon of Survival permits me to identify survival language, survival texts, and survival strategies in Esther 2 and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.* While incorporating each of these components, I now return to survival narratives. In striving to integrate religious traditions into a woman's life cycle of coming of age, childbirth, weaning, and death, Jennie Ebeling uses a fictional narrative to "bring the past to life."[363] Similarly, Wil Gafney composes womanist midrash as an interpretive practice to attend to marginalized characters contending survival. Gafney asserts, "Womanist midrash listens to and for their voices in and through the Hebrew Bible while acknowledging that the text does not speak, or even intend to speak, to or for them, let alone hear them."[364] She combines translation-based exegesis with literary, historical, and contemporary readings of marginalized figures in Scripture while adhering scrupulously to archaeological and anthropological records.

Norma Rosen explains the term midrash is derived from the Hebrew word *lidrosh* denoting "to search, to ask, to explain, to draw out, to enlarge upon-seized upon improbabilities, gaps."[365] She notes how ancient commentators created completely new tales that did not just explain but often extended biblical narratives; subsequently, she uses midrash to give voice to women in the biblical text. Further, Dana Nolan Fewell asserts midrash retells biblical stories in a way that addresses the issues of the interpreter's culture.[366] However, Debora Kahn-Harris

[363] Jennie R. Ebeling, *Women's Lives in Biblical Times* (New York; London: T & T Clark, 2010), 2-3.

[364] Wilda Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017), 3.

[365] Norma Rosen, *Biblical Women Unbound: Counter-Tales* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 4.

[366] Danna Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of our Children* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 37.

critiques Rosen's work for focusing on stories of women and names them creative re-imaginings that are rarely based on the midrashic hermeneutic. She argues feminist authors seem compelled to call their work "midrash" to have it taken seriously.[367] Though I do not refer to my work as midrash, I do find the midrash practice of questioning and filling in gaps is beneficial and utilize it.

Inspired by Ebling's and Gafney's methods, I create womanist survival narratives, yet my approach differs from theirs. Both use biblical text and archeological evidence to ground their work. Ebling develops a narrative about a fictional character to help readers focus on women's everyday life in ancient Israel. Gafney's womanist midrash re-envisions biblical passages primarily pertaining to women and uses her "sanctified imagination" with archaeological records to fill in the gaps in the text.[368] Each approach invites readers to give more consideration to marginalized women; however, they both focus primarily on Israelite women.[369] As I continue to investigate survival in the biblical text beyond Israelite males, I choose to focus on the experiences of non-Israelite girls and women as they are typically left unexplored but can contribute to a more thorough and expansive understanding of survival and could help survivors of trauma. "Focusing on the survival that comes after the trauma means that the violence is

[367] She also critiques Alicia Suskin Ostriker's *The Nakedness of the Fathers: Biblical Visions and Revisions* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994). Deborah Kahn-Harris, "Midrash for the Masses: The Uses (and Abuses) of the Term 'Midrash' in Contemporary Feminist Discourse," *Feminist Theology* 21, no. 3 (2013): 295-308.

[368] Gafney explains sanctified imagination is a practice in Black preaching that is rooted in biblical piety and respect for Scriptures. So as to not misrepresent the text, a preacher would note they are using their sanctified imagination while they discuss things not in the biblical text but are divinely inspired. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 3. Further, as a hermeneutical strategy that Black preachers "share what is missing from the biblical text and wonder aloud how an understanding from the lens of the sanctified imagination helps listener create meaning and understanding from the text." See Andre Johnson, "My Sanctified Imagination: Carter G. Woodson and a Speculative (Rhetorical) History of African American Public Address, 1925–1960," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 24, no. 1-2 (2021): 15-50.

[369] In *Womanist Midrash*, Gafney engages and interprets an assortment of text that include women. Most of the womanist midrash she provides is about Israelite women: Rebekah, 52; Rachel and Leah, 57; women in Lev 14, 115; Miryam, 135; and Midianite women, 154.

acknowledged, but so is the recovery and resilience."[370] Thus, the trauma, which is often violence, is recognized, but so is the survivor and their efforts. Centering these experiences in the biblical text is how I generate survival narratives.

I begin with a text identified in the *Lexicon of Survival*, read, and translate the passage for my translation-based exegesis to serve as the foundation of which the survival narrative is built. In reading the text, I pay close attention to the characters in the text, their experiences, language, silence, and social locations. I identify any gaps in the text pertaining to the characters. Melanie Johnson-DuBaufre advocates "gazing upon the invisible" to expand our vision to see people and activities that may not be visible.[371] However, the gaps are not always regarding the characters. As Janice De-Whyte notes, the Hebrew Bible does not always provide detailed background information for certain cultural elements, and parallels in ancient Near Eastern literature are helpful.[372] Zafrira Ben-Barak asserts although there is a difference between Israel and other ancient Afro-Asiatic societies, the fundamental elements of a patriarchal and urban society runs through them all.[373] Thus, I engage archaeology, literature, and historical sources to aid in

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[370] Kathleen Gallagher Elkins, "Children and the Memory of Traumatic Loss," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Children in the Bible and the Biblical World*, ed. Julie F. Parker and Sharon Betsworth. (New York; London: T&T Clark, 2019), 188.

[371] Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, "'Gazing Upon the Invisible': Archaeology, Historiography, and the Elusive Wo/men of 1 Thessalonians," in *From Roman to Early Christian Thessalonike: Studies in Religion and Archaeology*, ed. Laura Nasrallah, Charalambos Bakirtzis, and Steven J Friesen (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[372] Janice P. De-Whyte, *Wom (B) an: A Cultural-Narrative Reading of the Hebrew Bible Barrenness Narratives* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 10. While De-Whyte uses ancient Near Eastern, I will use the term ancient Afro-Asiatic acknowledging the term ancient Near East derives from centering the British Empire. See Shawn W. Flynn, "Broadening our Perspective of Ancient Children: Historical-Comparative Methods and the Value of Ancient Children," in *Children and Methods: Listening to and Learning from Children in the Biblical World*, ed. Kristine Henriksen Garroway and John W. Martens (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020), 105. Wil Gafney argues, "Naming the context, literature, peoples, and languages of the Hebrew Scriptures "Afro-Asiatic" immediately calls into question the white imagery applied to the biblical world." See Wil Gafney, "A Reflection on the Black Lives Matter Movement and Its Impact on My Scholarship," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136, no. 1 (2017): 206.

[373] Zafrira Ben-Barak, *Inheritance by Daughters in Israel and the Ancient Near East: A Social, Legal and Ideological Revolution* (Jaffa: Archaeological Center Publications, 2006), 1.

depicting the characters and their surroundings. The lack of archaeological work exploring the living spaces and daily lives of non-elite people, particularly women and children, makes this more challenging.[374] Like Ebling, I do not assert that every detail of the narratives is confirmed by archaeology or other sources.[375] While I attend to the cultural context of the text, my primary focus is the people, especially those who are often invisibilized. Therefore, my survival narrative utilizes an internal focalization, that is the position of a character defines the scope of perception.[376]

The survival narratives I construct using an internalized focus of characters who are not necessarily Jewish and whose presence is lifted from the text or gaps in the text while also taking into account whether the character is a child and the resulting additional implications. In reviewing the text, I consider the trauma in the narrative. As I build the narrative, I employ the midrashic practice of filling in the gaps with any cultural or archaeological details pertinent to the gap and my sanctified imagination. In addition, I recognize that some gaps cannot be filled by archaeology and other historical sources. Finally, I engage Black women's literature to help illustrate a picture of survival, thus creating a womanist survival narrative. In this narrative, I

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[374] Maryam Dezhamkhooy and Leila Yasdi-Papoli state most of the archaeological finds for the Achaemenid period has been structures identified to be palaces. Persepolis and Susa have been the focus of the attention and smaller sites where more information about everyday life needs to be examined more. *The Politics of the Past: The Representation of the Ancient Empires by Iran's Modern States*. (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2018), 34. Alireza Caverdi and Pierfrancesco Callieri note that most of the habitation areas of Susa remain largely unexplored by archaeologist in "A Rural Settlement of the Achaemenid Period in Fars" in *Journal of Inner Asian Art and Archaeology* 1 (2006): 65-70. Further, as noted by Carol Meyers, archaeological projects can have urban elite and gender bias in *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 28. The study of children has been neglected in archaeology. See Grete Lillehammer, "A Child is Born. The Child's World in an Archaeological Perspective," *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 22, no. 2 (1989); Kathryn A. Kamp, "Where Have All the Children Gone?: The Archaeology of Childhood," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 8, no. 1 (2001).

[375] Ebeling, *Women's Lives in Biblical Times*, 4.

[376] See Fotis Jannidis, "Narratology and the Narrative," in *What is Narratology*, ed. Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müeller (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 35-54, 37.

read the text of Esther as set in Persia and take into account the broader ancient Afro-Asiatic culture and context for the modern reader.[377] I recognize that the image of survival portrayed in the narratives will not speak for those silenced in the biblical text. However, I do proffer that these womanist survival narratives give the reader a new voice to consider in the text. Thus, for my narrative, I turn to the silenced young girls in Esther 2.

Narratives: Esther and Maya

Esther's Story

[Vashti refused to come before the king when called. The king seeks the advice of his advisor on the law regarding what should be done to Vashti. He is advised to issue an order that bans Vashti from the king's presence and removes her from her position as queen. The king gives an order declaring every man the master of their own house.]

> *Esther 2:1-4*[378]
> After these things, the king's anger subsided. Ahasuerus remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed upon her. [2] The king's servants who were serving him said let the king seek *young virgin girls* who are beautiful.[3] The king appointed overseers in all the kingdom's provinces, and they gathered all the *young virgin girls* who were beautiful. They brought them to the citadel of Susa to the house of women. The women were placed in the hands of the king's eunuch, Hegai, who was in charge of them and the cosmetic treatments they were to be given. [4] The *young girl* that was pleasing in the eyes of the king would be queen instead of Vashti. These words pleased the king and thus were done.
>
> *Esther 2:12-14*
> When the turn came for a *young girl* to go into king Ahasuerus after being in the regulations of the women for twelve months when she completes the days of beauty treatment for six months in oil and myrrh and six months in the perfume of women cosmetics.[13] The girls went to the king with everything she was allowed to take from the women's house to the king's palace. [14] In the evening, she would go and return in the morning to the house of the second woman in the hands of the king's eunuch Shaashgaz,

[377] Kristin Joachimsen cautions scholars dating of Esther as Persian or Hellenistic may overlook the Persian and Greek influence in under each rule. She suggests considering the broader Mesopotamian context and Hebrew traditions for the context of Esther. Kristin Joachimsen, "Esther in Shushan: Narrative Constructions of Otherness Related to Gender, Ethnicity and Social Status within the Persian Empire," *Foreign Women–Women in Foreign Lands: Studies on Foreignness and Gender in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East in the First Millennium BCE* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019): 204-33, 16 fn 51.

[378] All translations are my own and I have intentionally translated the passage to include young virgin girls to highlight they are not women but are vulnerable young girls. Further discussion below.

who was in charge of the secondary wives. She would not go again to the king unless he desired her, and the king called her by name.

This Esther passage narrates King Ahasuerus' decision to find himself a new wife after Vashti refuses to come when she is called.[379] The repercussions of his decision were that demoted Vashti from being a member of the ruling class.[380] The king removes Vashti from the queen's throne and his presence, and now she is no longer pertinent to the story. Although it is not clear what happened to Vashti after refusing to come before the king when he beckoned, it is clear she does not follow the rules of the kyriarchy in the heterarchical system.[381] Acting upon the advice of his male advisors, the king agrees to issue a law to *take* all the young virgin girls from throughout the twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom to the palace so he could pick a new queen. As Kandy Queen-Sutherland maintains, this is not a case of a lucky girl getting to be a queen; in the text, girls and women are not safe anywhere, and the father cannot protect his

[379] Yael Shamesh notes that Vashti is the only woman in the Hebrew Bible who refuses the request of a powerful man and her husband in "The Stories of Women in a Man's World: The Books of Ruth, Esther, and Judith," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Retrospect*, ed. Susanne Scholz (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013), 258. Vashti's refusal is interpreted as asserting her own agency and she is raised as a model for women. See Marthe M. Kondemo, "What Now of the Vashti character in the Hebrew Bible? Ruminating on the Future of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians Among Emerging Scholars in Democratic Republic of the Congo," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37, no. 2 (2016): 4; Deborah F. Sawyer, "Queen Vashti's 'No' and What It Can Tell Us About Gender Tools in Biblical Narrative," in *The Bible and Feminism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Vashti refused to appear naked before the king and refuses to be treated as a sexual object. Elizabeth A. McCabe, *Women in the Biblical World: A Survey of Old and New Testament Perspectives* (Blue Ridge Summit: UPA, 2011), 42-43.

[380] Madipoane Masenya contends Vashti is used by the Hebrew narrator to pave the way for Esther and names this as narrative violence in "'Limping Yet Made to Climb a Mountain!' Re-Reading the Vashti Character in the HIV and AIDS South African Context." Yvonne Sherwood (ed.), *The Bible and Feminism: Remapping the Field.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 534-547, 541.

[381] Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza uses kyriarchy to help clarify the existence of complex pyramid system of domination that exceeds the domination of men over women. The intersecting multiple structures of domination continue through violence of economic exploitation and lived subordination. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation.* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), 133. Carol Meyers argues against using the term patriarchal because women were not dominated in all spheres of their lives and in fact were leaders in some areas. She suggests that heterarchy acknowledges the different power structures that exist in any given society and acknowledges women were not dominate in all aspects of society. See Carol Meyers, "Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 133: 8-27 (2014), 22-23, 26.

daughter from the king's decree.[382] After being required to undergo a series of beautification treatments and more than enough time has passed to ensure they are not already pregnant, the bedroom parade begins. The king has a young girl brought to his room each night, and she enters one way from the hands and control of Hegai and exits into the hands and control of Shaashgaz, and she is now likely a different person.[383]

When Esther is made queen, the other girls taken to the palace are offhandedly mentioned as props in the narrative and then disregarded. Further, because Esther is the heroine of the Jewish survival story, very little attention is given to the girls in biblical scholarship. The girls are depicted as being in a beauty contest.[384] However, scholars interpret it more specifically as a forced sex contest, not a beauty contest.[385] Sarojini Nadar draws a parallel between Africans being gathered, raped, and abused to the virgin girls in Esther.[386] While I am interested in how Esther survives this ordeal, I also want to direct attention to the others who are victimized.

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[382] Kandy Queen Sutherland, "Naming the Enemy: Esther and the Prophets" in *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 35, no. 2 (2008): 180.

[383] Alice Laffey asserts the girls leave the care of Hegai and because they were no longer virgins and them must go to the care of Shaashgaz who was in charge of concubines. Alice L. Laffey, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

[384] See Alice Bach, "Mirror, Mirror in the Text: Reflections on Reading and Rereading" in *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*, ed. Athalya Brenner. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2004), 85; Kristin De Troyer and Atalyah Brener, *An Oriental Beauty Parlour: An Analysis of Esther 2.8-18 in the Hebrew, the Septuagint and the Second Greek Text*. (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1995), 56; and Nicole Duran, "Who Wants to Marry a Persian King? Gender Games and Wars and the Book of Esther" in *Pregnant Passion: Gender, Sex, and Violence in the Bible*, ed. Cheryl Kirk-Duggan (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 71-84, 74.

[385] See Randall C. Bailey, "'That's Why They Didn't Call the Book Hadassah!' The Interse(ct)/(x)ionality of Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexuality in the Book of Esther" in *They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*, ed. Randall C. Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2009), 239; Johnny Miles, "Reading Esther as Heroine: Persian Banquets, Ethnic Cleansing, and Identity Crisis," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 45, no. 3 (2015): 135; and Robert Alter, *Strong as Death is Love: The Song of Songs, Ruth, Esther, Jonah, and Daniel: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015), 97.

[386] Sarojini Nadar, "Gender, Power, Sexuality and Suffering Bodies in the Book of Esther: Reading the Characters of Esther and Vashti for the Purpose of Social Transformation," *Old Testament Essays* 15, no. 1 (2002): 114.

Hence, I closely examine the other girls taken in this passage and their experiences and recast them as essential characters in my womanist survival narrative.

When the king issues a call, an order is issued for all the בתולות in the various provinces to be sought out, taken from their homes, and brought to the palace. In this passage, Esther is the only named girl taken as none of the other girls are named. "Their namelessness condition denotes their utter lack of agency in the situation."[387] The other girls are all referred to as נערה or בתולות. Naomi Steinberg notes these are two of the most common terms used to refer to young people in the Hebrew Bible.[388]

In the Hebrew Bible there are fifty instances of the term בתולה. The word's semantic range includes virgin, maiden, young woman, and the personification of Israel or Zion.[389] The word is often translated as virgin, as I translated above. In fact, I noted that nearly every occurrence of the word in the Pentateuch is translated as virgin in the NRSV, ESV, and JPS except Gen 24:16 and Deut 32:25.[390] In Esther, the term is translated as virgin every time in all three translations. Tikva Fryer-Kensky states the "cultural expectation that young girls remain virgins is embedded in the Hebrew language" and the term indicates a sign of virginity.[391] Tom Wadsworth argues the

[387] Mariah Q. Richardson, "The Reality of Female Despondency in the Book of Esther," in *Troubling Teopics, Sacred Texts: Readings in Hebrew Bible, New Testament and Qur'an* ed. Roberta Sterman Sabbath (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 298-99.

[388] Naomi A Steinberg, *The World of the Child in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015), 27

[390] NRSV uses *virgin* except in Deut 32:25 when it uses young woman, JPS uses maiden, ESV uses maiden in Gen 24:16 and young woman in Deut 32:25.

[391] Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky, "Virginity in the Bible," in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky, Victor H Matthews, and Bernard M Levinson (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1998), 79.

term is more than the girl's status as a virgin, but also their social status as a member of a distinctive group.[392]

The consensus in scholarship is בתולה is a young girl of marriageable age, a pubescent girl, who has not given birth yet.[393] Margaret Murray Talbot suggests the understanding of "one of marriageable age" has expanded and includes developmental reproductive capacities such as menarche, as well as her virginity.[394] Kimberly Russaw explains that virginity should not be considered in modern concepts as it was used as a commodity for men.[395] Unmarried girls contributed to the families' economic value by doing chores such as gathering water, harvesting crops, and cooking. Children were part of their father's financial property. A girl's virginity was their highest economic value. There is no indication that a bride price was given to the fathers in Esther for their daughters.[396] As these girls were taken, families lost a child they loved and possibly needed to help survive. Regardless, the king had these young virgin girls gathered and brought to the palace, irrespective of the impact on the family, the girls' feelings, or the parents' desires. From this point on, they are consistently referred to as נערה. As Kristen De Troyer observes, when the *girls* are put in the hands of Hegai, they become *women*.[397] Julie Parker

[392] Tom Wadsworth, "Is there a Hebrew Word for Virgin?: 'bethulah' in the Old Testament," *Restoration Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (1980).

[393] Gordon J. Wenham, "Betulah, 'A Girl of Marriageable Age'," *Vetus Testamentum* 22, no. 3 (1972): Julie F. Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable: Children in the Hebrew Bible, Especially the Elisha Cycle*, vol. no. 355 (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2013).

[394] Margaret Murray Talbot, "Bat-Yiphtach and Her Bleeding Body: A Child-Oriented Reading of Judges 11:29-40." (PhD. Dissertation, Texas Christian University, 2020), 142.

[395] Kimberly D. Russaw, *Daughters in the Hebrew Bible* (Lanham: Lexington/Fortress Academic, 2018), 33.

[396] It was customary practice for a bride price to be given to a bride's family. Matthews, "Everyday Life," 160.

[397] De Troyer, *An Oriental Beauty Parlour*, 50.

argues they should be understood as girls and not women. According to Parker, "Most girls appear in the Hebrew Bible around early sexual maturity, since this is when the writers of the text take interest of them."[398]

Stephen Wilson states that נער is a term that connotes youth and proffers that scholars focusing on one aspect of the term do not gain a complete comprehension of the term. For Wilson, those called נער in the Hebrew Bible were unmarried, without children, and in the first two decades of their life.[399] He contends the feminine form of the term typically is the same, except the age range of the girls can be smaller because girls of marriageable age were included. In addition, he states נערות is used for servants/attendants, girls/young women, and occasionally married women.[400]

Carolyn Leeb notes the nouns נער and נערה have generally come to mean "servant" while often referring to a person who is youthful, if not a child. She contends these definitions are inadequate. Leeb states the term נערה is used sixty-one times and includes single and married females, young daughters, marriageable young women, and concubines. She asserts נערה connotes a girl away from their father's house and perhaps in danger or at risk.[401] According to

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[398] Julie Faith Parker, "Hardly Happily Ever After: Trafficking of Girls in the Hebrew Bible," *Biblical Interpretation* 28 no. 5 (2020): 540.

[399] Stephen M. Wilson, *Making Men: The Male Coming-of-Age Theme in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 52.

[400] Wilson lists Judg 19:3–9; Deut 22:13–21; Esth 2:20 as examples of married women being referred to as נערות. However, the term is נערות is not in Esth 2:20. She is called by name in Esth 2:16-17, compared to all the נשים included with the other בתולות in 2:17.

[401] Carolyn S. Leeb, *Away from the Father's House: the Social Location of na'ar and na'arah in Ancient Israel*, vol. 301 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 125-32. Mercedes Garcia Bachmann examines נערה and נער in the Dtr History leaning heavily on Leeb and concludes that these men and women find themselves outside of the *paterfamilias* protection and since women's sexuality belonged to men unprotected women found themselves in serious trouble no matter their legal status. See Mercedes L. Garcia Bachmann, *Women at Work in the Deuteronomistic History*, vol. no. 4 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013), 127. While I do not agree that נערה and נער are necessarily men and women, I do agree that a נערה is unprotected and in danger.

Leeb, נערה are typically servants and can be easily disposed of in the biblical text and can be offered for sexual exploitation by the command of their mistress or other men.[402]

Milton Eng's critique of Leeb's assessment is that she is trying to unify every occurrence of the word, and that goes against polysemy, "which recognizes that almost every lexeme in every language has multiple meanings."[403] He suggests נערה and נער are often referring to a servant or attendant.[404] While I do not agree that Leeb's definition would be accurate for every occurrence of the term, it appears to be accurate for this passage.

My survey of the term נערה examined the sixty verses the term is present in the Hebrew Bible, noting Deuteronomy has the most occurrences and Esther has the second most. The semantic field includes girl, servant girl, young woman, virgin, young virgin, maids, maiden, unmarried, betrothed, and secondary wife.[405] The word is translated most often as "girl," and the majority refers to an Israelite girl.[406] Typically when in a plural form of נערות or נערתי the term indicates some type of servitude, usually to a woman.[407] However, servitude is not limited to the plural for as Abishag (1 Kgs 1:4) and the Israelite enslaved girl who served Namaan's wife (2

[402] Leeb, *Away from the Father's House*, 128-129.

[403] Milton Eng, *The Days of Our Years: A Lexical Semantic Study of the Life Cycle in Biblical Israel* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 62.

[404] Eng, *The Days of Our Years*, 80.

[405] This semantic field is comprised of analysis of NRSV, JPS, *DCH*, and *TDOT*.

[406] The NRSV translates it as girl twenty-four times and JPS thirty-two times. E.g., Rebekah Gen 24:14, 16; Dinah Gen 34:3, girl with virginity in question Deut 22:15, Abishag 1 Kgs 1:4, and Esther Esth 2:9. *DCH* offers young woman, girl, unmarried, betrothed newly married, and secondary wife.

[407] G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 492. See Rebekah's servants Gen 24:61; Exod 2:5 servants of Pharaoh's daughter; Abigail's maids 1 Sam 25:42, Prov 9:3 Woman Wisdom's servants, Esth 2:9 Esther's servants. However, one instance when service was for a male is Ruth 2:8, 22, 23 and 3:2 where it references Boaz's female servants.

Kgs 5:2) are both called נערה. Abishag also indicates servitude was not limited to women. A נערה in Esther is a young girl, away from the protection of their family, under the command of other men, and is offered for sexual exploitation.

In addition, when נערה is adjacent to בתולה details, she is a likely virgin. There are six instances when the two terms are together, and in every instance, the young girl is raped and/or taken for the pleasure of a male, usually by force.[408] Thus, young girls are at risk when these two terms are together. One-half of these occurrences are in Esther, where the young virgin girls are in danger. As a result, I translate these terms in Esther as young virgin girls to highlight the youth and status of these vulnerable girls. While it is possible all of the girls taken were not virgins, my translation highlights that these were, in fact, girls, not women. I argue that seeing these girls as young girls challenges the reader to not gloss over the abuse of children, and it offers clarity in understanding the heinousness of the king and his advisors' actions. Further, identifying the young girls in the passage as young girls allows the reader to revisit their previous assumptions, thoughts, and interpretations about this passage and reconsider the implications. As Garroway notes, finding "children" in the text changes the information gleaned from the text.[409]

Finally, I recognize the idea of child and childhood is not universal.[410] As Steinberg notes, children in every period live in culture-bound contexts that shape the understanding of

[408] Deut 22:23, 28; 1 Kgs 1:2; Esth 2:2, 3, and 12.

[409] Kristine Henriksen Garroway, "Methodology: Who Is a Child and Where Do We Find Children in Ancient Near East?" in *T&T Clark Handbook of Children in the Bible and the Biblical World*, ed. Julie F. Parker and Sharon Betsworth (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 67-90, 90.

[410] The definitions of the terms child and childhood are continually deliberated. See Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Knopf, 1962); Reidar Aasgaard, Cornelia B. Horn, and Oana Maria Cojocaru, *Childhood in History: Perceptions of Children in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2018), and Jane Eva Baxter, *The Archaeology of Childhood: Children, Gender, and Material Culture* (Lanham: AltaMira, 2005). Aram Tropper, "Children in Light of the Demographics of the Jewish Family in Late Antiquity," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period 37*, no. 3 (2006): 299-343.

what it means to be a child and what is a normal safe childhood.[411] Thus, children who lived in the provinces of Susa had different responsibilities and expectations than children today. Nevertheless, my focus is not on what is expected of the child but what should be expected of the reader and perhaps the child's society, both ancient and contemporary. Further, as Talbot points out, scholars who engage in child-centered research use their primary discipline and draw on other fields "to bridge the gap between the abstract theoretical child and historically situated embodied children and their varied childhood…such bridging gives varying perspectives."[412] Laura Silver also notes how childhood studies is multidisciplinary and focuses on the agency and power of young people while exploring different experiences of children. She advocates for transformative children's studies, which transforms the context that make harm possible across levels that include intrapersonal, interpersonal, community, institutional, state, and global.[413]

Scholars are looking to children and childhood in biblical studies considerably more in the last twenty years, and similar to womanist interpretation, it is not monolithic.[414] Scholars take different approaches to locating and interpreting children, including narrative, historical-

[411] Steinberg, *The World of Children*, xi.

[412] Talbot, "Bat-Yiphtach," 62-63. See also Rita Braches-Chyrek, *The Future of Childhood Studies, v*ol. 4 (Leverkusen-Opladen: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2020).

[413] Laura J. Silver, "Transformative Childhood Studies: a Remix in Inquiry, Justice, and Love." [In English]. *Children's Geographies* 18, no. 2 (2020): 176-90, 177-178.

[414] Kristine Henriksen Garroway and John W. Martens, eds., *Children and Methods: Listening to and Learning from Children in the Biblical World*, vol. 67 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020), 2; Amy Lindemen Allen, "Children and Childhood(s) in the Bible and Biblical World." *Religious Studies Review* 46, no. 1 (2020): 37-45; Julie F. Parker and Sharon Betsworth, eds., *T&T Clark Handbook of Children in the Bible and the Biblical World* (London: T&T Clark, 2019). Marcia J. Bunge and Jon L Berquist, "Childhood and Age in the Bible." *Pastoral Psychology* 58, no. 5-6 (2009): 521-30. Terence E. Fretheim and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008); Danna Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children.* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003).

comparative,[415] archaeology, and iconography.[416] Kathleen Gallager Elkins states four questions raised by childist interpretations. First, where are the children in the biblical world, and why are they frequently overlooked? Second, how do we recognize children's agency? Third, how are children especially vulnerable to violence? Finally, how does this interdisciplinary field make a difference in people's real lives?[417] Elkins notes that many biblical references to children include violence or threat of violence, and the life of children in antiquity seems to involve precarity modern readers do not always assume.[418] Child-centered or childist interpretations "focus on the agency and action of children and youth in the biblical text instead of seeing them primarily as passive, victimized and marginalized."[419]

While biblical scholars give more attention to children in the biblical text now than in the past, the focus remains primarily on Israelite children.[420] Dong Sung Kim provides a childist interpretation Esther. He states that readers uncritically accept the implicit assumption of the

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[415] Shawn W. Flynn, *Children in the Bible and the Ancient World: Comparative and Historical Methods in Reading Ancient Children.* (New York: Routledge, 2019)

[416] Jason Anthony Riley, "Children Should be Seen: Studying Children in Assyrian Iconography," in *Children and Methods: Listening to and Learning from Children in the Biblical World*, ed. Kristine Henriksen Garroway and John W. Martens (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020).

[417] Kathleen Gallagher Elkins, "Feminist Studies as the Mother of Childist Approaches to the Bible," in *Children and Methods: Listening to and Learning from Children in the Biblical World*, ed. Kristine Henriksen Garroway and John W. Martens (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020), 20.

[418] Elkins, "Children and the Memory of Traumatic Loss," 183.

[419] Kathleen Gallager Elkins and Julie Faith Parker, "Children in Biblical Narrative and Childist Interpretation" in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 422-33, 425. See also, Julie Faith Parker, "Children in the Hebrew Bible and Childist Interpretation." *Currents in Biblical Research* 17, no. 2 (2019): 130-57.

[420] See Kristine Heriksen Garroway, "Moses's Slow Speech: Hybrid Identity, Language Acquisition, and the Meaning of Exodus 4:10" in *Biblical Interpretation* 28; 2020; no. 5 (2020): 635-57; Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 2013; and Peggy Day, "From the Child Is Born the Woman: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter" in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 58-74; Hagith Sivan, "Ancient Jewish Traditions: Moses's Infancy and the Remaking of Biblical Miriam in Antiquity," in *Childhood in History*, ed. Reidar Aasgaard, Cornelia B. Horn, and Oana Maria Cojocaru (New York: Routledge, 2018).

collective identity of Jew, whose representation predominately reflects the interests of adult males. Instead, he focuses on Esther and argues she is a youth in the diaspora with a complex identity between Jewish and Persian cultures, royalty and colonized minority, older and younger diasporic generations, past and future while standing between communal fate and individual survival.[421] My interpretation of these passages highlights that there are many children in the passage who are not Jewish, as girls are gathered from throughout the kingdom; this interpretation considers their lives and experiences.

Another reason I interpret נערה בתולה as young virgin girls is that while they are referenced as בתולה and נערה, the passages also mention נשים (women) which indicates a distinction between the two.[422] The young virgin girls are required to go through specific regulations and beauty treatments for women. Laura Quick suggests that wearing cosmetics from such treatments could convey information to others about the wearer's sexual or social status.[423] Although, when starting the treatments, they were still considered young virgin girls, the treatments were part of the process in preparation for becoming a woman, and after they left the king's bedroom, they were then a woman. The girls are no longer referred to as נערה after they have one night with the king, except for Esther; they are not queen, not a wife, but also no longer

[421] Dong Sung Kim, "Children of Diaspora: The Cultural Politics of Identity and Diasporic Childhood in the Book of Esther" in *T&T Clark Handbook of Children in the Bible and the Biblical World*, ed. Julie F. Parker and Sharon Betsworth (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 109-30.

[422] Esth 2:3, 12,13, and 14.

[423] Laura Quick, "Decorated Women: A Sociological Approach to the Function of Cosmetics in the Books of Esther and Ruth," *Biblical Interpretation* 27, no. 3 (2019): 368.

a virgin.[424] Parker asserts there is no clear demarcation between youth and adulthood, although marriage does offer a benchmark of progression in stages of life.[425]

These girls have been taken from their homes and pushed out of childhood. Carol Duncan argues that young people have to act like adults long before reaching adulthood due to experiences that force them to grow up fast; they are forced-ripe. She uses a metaphor of a piece of fruit plucked before it is allowed to ripen.[426] I assert Esther and the other young girls were forced-ripe from young girls to women leaving their virginity and childhood behind. Anne Marieke Wetter states the process the girls go through is a "ritual that involves not 'only' their bodies but ultimately changes their identity."[427] Thus, their bodies are moved from their homes to the palace, where their bodies and identities are shaped to the king's desires. These young girls must negotiate the transitions while simultaneously deducing how to survive.

Erika Dunbar maintains the events of this passage narrate the sexual trafficking of young girls.[428] Parker aligns with Dunbar's argument and contends that trafficking starts when the king's servants suggest that girls are brought to the king. Thus, the trafficking in Esther includes the recruiting, transporting, and transferring of girls from their province by abuse of power for sexual exploitation.[429] When the girls are taken from their homes to the palace, they are isolated

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[424] Leeb, *Away from the Father's House*, 133.

[425] Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 55.

[426] Carol B. Duncan "From 'Force-Ripe" to 'Womanish/ist:' Black Girlhood and African Diasporan Feminist Consciousness" in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey Floyd-Thomas (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 32.

[427] Anne-Marieke Wetter, *"On Her Account": Reconfiguring Israel in Ruth, Esther, and Judith* (New York: Bloomsbury), 103.

[428] Ericka S. Dunbar, "For Such a Time as This? # UsToo: Representations of Sexual Trafficking, Collective Trauma, and Horror in the Book of Esther" in *Bible and Critical Theory* 15, no. 2 (2019): 29.

[429] Parker, *Hardly Happily*, 551.

from their available support systems, making them more vulnerable and adding to the traumatic impact. Under the beautification process, the girls are groomed to please the king.[430]

In these Esther passages, the reader finds the trauma of numerous young virgin girls whose experiences are muzzled by the narrator. Yet, their narratives could bring what Lil Ann Kim designates as the four essential elements of trauma narration that are present in Esther: the nature of suffering; the nature of victimhood; the relationship between trauma victim and audience; and attribution of responsibility.[431] The narration of these girls' stories could not only speak to the trauma but survival as well. I will now turn to a contemporary narration of a Black woman's trauma and survival.

Maya's Story

Maya Angelou details her early life in Stamps, Arkansas, in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.* Her grandmother, Momma Henderson, raises Angelou and her older brother Bailey as they are growing up in a small town. She witnesses her grandmother start the day on her knees in prayer and then go out to work running her store in the racially segregated southern Arkansas town where blatant racism flows freely. As she narrates her childhood, she recounts the indignities suffered by Black people in the town and the harassment and racial terror they endured. Angelou describes how her grandmother Momma Henderson maneuvers Southern racism and poverty with skill and precision, allowing her family to withstand it all.

Eventually, after years of separation from their parents, Angelou and Bailey go to live with her mother in St. Louis, Missouri. Taken from the small rural town life, she knew into a

[430] See Bailey, "That's Why They Didn't Call the Book Hadassah," 237-240; Rachel Adelman, "'Passing Strange'—Reading Transgender across Genre: Rabbinic Midrash and Feminist Hermeneutics on Esther," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 30, no. 2 (2014): 81-97, 89; Dunbar, *Trafficking Hadassah*, 20.

[431] Lily Ann Kim, "Reframing the Book of Esther as a Case of Spiritual Mutism" in *Practical Theology*, 13 (2020): 246-58, 248.

much different and faster pace city life; she finds herself trying to navigate her new life. She is now away from Momma Henderson, living with new ways, rules, and other family members. However, racism and poverty remain though it looks different in the city setting. The impact of the changes causes Angelou to have nightmares and sweats. For this reason, her mother takes her into the bedroom she shares with her boyfriend, Mr. Freeman.[432]

Mr. Freeman is now also part of her new life. He lives with her, her mother, and Bailey. Mr. Freeman initially appears to be a nice man, then changes. In the first instance of sexual abuse, Angelou reveals how she was awakened alone with Mr. Freeman's private parts on her leg, and he then molests her. Weeks later, she finds herself home alone with him. He instructs her to come to him, then threatens to kill her if she screams and kills her brother Bailey if she tells anyone. He raped her, and Angelou described her eight-year-old body's pain when he penetrated her, "The act of rape on an eight-year-old body is a matter of the needle giving because the camel can't. The child gives because the body can, and the mind of the violator cannot. I thought I had died."[433]

After the traumatic event, she views herself as complicit in her assault. She convinces herself she helped her rapist do something wrong, and if anyone found out, they would stone her as they did in the bible. Angelou's mother ultimately finds out about the assault, and Mr. Freeman is arrested. Although she could not say publicly at the trial what happened, Mr. Freeman is convicted of assaulting her and released on bail. However, he is murdered while on bail, seemingly "kicked to death."[434] The combination of the pain of the assault, the trial, Mr.

[432] Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. (New York: Random, 1969), 72.

[433] Angelou, *I Know Why*, 78.

[434] Angelou, *I Know Why*, 86.

Freeman's murder, and the resulting trauma was overwhelming for young Angelou. In response, she begins a self-imposed silence for five years, refusing to speak to anyone except sometimes her brother Bailey.

Angelou's autobiography gives insight into the experiences of a young girl who survives child sexual assault. She was a girl growing up in a society that did not value her Black girl body, and she experienced multiple simultaneous oppressions. First, a male entrusted to care for her assaulted and failed Angelou. Then, after surviving her molestation, rape, and the associated trauma, Angelou must discover how to proceed. I now look to see how the words of Angelou may speak in dialogue with Esther 2.

Angelou and Esther 2

Before analyzing the passages, I considered the settings and culture of each narrative. Maya Angelou, Esther, and the other young virgin girls are all daughters coming of age in a hierarchical society that placed their lives at the bottom making daily life and survival much more difficult. Indeed, the everyday experiences of Esther and the other young girls in the passage are not the same as Angelou's. However, though centuries apart, some similarities illustrate how two realities from different cultures can be beneficial.

The young girls in Esther come from rural and urban areas and families who are not wealthy, so they had to help the family. Similarly, Angelou was tasked to do chores and help her grandmother with the family business. The women of the community also taught the younger girls skills and passed on wisdom to help them.[435] Further, communal support and involvement

[435] Women worked in groups in the community which allowed for women to bond, share resources, and care for one another in times of need or in daily living. These gatherings also provided the opportunity for women to teach girls how to complete necessary task for the families such as cooking, weaving, gathering water. See Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 140-42.

were integral to Angelou's upbringing. As women and others in the community would help the children, they were also authorized to correct those who did not act appropriately, primarily to protect them or the community.[436] What is clear from studying the worlds in which all the girls represented by my study lived is that daughters are at risk of being harmed and must navigate their survival.

Language

As I read these two narratives together, I focus on how the stories parallel and the language used in both.[437] Using the initial terms and cluster subfields in the Lexicon of Survival, I survey both passages to see the vocabulary used to tell the story and to speak to survival. I am probing to ascertain how the language is used in each text to discuss survival and any survival strategies. For example, the *Lexicon of Survival* shows in Esther 2 that the term לקח (take) is used in four passages, and Esther is the one taken each time. Every instance Esther is taken is a site of trauma.

Angelou likewise speaks to the traumatic experience of being *taken*, particularly when taken by her father to St. Louis to live with her mother and later to California by her grandmother to live with her mother again. She did not wish to go in both instances and felt the weight of being separated from the community she knew and loved. Further, once taken to each of these places to live, she encounters trauma such as racism, rape, physical violence, and experiencing homelessness.[438] Compounding the trauma of her being taken is the episode where

[436] Angelou, *I Know Why*, 116.

[437] See *Appendix L* for a complete list of primary terms in both narratives and *Appendix M* for cluster subfields present in both.

[438] See Angelou, *I Know Why*, 72-81 on rape, 246-250 on the physical violence of being cut and experiencing homelessness, and 264-272 on racism.

Angelou's grandmother publicly humiliated her. The grandmother had Angelou undress in the middle of a store to show off her seamstress skill. The language indicating the act of taking young girls or their clothes signifies trauma and thus a point of survival on a continuum.

During her description of her rape, Angelou uses other words that are in the semantic range of the primary terms הרג ,מלט, and תלה. Speaking about racial trauma and terrorization, Angelou explains how a Black man was *killed* by white people based on allegations he had sexual relations with a white woman.[439] She decides to stop speaking after her rape because she is concerned that the consequences of using her voice was the power to *kill* anyone–except her older brother, Bailey. The trauma of the rape and death of her rapist continues to affect Angelou, as she writes how she believed that she had been sold to the devil and could not *escape*. She continues by stating she thought she had *died* and wanted to *flee* during her rape. Angelou narrates her experience using this language to discuss her trauma and subsequent individual survival. She also discusses communal trauma as she equates the community listening to Joe Lewis appearing to lose a fight to that of a Black man being *hanged* and what that meant for the Black community.

Gifted in her use of language as she articulates her experiences. I note how she also uses terms included in the cluster subfields.[440] For example, Angelou writes about the *pain* she experienced during her rape and the *fear* that came over her when her family was warned to hide her uncle because of the terrorization they would face when some white ""boys'll come over later."[441] However, the only cluster subfield captured in the four Esther survival texts is the term

[439] Angelou, *I Know Why*, 36, 87.

[440] See *Appendix M*.

[441] Angelou, *I Know Why*, 17.

"daughter." Interestingly, as Angelou writes about being a daughter she is taken to Mexico by her father and sexually harassed. As a daughter, she is also cut by her father's girlfriend. It seems that as a daughter, out of the protection of her mother, she finds her safety in jeopardy.

The vocabulary included in the *Lexicon of Survival* with the seven primary terms and the cluster subfields constitute terminology that indicates survival in ancient and modern texts. It is my position these terms can alert the reader to traumatic experiences which may necessitate a survival experience. Though the literary portrayal of survival in the Hebrew Bible is not attentive to the survival of individuals, except when it is a male Israelite, the Lexicon of Survival helps to locate survival in the biblical text. At the same time, the terms may help call attention to survival in contemporary writings and facilitate identifying more survival texts.

While understanding survival in the Hebrew Bible is not focused on the individual but communal, I see parallels in Angelou's narrative. Angelou writes about her individual experience and struggles to survive during and after her sexual abuse. She connects her survival to the overall narrative of the Black community. Angelou uses the violation of her body by Freeman to explore oppression in the Black community.[442] Likewise, Esther's survival is linked with the survival of the Jewish community.

Actions and Survival Strategies

Examining the sexual abuse and exploitation of the young girls in the passage with Angelou's experience sheds light on some aspects of the story. When Angelou recounts the sexual violence she experienced in both incidents, she was alone with her attacker. Her mother, brother, and others who cared for her were not around to offer any protection. This man who was

[442] Mary Vermillion, "'Reembodying the Self: Representations of Rape' in "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl and I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," *Biography* 15, no. 3 (1992): 246.

supposed to be a father figure in her life is a sexual predator. The young girl is left to the urges and desires of a man who uses his position to violate her young body. Her virginity is violently taken at that moment, changing her from her former self and leaving a lasting traumatic impact on her life.

The young girls taken from their homes to satisfy the king's desires are immediately at risk. Lisa Wolfe argues this could have looked like kidnapping and sexual slavery with the woman with the best sex being named queen.[443] Daniel Smith-Christopher asserts one must consider the role of sexual politics because "women are forcibly removed from their homelands and are thus women who must also navigate the issues of survival living in the midst of a foreign, militarily and economically dominant imperial context."[444] Although I do not view them as young women, Smith-Christopher's assessment is accurate. Their fathers, responsible for their care and protection in the heterarchical society, were viewed as the owners of the girls' bodies and sexuality. However, their fathers could not protect them because while they participated and upheld the heterarchical system, their lower status meant they were out-powered. Perhaps some fathers viewed this incident positively and as an opportunity to improve their economic position. Still, I am convinced many were not eager to have their young daughters taken from them to be presented to the king for his sexual pleasure, especially since they likely did not receive any compensation.

As a young Angelou found herself taken away from those who genuinely cared for her, the young girls gathered and taken to the palace found themselves similarly positioned. Neither

[443] Lisa M. Wolfe, *Ruth, Esther, Song of Songs, and Judith* (Eugene: Cascade, 2011), 86.

[444] Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "Esther on Trial: Resistance or 'Collaboration Horizontale?" in *Postcolonial Commentary and the Old Testament*, 210. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018).

of them had choice or agency over their bodies at this time. After a period of grooming and beautification, the young girls were sent to the king's bedroom. Behind closed doors, these young girls are raped by the king. The young girls are told to go to the king's bedroom and given a choice of items to take, but not a choice if they want to go with the king. There is no indication of the consent of the girls. As Gafney states, "To come when beckoned by the king does not imply consent."[445] The power dynamics intersecting with gender and age differences of a king and the young girls paraded in his bedroom strip the girls of agency and removed their opportunity to say no.[446] Dunbar argues women's agency and status is always limited. Even when Vashti and Esther are queens with high socioeconomic status, they are unable to prevent sexual exploitation and resist their own oppression or that of other girls and women.[447]

Another significant matter to consider is the girls' silence throughout the second chapter. When Esther and the other young virgin girls are gathered and taken from their homes, there is no record of their words or reactions. The narrator does not give any details or observations when the guards show up in each province and remove the girls from their homes. Every girl is silent as they are removed from their homes, taken to the palace, put through beauty treatments, taken into the king's bedroom, and while leaving the bedroom. The only girl who speaks in this chapter is Esther. However, the reader is not given her words as she progresses through each harrowing stage of this traumatic experience. The first time Esther speaks is not about her or her safety, but when she informs the king of the plot to kill him in Esther 2:22.

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[445] Gafney discusses the rape of Bathsheba in 2 Sam 11. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 214.

[446] See Juliana Classens and Amanda Gouws who also argue that sex with the girls was not likely consensual because of the king's position in "From Esther to Kwezi: Sexual Violence in South Africa after Twenty years of Democracy" in the *International Journal of Public Theology* 8, no. 4 (2014): 471-87, 77.

[447] Dunbar, *Such a Time*, 36.

Reading the events of this chapter along with Angelou's autobiography and considering the trauma in both can help construct an alternative interpretation of this passage. When Angelou writes about the new world she found herself in when she moved to St. Louis, Missouri, and her experience seems to parallel the young girls taken from their home to the palace. As Angelou explains, there were stark differences between rural Stamps, Arkansas, and St. Louis, Missouri. How each city functioned, what was expected of her in each place, the change in her surroundings, and being taken from the familial unit she knew for most of her life—all was unsettling and frightful for her. In looking at the young girls taken from their homes to the palace, a vision of rattled and frightened young girls being taken away from the families and life they know begins to form. In addition, as Esther is of Jewish lineage, she and other Jewish girls who were taken live in diaspora. "To be in diaspora is to be in this liminal space, embracing the notion of living in the hyphen."[448] The continuous disruption of their lives and displacement could also have a traumatic impact on them. Given the compounded traumatic experiences, it seems probable that they began to question the possibility of personal survival at some point. `

Angelou is unequivocal about her fear and pain being so great during her rape that she believed she died.[449] Her rapist instructs her not to scream—she is silenced by the one harming her, prevented from alerting others of her dilemma, and could not otherwise fathom release from the pain. She is then silenced again after the rape when she is told not to tell anyone. After questioning whether her body would survive the physical violence it has withstood, she must then determine how to continue to survive.

[448] Ciin Sian Siam Hatzaw, "Reading Esther as a Postcolonial Feminist Icon for Asian Women in Diaspora," *Open Theology* 7, no. 1 (2021): 1-34, 2.

[449] Angelou, *I Know Why*, 79-80.

Angelou struggles in the aftermath of her assault and then undertakes actions to garner her survival. Reviewing Angelou's language and actions before, during, and after her rape, the involuntary movement of her body, the pain, the silence, and the shame are pieces of the trauma she endures and survives. Subsequent to her assault, when assured of the safety of her brother Bailey, Angelou names her rapist and his malicious deeds. I assert that naming the wrongs, trauma, and perpetrators is a survival strategy. Defining survival as continued existence after a traumatic event necessitates identifying the traumatic event.

During the molestation and assaults, Angelou did not try to fight her abuser. Out of respect, fear, or recognition of the difference in size and strength, physically fighting did not seem to be the best option. There is nothing in the biblical text to suggest Esther or the other young girls who were taken and raped by the king physically resisted; in fact, scholars note Esther is continuously passive in this chapter.[450] Kimberly Russaw states that for daughters to survive in the ancient biblical culture, they have three options: acquiesce to systems and institutions of power, including traditions; reject the systems and institutions, or combine the first two options.[451] Taking note of the trauma experienced by Angelou, Esther, and the other young girls in the passage, their fear and dislocation, they likely acquiesce to the demands of the king and the heterarchical culture as a way to stay alive. Certainly, Vashti's removal after her refusal could serve as a warning. Thus, the girls probably decided, like Angelou, to comply with their perpetrator in hopes of living.

[450] See Rebecca Hancock, *Esther and the Politics of Negotiation: Public and Private Spaces and the Figure of the Female Royal Counselor* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 79; Adelman, "'Passing Strange,'" 88; Barry Dov Walfish, "Kosher Adultery? The Mordecai-Esther-Ahasuerus Triangle in Midrash and Exegesis," in *Prooftexts* 22, no. 3 (2002): 311.

[451] Russaw, *Daughters in The Hebrew Bible*, 123.

Third, when Mr. Freeman is murdered, Angelou stops talking because she believes her words and voice are the reason for his death. It is common for survivors of sexual assault to become silent in response to the trauma.[452] After being silenced by her assailant twice, I submit her selected silence was a coping mechanism in response to her trauma which she then uses as a survival strategy. In her young nine-to thirteen-year-old mind, the most practical and effective way for her to continue to exist was silently. Though the narrator silences Esther and the young girls, silence could have been a survival strategy for them as well.

Lastly, Delores Williams identifies the development of strong bonds with other women and men as a survival strategy.[453] Angelou evidences this strategy with her relationships with Momma Henderson, her mother, Mrs. Flowers, who help guide, nurse, and empower her as she maneuvers the trauma of her life. Unfortunately, there is nothing in the text of Esther that states how the other young girls could have developed bonds. However, Esther does develop a bond with Hegai and, eventually, her enslaved females. I believe the development of bonds with others would have been necessary for the other girls, especially since they were trained by women of the community and worked in groups.

Now I consider a possible survival narrative of a young girl taken in Esther 2. While the biblical text only refers to the other girls as either בתולה (virgin) or נערה (girl), I name the young girl in this survival narrative Khina, which is a Persian word for ““sweet voice.”“[454]

[452] Toinette M. Eugene, “‘Swing Low, Sweet Chariot!’: A Womanist Response to Sexual Violence and Abuse” in *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Marie Fortune, 185-200 (New York: Continuum, 1995), 187.

[453] Delores S. Williams, “Women’s Oppression and Lifeline Politics in Black Women’s Religious Narratives,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 1, no. 2 (1985): 59-71, 65-66.

[454] Name.org, *Khina*. Accessed November 15, 2021. https://www.names.org/n/khina/about.

A Womanist Survival Narrative: Khina's Story[455]

My name is Khina. I am fourteen years old, and I lived outside Ecbatana with my father, *mother,* and three older brothers. As the only *girl* in the family, it was customary for me to draw water for the family, weave, and help prepare our meals.[456] It was a lot of work, but I was in the company of my *mother,* aunts, and other *girls* in the village. We worked in groups for safety and efficiency.[457]

Doing so many chores was my *mother's* way of preparing me to become a *wife* and *mother*. Although I did not like the idea at all, it was inevitable that my father would choose a husband for me. I liked my friend Hassan who lived close to us; however, my father would not consider him because Hassan's family could not give a large enough bride price.[458] It was no secret that my father was negotiating the best bride price he could get for me, and he wanted to give me a dowry. I knew of ***girls*** who had to become enslaved when their parents did not have money to feed them.[459] I did not want that to happen to me. My brothers made sure I wasn't

[455] For demonstrative purposes, I have italicized all terms that are included in the *Lexicon of Survival* either as a primary term or cluster subfield. The term girls and cluster terms of relationships such as daughter, girl, mother, are also in bold to indicate the vulnerability to potential trauma likely due to danger or loss of agency. I have underlined terms that are from Angelou's narrative to connect the language of lived experience to the narrative.

[456] Russaw, *Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 33. See also, Ebling, *Women's Lives*, 46-48.

[457] According to Almundena Hernando, et al., maintenance activities are essential for continuation of social groups. However, archaeology and history has not given these activities much recognition because it was done mostly by women. This results in the marginalization and invisibility of women. "Maintenance activities are vital for the support of the group, but they are structurally opposite to activities associated with individuality and power." Almudena Hernando, "Why Did History Not Appreciate Maintenance Activities?" in *Engendering Social Dynamics: The Archaeology of Maintenance Activities,* ed. S. Montón-Subías and M. Sánchez-Romero (Oxford: Archaepress, 2008), 9-23.

[458] Marten Stol, *Women in the Ancient near East* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2016); Victor H. Matthews, "Everyday Life (Customs, Manners, and Laws)" in *Near Eastern Archaeology: A Reader*, ed. Suzanne Richard (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 157-63.

[459] Raymond Westbrook, "Slave and Master in Ancient Near Eastern Law Symposium on Ancient Law, Economics & Society Part I: The Development of Law in the Ancient Near East," *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 70, no.

alone with Hassan or any other boy to ensure I wasn't defiled. No one ever really explained what happens to make you *defiled*. I just knew I had to stay away from boys and men. *Mother* said when I was properly married, we would not have to worry about this anymore.

One day the women and ***girls*** were gathering water for family dinner when a group of *soldiers* came into our town. There were so many *soldiers*. I had never seen that many, as we usually only saw *soldiers* on the roads to the city or in the city. The *soldiers* were with the satrap from Ecbatana, and they began reading a scroll in different languages; when I heard it read in Elamite, I knew it was an order from King Ahasuerus.[460] Chaos ensued: people were *gasping*, others were *crying*, and there was a look of *terror* on *mother's* face. Father and other men from the town approached the satrap and the *soldiers*. Then there was yelling—one man shouted, "no one is *taking* my ***daughter***!" as another *soldier struck* him. The man was *beaten* and *taken* away.

Mother rushed me inside the house and began to *weep*. She told me I would have to go with the *soldiers* to the king's palace in Susa. I was confused. Why would I need to go to the king's palace? We are not royalty or part of the elite; we are just people who live in a small town and farmed. Why me? ***Mother*** said the king ordered all young ***girls*** who were *virgins* to be *taken* to the palace because he wanted a new *wife*. My ***mother*** explained to me what *virgin* means, and since my brothers made sure I was never *defiled*, I was a *virgin*. Therefore, I had to go. I *cried* inconsolably. Sure, I expected the day would come when I would get married and leave my

4 (1994-1995 1994), 1676.

[460] Satraps ruled provinces or satrapys of the kingdom and were responsible for carrying out edicts of the king, collection of taxes, and overseeing of commerce and trade. In return they enjoyed the privileges of being a royal representative. See Maria Brosius, *The Persians: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 48. Elamite was the administrative language used by the Persians. See Gian Pietro Basello, "Elamite as Administrative Language from Susa to Persepolis," in *Elam and Persia*, ed. Javier Álvarez-Mon and Mark B. Garrison (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2011), 61. Daniel C. Snell, *A Companion to the Ancient Near East* (Malden: Blackwell 2005), 18. The Persians did allow people in different regions to use their own language and traditions.

parents' home; however, I did not think that meant I would have to go away from my family while unmarried, and so far away at that, all the way to Susa.

The *virgin girls* had two hours to gather their belongings and say goodbye to their families. After that, *soldiers* questioned each father about the ***girls*** in their home. They wanted to know if the ***girl*** was *married*. How old was she? If she had started her menses?[461] Then they searched every room in each home to ensure they took every *virgin* ***girl*** to the palace. When the *soldiers* arrived at my house, I could not stop *crying*. ***Mother*** was *crying,* and I saw my father *cry* for the first time in my life. Everyone knew there was nothing any father could do to keep their ***daughters*** from being *taken* to the king in Susa. *Mother* gave me bread and water and told me to remember what she taught me, listen, pay attention, and stay safe. As the *soldiers took* me out of my ***mother's*** arms, I *cried*, and *fear* shot through my body. After that, I was grouped with the other ***girls*** from my village, and we headed towards the Royal Road that goes to Susa. [462]

Then, I saw my cousin. I stood next to her in line, and we held hands on the walk to Susa. I wiped the *tears* from my eyes and started to watch the guards and other ***girls*** because my *mother* told me to pay attention. This long line of girls was uncharacteristically silent. We were too afraid to say anything. Finally, one ***girl*** tried to *escape*! The *guards* grabbed her by her hair, *beat* her, *stripped* her *naked,* and put *ropes* on her hands. Although she could barely stand, they

[461] Naomi Stenberg asserts when a girl begins her menstruation is when personhood was attributed to them because they were ready for childbearing. The girl's childhood is considered ended upon menstruation which was probably around age twelve. Steinberg, *The World of the Child*, 71.

[462] The Achaemenid empire expanded existing road systems that connected Asia Minor to Assyria in order to connect the main cites, satrapal, and royal centers across the empire. The Royal Road went from Persepolis via Susa to Babylon where it split. The eastern extension included a route that went from Persepolis to Ecbatana. See Brosius, *The Persians*, 53; Muhammad A. Dandamaev and Vladimir G. Lukonin. *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); W.M. Sumner, "Achaemenid Settlement in the Persepolis Plain," *American Journal of Archaeology* 90, no. 1 (1986): 3-31.

made her continue to walk to the palace. I felt so bad for her because I could see she was in so much *pain* and *humiliated*. After that happened, none of us tried to *flee*.

Eventually, the *girls* started talking again, and I met some *girls* from other villages. One of them asked why we were being *taken* away from our families. An older *girl* from another village told us that Queen Vashti had been expelled from the palace for not coming when the king called her. The king wanted a new queen, and he would pick one of us girls. It was so strange because a queen usually comes from one of the noble families in Persia.[463] I had never heard of the king picking ***girls*** from the villages, but maybe it was just my village.[464] I listened to the *soldiers'* conversations to get more information and noticed one grabbing the ***girls*** and laughing at their *fear* and *humiliation*. Another *soldier* warned him that he would be in big trouble if the king found out he had *sex* with one of the ***girls*** before the king had a chance to choose a new *wife*. I remember my *mother* telling me when I left about being a *virgin.* The few times she talked in a very hushed tone about some of the things I would have to do as a *wife*, mainly once we had a marriage ceremony to consummate the marriage. Although she did not call it *sex*, [465]I thought it was the same thing. I figured if the *soldier* had *sex* with the ***girl***, she would be *defiled*. When I realized the *soldier* saw me watching, I quickly put my head down, trying to avert his gaze, and kept walking.

[463] William H. Stiebing, *Ancient Near Eastern History and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 306. J. Stafford Wright, "The Historicity of the Book of Esther" in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament* (Waco: Word, 1970): 37-47, 38. J. Wright argues Darius marries outside of the seven families. However, while kings may have taken other wives it does not mean the wives would be queen. See Matt Waters, *Ancient Persia: A Concise History of the Achaemenid Empire, 550-330 BCE* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 94.

[464] Amélie Kuhrt notes that the king would take local girls for concubines in *The Ancient Near East, C. 3000-330 BC.* Vol. II: (London: Routledge, 1995), 697.

[465] Dezhamkhooy and Papoli-Yazdi, *The Politics of the Past*, 37.

When we finally arrived in Susa, I could not believe how large the walls around the city were as you entered. I had never been to Susa. When we reached the palace, I noticed how it looked different from the small mudbrick and stone houses back home.[466] I was surprised at how big it was. One *girl* told me there were more than 100 rooms in the palace.[467] We walked through an entrance, then a courtyard, and into the palace.[468] The bricks were glazed, and there were these scary-looking statues and pictures of lions and bulls with wings.[469] There were quite a lot of ***girls*** there. I realized the king really did have ***girls*** brought from all over the kingdom because I could hear some of the *girls* speak a language I did not understand.[470] I just assumed they were from another part of the kingdom. Some looked older than me, others seemed to be my age or younger, and all looked afraid. A guard ordered us to follow him down a long corridor to a chamber where we were left for quite some time. Eventually, the door opened, and a group walked into the room. I could tell many of them were *slaves* from Babylon because of the way their hair was bound.[471] They entered the room behind one person, who we soon learned was

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[466] Sally Dunham, "Ancient Near Eastern Architecture," in *A Companion to the Ancient Near East*, ed. Daniel C. Snell (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 208.

[467] Archeological excavations have confirmed the palace in Susa walls were decorated with wide panels made from glazed brick. See Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 257.

[468] Stiebing, *Ancient Near Eastern History and Culture,* 311.

[469] Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 294. See also Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 257.

[470] The Persian empire included many different ethnic groups with their own cultures. Waters, *Ancient Persia*, 7. Further, the Persians did not impose their language on conquered people allowing them to freely speak their perspective languages as referenced in in Esth 3:12 and 8:9 edicts being written in different languages. Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, "Achaemenid Empire," in *Encyclopedia of Empire*, ed. John Mackenzie. (Hoboken: Wiley, 2016). Brosius, *Persians*, 50.

[471] Marks, brands, hairstyles and tattoos were used to identify slaves in the ancient Near East. See M. Wayne Alexander and William Violet, "The Marketing of People: Slave Trade in the Ancient Near East" in the *Journal of Business and Behavioral Sciences* 26, no. 2 (2014): 138-55, 46; John Robertson, "Social Tensions in the Ancient Near East" in *A Companion to the Ancient Near East*, ed. David Snell (Malden: Blackwell, 2020), 205; H. D. Baker, "Degrees of Freedom: Slavery in Mid-First Millennium BC Babylonia." *World Archaeology* 33, no. 1 (2001): 18-26. For more on identifying slaves in Babylon see Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 114.

Hegai, one of the king's eunuchs.[472] He told us he was in charge and that we must do everything he said or there would be consequences. By the way he was ordering the *slaves* and other *servants* around, I could tell he was pretty serious.

After we washed, this older woman examined us and checked to see if we were *virgins*. Then, Hagai walked by each of us and inspected us from head to toe. After the inspection, we finally got to eat. I was so hungry, but as I got full, I became sad all over again. I missed my family. I missed my *mother*'s cooking. I missed being with my father and my brothers. After dinner, the girls were told where we would sleep. Fortunately, I was able to stay with my cousin. She *cried* all night, but she was not the only one. I lay there that night staring at the stone columns trying to figure out what I would do. I thought about trying to *escape*, but I knew I probably could not get past the guards, and if I was lucky enough to, I wasn't sure I would make it home. But then, even if I got home, the *soldiers* would probably return and *kill* my family or me for disobeying the king's order. So, I had to find a way to <u>live</u> and keep my cousin alive.

We started an elaborate beautification ritual that Hegai said was required before we could meet the king. This process included being in the room with incense burners that filled the room with oil and myrrh for six months until our hair and skin was considered properly covered.[473] Once that was complete, we would have to spend another six months being fumigated with other herbs and oils Hegai said we needed. He said we had to be as clean and beautiful as possible—although it would not help some of us. Hegai could be nice, but he could also say some mean

[472] Stiebing asserts women of the harem were protected and served by eunuchs in *Ancient Near Eastern History and Culture*, 306. Dominique Lenfant argues eunuchs primarily were in service to men and "guardians of the bed" and not only guardians of women in "Eunuchs as Guardians of Women in Achaemenid Persia: Orientalism and Back Projection in Modern Scholarship," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 61, no. 4 (2021): 456-74; 57, 65.

[473] Moore states discovery of incense burners at Hurieda in Hadramaut, and at Lachish and Gezer in Israel suggests that the beauty treatments in Esth 2:12 were done with six months of fumigation. Carey A. Moore, "Archaeology and the Book of Esther," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 38, no. 3/4 (1975): 62-79, 78.

things. These treatments went on for months. Then we started noticing how some of the ***girls*** there when we arrived were being taken away and never coming back. The first time it happened, I wondered if she was *killed*. Every day that week, another ***girl*** left and did not come back. Of course, there were whispers about what was happening. Finally, one of the *slaves* told us the ***girls*** were being *taken* to the king's private quarters so he could pick a new queen. I thought of the king's quarters, his private space, and where I thought he slept. Why would we have to go there? She told us the king was having *sex* with each ***girl***. I was shocked.

One day Hegai came and picked a ***girl*** to go to the king's private quarters, and she did not want to go.[474] She screamed and *cried*. Deaf to her protests, Hegai scolded her, saying that the only way she was leaving that chamber alive was to go to the king's private quarters. Silence fell upon the room except for the girl's *crying.* Hegai pushed the ***girl*** to the floor, then turned to another ***girl*** sitting in the corner and ordered her to come with him. She quietly stood up and followed him. I was hoping the king found a queen before I had to go to his bedroom. I did everything I was told because I did not want them to *kill* me. I also did not want to go to the king's private quarters.

After being in that chamber for about a year, I completed the beauty treatments, continued to follow directions, and kept quiet. Then one evening after dinner, Hegai chose me to go to the king's private quarters. He <u>told me</u> it was time to see the king and asked what I wanted to take with me.[475] I did not have anything, so I stood up and followed him. The servants put a robe on me. After examining me, Hegai <u>told me</u> to come with him, and we walked out of the

[474] Achaemenid palaces were huge complexes with administrative and private spaces. See Dezhamkhooy and Papoli-Yazdi, *The Politics of the Past*, 35.

[475] See Esth 2:13.

chamber through the halls. Two guards met us as we reached the king's private quarters. I kept looking at the guards' spears, which were decorated with golden apples.[476] I had never seen this part of the palace before, and guards were everywhere. We finally reached another area, and I realized this was where the king slept. Before we entered the room, Hegai instructed me to do what I was told and only speak if the king gave me permission. We entered, and Hegai bowed to the king, so I bowed. Once the king permitted him to speak, he said, "This is Khina. May she please the king while she is with you tonight." Hegai bowed again and backed out the door.

I stood there frozen in my spot, holding my breath, still bowing, not knowing what I should do. I wished I could run, but where? The king was wearing a long purple robe and lounging on a sofa, drinking wine from a golden goblet.[477] He ordered me to *strip*. Remembering Hegai told me to do what I was told; I began to undress. It was not easy getting into that robe or out of it since it was nothing like what I usually wear, and I was so nervous my hands did not seem to work. Finally, it was on the floor, and I was standing there *naked.* I was petrified and *humiliated* standing there while the king, a man, looked at my *naked* body. He came over, grabbed me, and *threw* me on the bed. As he pulled back his robe and climbed onto the bed, he pulled my legs apart and got on top of me. His body was so heavy I could barely breathe, and then I felt a horrible *pain* searing through my body.

I could not make sense of what was happening. Everything seemed to be falling apart inside of me. I wanted to scream, but I was too afraid. I did not want him doing this to me. It hurt so bad that the *tears* began to roll down my face. I *cried* as quietly as possible. A few minutes later, he *groaned* and rolled off me. I laid there very still, looking up at all of the fabric curtains

[476] Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 688.

[477] Achaemenid kings wore long purple robe embroidered with gold designs. See Stiebing, *Ancient Near Eastern*, 306.

and hoping it was over. My body still throbbed. If this is what it means to be queen, I do not want to be queen. The king soon fell asleep. I continued to lie still as so many thoughts flooded my mind. I wished I could go back home. I even thought about trying to leave, but my body was in so much *pain* that I did not think I could make it very far. Many hours passed, and the sun began to come up. I never went to sleep; I was too afraid.

After a soft knock on the door, Hegai and other servants entered the room. As the king woke, he ordered, "*Take* her away. I am done with this one." I was told to get up and get dressed, but my body was still hurting, and I could barely move. Finally, a *slave* girl came and wrapped a robe around me and helped me out of the room. Hegai told me I would be going with another eunuch, Shaashgaz, in the hall and walked away. Slowly and painfully, I walked down another corridor for what seemed like forever to a different chamber. When the door opened, I saw some of the girls who were in the first chamber with me. An older *girl* and another *slave* came over to me to help. I was *taken* to wash and given a drink from the healing plant to help ease my *pain*.[478]

After I dressed, I just sat on the couch when one of the older *girls*, Samira, came over and asked how I was doing. I told her I was tired and in *pain*. Samira told me we would be all right here with Shaashgaz. She told me only one of the ***girls*** in this chamber ever returned to the king's bedroom since he was still bringing in a new ***girl*** each night. Samira warned me about going to other parts of the palace unless we were *taken*. We are only to be here in this chamber from now on. I asked when do we get to go home? She said this was our new home, and we would have to care and look out for one another. I could feel the *tears* begin to well up in my

[478] Many Persians followed Zorastrian beliefs including Persian royalty and nobility. Brosius, *Persians*, 39. In Zoroastrian belief Ahura Mazda created a healing plant that could be consumed or smeared and was used the treatment of disease and trauma. Laura M. Zucconi and Candida Moss, *Ancient Medicine: From Mesopotamia to Rome* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2019), 369.

eyes as I realized I would never see my family again. As the *tears* fell, it seemed as though my words left my body with each *tear*. Finally, I had no more words left. I sat silent for what seemed like hours and eventually fell asleep. I was able to sleep because Samira promised me she would sit there with me as I slept.

I jumped up the following morning and looked around, and Samira was right beside me. When I looked around the room, I realized I was still in the new chamber. My body was still sore, so I slowly got up and went to wash. I remained speechless for many days and continued to have nightmares. Each day another *girl* joined us in the chamber, and I eventually began to help the *girls* with Samira. We provided them with the same drink they gave made from the healing plant to help ease the *pain* and told them the ways of the chamber. We did not want any of the *girls* to get hurt anymore, so we figured out the best approach to protect ourselves and get what we needed. The *maidservants* were also helpful by giving us information and bringing us things we needed. Unfortunately, the chamber controlled by Shaashgaz did not receive the same treatment as the one controlled by Hegai. We received fewer rations, so our meals or clothes were not as nice, but we did have the necessities.[479] Getting ready to see the king was the most important thing, and once you saw him, you were no longer important.

The *maidservant* told us that Esther was chosen as queen one day. I remember when she arrived at Hegai's chamber. Like all of us, she was afraid and was usually quiet. When we found out Esther was queen, I was glad because I figured no more *girls* would have to go through what we went through. I also felt terrible for her because I knew what she had to go through to become queen. I tried not to focus on what happened that night in the king's quarters. However, she

[479] Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 432.

probably would not forget because she would have to return. Once the king picked another queen, I hoped he would let the rest of us go back home, but that did not happen. Samira was right. We are stuck here for the rest of our lives. I still think about my *mother,* father, and even my lovingly annoying brothers. I wonder how they are doing and if they are alright.

Narrative Criticism

The narration in Esther speaks to the survival of the Jewish people as a community. However, the Jewish people are not the only people in the story who face threats to their survival. Khina's story allows the reader of Esther to consider further the experiences and survival of non-Jewish people in the biblical text. While Esther has numerous issues that have ethical and theological implications, namely the sexual abuse and trafficking of young girls, I do not want only to name these issues. The naming of the issues is one of the first steps. Interrogating and, at times deconstructing violent biblical texts is essential in interpreting the biblical text in a liberative manner. However, deconstruction alone does not address the experience and silencing of the marginalized persons in the biblical text as they are left in the ruins of the deconstructed text. Therefore, I argue that when the survival narrative is identified, it lifts a voice of one silenced in the text.

Khina's story gives an account of the experience of a Persian girl being taken away from her home to the palace and eventually to the king's bedroom from her perspective. Using a survival text and the vocabulary from the Lexicon of Survival, Angelou's autobiography, the survival strategies of Black women, trauma literature, and archeology, I was able to create a womanist survival narrative for Khina. This narrative allows one to consider the survival of an individual, a non-Jewish girl. Although the survival of others is also interconnected with Khina's, her survival is the focus, and she narrates her story. Decentering the communal survival

of Jewish males allows the presence and importance of the individual's survival to be seen and heard. Further, considering the individual lives and concerns of people who have been othered and ignored, allows one to see the survival of individuals, which may or may not coincide with communal survival.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I used the *Lexicon of Survival* to buttress my reading of Esther 2 with Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. The lexicon provided language which indicated trauma and survival experience in both texts. Surveying the language in the passages along with the actions of the young girls in Esther and through Angelou allowed me to identify survival strategies and create a womanist survival narrative. The creation of Khina's survival narrative lifts a voice of a young girl virgin who had been taken and silenced. Centering the young virgin girls raises the experiences of those whose survival the Hebrew Bible shows little concern and can raise different questions. Further, it illustrates how individual survival narratives may differ from communal survival narratives and become suppressed in the overarching narrative. I will now examine how the *Lexicon of Survival* and survival narrative's function violence outside of sexual trauma.

CHAPTER 4. ZERESH, THE STRUGGLE OF AN IMPLIED SURVIVOR

In the previous chapter, I used the *Lexicon of Survival* to examine the survival experiences of young girls in Esther 2 who had encountered sexual violence. I argue there are varied traumatic experiences and different sites of trauma portrayed in the Hebrew Bible that may necessitate survival. While sexual trauma was the focus of the trauma and survival in Chapter 3, the *Lexicon of Survival* indicates other sites of trauma and survival experiences. It is imperative to examine more of these instances when the survivor is a woman or girl or is not Israelite, as is oft the case. Again, in Chapter 2, I define survival as the struggle for continued existence after a traumatic event that threatens the safety and well-being of a person or people. As the second portion of this definition indicates, there are times when the survivor is not the one who experienced the violence but one who has to live with the loss caused by the violence. When there is a killing, there is a loss of life, and the deceased person has family who survived their death unless stated otherwise. In these instances, there is an implied continuation of life for the remaining family. How does one continue to exist or find a way of keeping alive when the site of trauma is the murder of a loved one?[480] What could their survival narrative say?

The overall story of Esther is quite complex. While there may be some humor weaved in, there is also a lot of evil, schemes, attempted murder, and murder that the named and unnamed characters must endure and survive. As previously mentioned, I am particularly interested in the survival of women and girls and those who are not Jewish. Although they are not the writer's focus or even the focus of scholarship, their experiences must be seen and valued. Zeresh is an exemplar of this group of survivors.

[480] I acknowledge that the legal term "murder" is typically defined as the unlawful killing of another person with malice aforethought and is a crime in both ancient and contemporary societies. However, for the purposes of this project, I argue that murder is the intentional killing of another person that does not always result in the legal conclusion of a crime.

In this chapter, I examine Zeresh's experience of familicide when the king orders the execution of her husband and ten sons at the behest of Esther. This often-ignored character briefly appears in the narratives and then fades to oblivion. Zeresh is first mentioned in Esther 5:10 when Haman summons her and his friends, and she is last mentioned in Esther 6:13 when she warns Haman of his pending downfall. While Esther 7:10 and 9:6-10 records the names and executions of her husband and sons, there is nothing in the text to indicate she was killed or died. Therefore, I consider Zeresh an implied survivor in the survival texts of Esther 7:10, 9:6, 9:10, and 9:14; and discuss her survival of the sanctioned familicide in Esther 9:5-14.

Zeresh

Esther 5:10
And Haman controlled himself and went to his house. He sent and called for his friends and his wife, Zeresh.

Esther 5:14
And his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, make a gallows fifty cubits high and in the morning tell the king to hang Mordecai on it; then you go with the king to the banquet joyfully. This advice pleased Haman, and he had a gallows made.

Esther 6:13
Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friend all that happened to him. His advisors and his wife Zeresh said, ""Since Mordecai is from the Judean seed and is before whom you have begun to fall, you will not prevail but will surely fall before him.""

Esther 9:5-14
5 The Judeans struck all of their enemies, putting them to the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did as they pleased. 6 In the citadel of Susa, the Judeans killed and destroyed five hundred people. 7 Parshandatha, Dalphon, Alpatha, 8 Poratha, Adilia, Ariadatha, 9 Parmashta, Arisai, Ardai, Vaizatha, 10 the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Judeans they killed but did not put their hands on the plunder. 11 On that day, the number of people killed in the citadel of Susa was brought before the king. 12 The king said to Queen Esther that in the citadel of Susa, the Judeans killed five hundred people and the ten sons of Haman. The king said, what have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? What is your petition? I will give it to you. What further request do you make? 13 Esther said, ""If it pleases the king, allow the Jews who live in Susa to do tomorrow like the law of today and let the ten sons of Haman hang on a

tree.[14] The king said for this to be done and issued a law in Susa and the ten sons of Haman to be hanged.

Esther 5 introduces the reader to Zeresh as the wife of Haman, the newly appointed head official for King Ahasuerus. Zeresh is the third woman named in Esther; whereas Vashti and Esther are both called by their name or queen, Zeresh is always referred to as Haman's wife. She is only mentioned four times in the three texts above, and little is written about her in these biblical texts, so the reader is offered a limited understanding of who she is. From the texts, including Zeresh, one can glean that she is married to Haman, a high-ranking official of the royal court with at least ten sons.[481] The ten sons are the only children of a named character in Esther, and their names are recorded.[482] Her husband also consults her for advice on more than one occasion. Unlike Esther, she is not characterized by her beauty or ethnicity.[483] Scholars have speculated on her cultural identity based on her name.[484] Persians came from various ethnic,

[481] Though the text does not explicitly state the ten sons of Haman's are Zeresh children, I read them as her sons because there is nothing to suggest Haman had children by another woman. Joseph Wiesehöfer suggests the idea that Persians practice polygynous marriage is based on the writings of classical Greek writers. He states Achaemenid kings likely made a difference in themselves and the levels below him. Further, poor Persians were likely monogamous. Although I do not see Haman as a poor Persian, I do not interpret the text to view him as having other wives. See Josef Wiesehöfer, "The Achaemenid Policy of Reproduction," in *The Economy of Ancient Judah in Its Historical Context*, ed. Marvin Lloyd Miller, Ehud Ben Zvi, and Gary N. Knoppers (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015).

[482] Adam Silverstein states Haman is the only on in the book who has children and Zeresh by implication has children that are named. However, the parents of the girls who were taken in Chapter 2 had children as did the parents of the children who were approved for annihilation in Esth 3:18 and 8:11. Hence, I note Haman is the only named person in the book with children. See Adam J. Silverstein, *Veiling Esther, Unveiling her Story: The Reception of a Biblical Book in Islamic Lands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 89.

[483] Kristin Joachimsen, "Esther in Shushan: Narrative Constructions of Otherness Related to Gender, Ethnicity and Social Status within the Persian Empire," in *Foreign Women–Women in Foreign Lands: Studies on Foreignness and Gender in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East in the First Millennium BCE.* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 209.

[484] Henry S. Gehman argues the name was linked to Avestan *zarśayamna*, meaning "the joyful one" or "the one with ruffled hair." See Henry S. Gehman, "Notes on the Persian Words in the Book of Esther," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 43, no. 3/4 (1924): 321--28, 27. Lewis Paton states *zereš* was the equivalent of Persian *zara.* He further suggested the names of the leading characters in Esther could be identified with the chief gods of Babylon and Elam in an old Babylonian myth. Lewis Bayles Paton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther*, vol. 13 (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1908), 89. See also Ran Zadok, "On Five Biblical Names,"

cultural, and religious groups, as alluded to in the story by the need for the orders to be issued in many languages.[485] Thus, one cannot state her cultural identity conclusively. Lastly, she disappears from the story after she gives her final warning to Haman about his forthcoming downfall. There is no clear indication of what happens to her, leaving room for speculation.[486] Using my trauma-informed womanist survival narrative, I consider Zeresh. Again, using more contemporary language for the modern reader while still attending to the historical elements of the ancient culture.

Zeresh's Survival Narrative

My name is Zeresh. I come from a southern region outside of Susa. When I was fifteen, it was arranged that I would marry Haman. I had no choice; he was older and came from a well-known family filled with members of the royal court.[487] I, too, come from a family where the men in my family were advisors and other members of the court. When I *married* Haman, I moved inside the city gates to live on his family's land.[488] It was a bit of an adjustment for me

Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche wissenschaft 89, no. 2 (1977). Jean-Daniel Macchi state the Greek translations cast doubt on the spelling of her name. Jean Daniel Macchi, *Esther*, in the International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament, (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer GmBH, 2019), 193. Athalya Brenner argues Zeresh is non-Semitic, and their sons have Persian sounding names with Aramaic suffixes. Athalya Brenner, "Esther Politicised in a Personal Context: Some Remarks on Foreignness" *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 32, no. 1 (1999). Tricia Miller also asserts her name is of Persian origin. Tricia Miller, *Jews and Anti-Judaism in Esther and the Church* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2015), 13. Lastly, Robert Holmstedt and John Screnock identify the ten son's names as Persian as well. Robert D. Holmstedt and John Screnock, *Esther: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015), 233.

[485] Archives indicate Persian government communications were written in Persian language, Elamite, Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, and Aramaic. Erhard Gerstenberger and Siegfried S. Schatzmann, *Israel in the Persian Period: The Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.E* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), 55.

[486] Robert Debelak states readers are left to speculate Zeresh is banished. See Robert P. Debelak, *Hidden in Plain Sight: Esther and a Marginalised Hermeneutic* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2008), 89.

[487] Women had little choice in marriage and often were married off to older men who they survived. Daniel C. Snell, *Life in the Ancient Near East, 3100-332 B.C.E* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 102. See also, Stephen Bertman, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (New York: Facts on File, 2003) 275-276.

[488] Again, for demonstrative purposes I have italicized terms that are included in the *Lexicon of Survival* either as primary terms or cluster subfields.

being away from my family. However, I quickly assumed my role in taking care of our home. Haman was working diligently, and also, because of his family, he was quickly moving up the ranks in the king's court.[489] He was always so proud and excited when he received gifts from the king, and he knew this meant he must continue to show he was loyal to the king.[490]

One day he was rambling to his brother about a problem he had with a merchant, and I interjected with my thoughts. He loved my idea, and after that Haman came to me often for advice on the best way to handle situations. We frequently talked about what was going on at the palace. I had watched my father closely growing up, and I knew how competitive and vicious it could be on the court. I have seen the schemes and deaths when people try to get more power and either try to get closer to the king or even kill the king.[491] We had children immediately, and I fulfilled my duties and became a *mother*. The boys seemed to come one right after the other. I felt pregnant most of my younger years because we had a new baby every year. It was essential to have children and, even more important, to have boys. We were fortunate to have thirteen living children, eleven boys, and one girl. Unfortunately, I lost one son and two daughters at birth. I raised my other eleven children, only for all but one of them to be taken away from me. It seems like just a few months ago, everything in Susa and my life was getting a little better.

This chaos all started during the months of banquets when the king summoned Queen Vashti one evening while we were eating. Vashti told the messengers no. We were all shocked; I

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[489] Family descent played a significant role in position and access to the high office. See Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East, C. 3000-330 BC*, II, 688.

[490] It was an honor to receive gifts from the king and as a royal favor Persian kings gave land, special clothing, precious jewelry, and more. See Matthew W. Waters, *Ancient Persia: A Concise History of the Achaemenid Empire, 550-330 BCE* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 94. Public acceptance of the gift stress the loyalty of the person who received it. See Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East, C. 3000-330 BC*, II, 689; Karen H. Jobes, *Esther* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 213.

[491] See Esth 2:21-23, and Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 664.

admired her for that. Apparently, when we went home that evening, the king's advisors told him to banish her. She has not been seen since. After removing Vashti, the upheaval began when the king decided to get a new wife. First, there was this ridiculous order that men were to be considered the head of their homes, then the king had all the young virgin girls taken to the palace to pick a new wife. I have always known women to be the ones to be in charge of the home, and the men are to take care of things outside the home.[492] Fortunately, my daughter Parvaneh was too young to be taken.[493] It was chaotic as the soldiers were rather rough and often unnecessarily mean. Haman always said that was part of their job. I just never thought they had to be so cruel, even downright hateful, towards people. After the king chose Esther to be the new queen, things became somewhat normal again. Haman was excited about how he was the head of the king's inner circle, or so he thought.[494] I was looking forward to having grandchildren. Our oldest son Parshandatha's wife, Nazanin, was expecting their first child. We were making plans, and everything seemed to be going well.

One evening Haman returned from the palace rather upset. He went on and on about how disrespectful Mordecai was to him in front of everyone assembled in front of the palace when he did not bow before him like everyone else. Of course, many people knew these families did not get along going back generations, to make matters worse. Growing up, I learned that men dislike being embarrassed in front of others, especially those in high positions. If someone saw a man of position being disrespected or shamed, he could quickly lose his power and status. Haman was

[492] The Achaemenids cultivated a separation between public and private spheres. Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, *King and Court in Ancient Persia 559 to 331 BCE* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 98.

[493] Parvaneh, Nazanin, and Roya are Persian names included in this narrative selected from *names.org* and *behindthename.com.*

[494] Those who the king kept close were the most eminent. See Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 688.

much too driven to lose his influence. He wanted to achieve a higher rank in the court than his father had previously, and he was there. He knew that Mordecai sat at the gate, and while he was not as high as him, he could advance, and if he continued to shame him in front of others, he would be seen as weak.[495] In his fit of rage, Haman was illogical and decided the best way to maintain his position was to get not only rid of Mordecai but all of the Jewish people. He then asked the king for an edict to *kill* all Jewish people in the kingdom. I did not think that was necessary since his real issue was with Mordecai. I was horrified at the thought of his plan. However, I also knew their family history and his pride, so I did not say anything. I knew I needed to support him because that was the only way I could see to protect myself and the children. The king agreed with Haman and issued the decree. The king usually goes along with whatever his advisors say. I dreaded what was going to happen when the day arrived.

The month of Adar came, and right before the proclamation, Haman came home one day, and he was talking about himself a lot. He went on to talk about how he was able to have dinner with the king.[496] I know my husband; when he starts to speak excessively about his importance, it is usually because someone angered him, so I knew something had happened. He then explains how Mordecai the Jew infuriated him again. So, along with his friends, who he often asked for advice, I told him to have Mordecai *hanged*. To me, it made more sense to *kill* the one person he had an issue with instead of *killing* all the other people who had nothing to do with the feud. Plus, I knew that if Haman did not do something about Mordecai soon, it would end up being a problem for my family. What a problem it has become.

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[495] Mordecai sitting at the gate signifies in Esth 2:21 he had a role of some importance. See Lisa Wolfe *Ruth, Esther, Song of Songs, and Judith*, (Eugene: Cascade, 2011), 92. Robert Gordis maintains Mordecai sitting at the gate signifies he has been appointed judge. Robert Gordis. *Megillat Esther: The Masoretic Hebrew Text, with Introduction, New Translation, and Commentary* (New York: Ktav, 1974), 2.

[496] It was considered a great privilege to a companion of the king at his table. See Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 688.

The next evening, Haman was forced to honor Mordecai throughout the streets of Susa on behalf of the king. I have never seen him so humiliated in all my life. When he explained what happened, I told him that since Mordecai was Jewish, he would not prevail. We all knew that Mordecai was Jewish, Haman told us when he first complained about him. Haman made this a point of contention. I knew it was wrong to ask for all Jewish people to be *killed* when he had an issue with one person. I thought if I told him he would fail, maybe he would let it go. Haman does not ever want to fail because of how that makes him look. After that conversation, I could sense that trouble was coming, but I had no idea how much. Before we could finish the conversation, the king's eunuchs came to take Haman to the king's palace for the banquet given by Queen Esther. They were moving so quickly that he did not even say goodbye; that was the last time I saw my husband alive.

I was home, and my daughter came in yelling and crying; they *hung* her father. The next thing I know, my sons are *taken* one by one, and they are *killed*. Their *blood* was right before me, covering the road in front of our house. A *mother* watching the child she carried in her body being *killed* before her as their life leaves their body is a pain I cannot fully explain. I had to watch and feel this excruciating pain ten times. To see the *blood* of my children and the *blood* of so many other children cover the roads was too much. I fell to my knees and began to *cry* as I had never *cried* before. After what seemed like hours, I went out to see if I could find where they had taken my boys. I wanted to give them a proper burial, but we could not find them. The next day Nazanin told me that Queen Esther had them *hung*. As if killing my sons was not enough, the *soldiers hung* them all to shame our family further. I knew they would leave their dead bodies up to *hang* for days. Again, my tears started, and I could not stop *crying*. We *cried* together.

Just when I thought I had lost everything, the *soldiers* came to our house and said that our home and everything that Haman owned was now the property of Queen Esther. When the *soldiers* came to remove us from our home, it was too much for me. The last thing I remember is the *soldiers* pushing Parvaneh out of the house, *crying,* and screaming, and when I came to, I was outside the compound on the ground. Parvaneh was next to me, crying, and I did not know what had happened to Nazanin. I could still see my children's *blood* just steps away from where I was sitting. We were put out on the street. They did not even let us get our belongings. My heart ached, my head was pounding, and I did not know what we were going to do. How were we going to make it? My husband was *dead,* all my sons were *dead,* and we had no home and only the clothes on our backs.

I began to compose myself, and fortunately, my friend Roya came to help us. We stayed at her house that evening. She was kind enough to feed us and sit with me as I cried. I know it was risky for her to take us in because if anyone saw her with us, she could also be ostracized. Roya has already been through so much herself. Her son was also *killed* by *soldiers* a few years ago. She understood the *pain* I felt. The tears would not stop running down my face. We had nothing. I also knew that we were not safe staying in Susa. The day of *destruction* when people would *kill* Jewish people turned into a *bloodbath*. Thousands of people *died*. I was not the only one who *lost* family. So many others also *lost* their husbands, wives, sisters, brothers, and even their young children. It was torturous. Then there was a rumor that Queen Esther asked the king for the second day of *destruction*. Wails of *pain* and grief were heard throughout the night. I knew that I had to get out of Susa. It was the only way to keep what was left of my family alive.

I arose early the following day, got my daughter Parvaneh up, and prepared to leave. I thought we might have a chance if we could make it to my uncle's house in Persepolis. Of

course, it would be extremely dangerous trying to get there with just us two traveling. It is unsafe for women to travel alone, especially on the Royal Road.[497] Still, I know it is even riskier to stay here because everyone knows Haman was my husband, and they know we have no males to protect us here. Some people probably want to *kill* us because of Haman, and others may do something to us just because they can. With the second day of *destruction* coming, we must try to get out of here.

Roya told me to be strong and keep going; then, she gave us some bread and water to take on our journey. We hugged her and set off before daylight. As we were arriving close to the city gates to leave the city, we walked past the bodies of my boys, still *hanging* for everyone to ogle. The sight of their decomposing bodies *hanging* there is agonizing still. After seeing my boys *killed*, I have had to watch their bodies *hang*, and now I will not even be able to give them a proper burial. I so wish I could just take them down now and give them the burial they each deserve, but we must hurry to get out here. With our heads covered, we walk quickly, careful not to draw attention to ourselves. We have a long walk ahead of us. I wonder if we will make it and what life will be like without Haman and my boys. It is a miracle that Parvaneh and I are still here. We just have to keep going.

Zeresh in the Esther Story

The storyline develops with numerous plot reversals leading up to Zeresh's entry in chapter five. After years of King Ahasuerus trafficking and raping young girls throughout the kingdom, Hadassah, a Jewish girl, has been chosen as queen in the second chapter.[498] Esther

[497] Waters, *Ancient Persia*, 6. See also, *Herodutus* 5.52.

[498] Chapter 1 of Esther opens at the first banquet during the third year of King Ahasuerus' reign, and it is the seventh year of his reign when Esther was made queen.

intermarries the non-Jewish king while her people are exiled to Susa.[499] Living in Diaspora, Esther and Mordecai learned how to assimilate among the Persian people.[500] Following the instructions of her uncle Mordecai, she hides her Jewish heritage and is called Esther.[501] Yigal Bloch notes that Judeans who were in exile in Babylonia between 590-490 BCE pursued private commercial activities, sometimes as royal merchants, with the backing of state institutions and opted to increase the adoption of personal names honoring Babylonian deities.[502] Mordecai and Esther's names are associated with Babylonian deities.[503] In this chapter, Esther quickly learns

[499] John Anthony Dunn argues Joshua's farewell speech (Josh 23:12-12) indicates exile as the consequence of intermarriage. While there are numerous texts that speak against intermarriage (e.g., Gen 27:46, Gen 28:6, Exod 34:16) mixed marriages were not regarded as all-pervasively problematic as evidenced in Ruth. John Anthony Dunne, *Esther and Her Elusive God: How a Secular Story Functions as Scripture* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 25. Further, Joseph Fleishman suggests during the Persian period Jewish people were living in exile on their own volition as they could have returned. Joseph Fleishman, "Why Did Ahasuerus Consent to Annihilate the Jews?," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 25, no. 2 (1999): 54.

[500] Diasporas necessitate negotiations of identity because when one is removed from homeland either by force or voluntarily it requires rethinking identity. See Hugh R. Page, *Israel's Poetry of Resistance: Africana Perspectives on Early Hebrew Verse* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013).

[501] Anne-Mareike Wetter contends Jewishness appears to be more ethnic than religious in the book of Esther. See Anne-Mareike Wetter, "Judging By Her. Reconfiguring Israel in Ruth, Esther, and Judith" (Utrecht: Utrecht University, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, 2014), 116.

[502] Yigal Bloch, "Judeans in Sippar and Susa During the First Century of the Babylonian Exile: Assimilation and Perseverance Under Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Rule," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History* 1, no. 2 (2014): 141.

[503] Scholars generally regard that that Mordecai's name is derived from the Babylonian god *Marduka* and Esther's name is derived from either goddess Ishtar or *stâra,* Persian name for star. See Michael Fox, *Character and Ideology*. 30; Robert Alter, *Strong as Death is Love: The Song of Songs, Ruth, Esther, Jonah, and Daniel: A Translation with Commentary*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015); Elias Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible: Jonah, Daniel, Koheleth, Esther* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 181. Dunne, *Esther and Her Elusive God*, 23; W. Gunther Plaut, "A Radical View of Esther," in *Through Those Near to Me: Essays in Honor of Jerome R. Malino*, ed. Jerome R. Malino and G. Lebetkin (Danbury: Danbury, 1998), 91. In an effort to prove the historicity of the book of Esther, Moore asserted that a *Marduka* found in Persian inscriptions was Mordecai. See Carey A. Moore, "Archaeology and the Book of Esther;" Robert Gordis, *Megillat Esther: the Masoretic Hebrew Text, with Introduction, New Translation, and Commentary* (New York: Ktav, 1974). However, the argument is dismissed, see Jŏn Douglas Levenson, *Esther: A Commentary*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997); David J. A. Clines, "In Quest of the Historical Mordecai," *Vetus Testamentum* 41, no. 2 (1991): 135. Ishtar and Marduk are also associated with Babylonian myths including *Enūma Elish*. See Adam Silverstein, "The Book of Esther and the Enuma Elish," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies. University of London* 69, no. 2 (Jun 2006). William Horbury evaluates a Ptolemaic funerary inscription with the name Mardochaeus to see if it corresponds with Mordecai in Esther. See William Horbury, "The Name Mardochaeus in a Ptolemaic Inscription," *Vetus Testamentum* 41, no. 2 (1991).

the proper protocol and procedures for the Persian court and plays her role as a compliant niece and wife. The second chapter ends with Mordecai sitting at the palace gate. He learns of the plan of two eunuchs to assassinate the king. Mordecai tells Esther about this plot, and she notifies the king while praising Mordecai for the information.

In the next chapter, Haman advances in the king's court, and citizens acknowledge his position and power by bowing in his presence. Mordecai, however, refuses to bow to Haman. Whereas his refusal might be due to tribal enmity with Mordecai being a descendant of Saul and Haman an Agagite, an enemy of Israel, it could also be supposed that Mordecai is being a loyal Jewish man.[504] John Anthony Dunne dismisses the claim Mordecai was acting as a faithful Jewish man by refusing to bow to Haman. He asserts that to be in his position, he would have had to bow to the king or others before, and nothing in the Scripture prohibits such activity.[505] Further, Ronald Pierce argues that Mordecai's refusal to bow is incorrectly interpreted when viewed as similar to the order to worship Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3 because Mordecai is not required to worship Haman.[506] Still, Mordecai was expected to show loyalty to the king's representative, making this an issue of respect, not religion.[507] Finally, Erich Gruen argues it was

[504] Peter Machinist argues Mordecai snubs Haman because he is an Amalekite. Peter Machinist, "Achaemenid Persia as Spectacle. Reactions from Two Peripheral Voices: Aeschylus, The Persians and the Biblical Book of Esther" in *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies /* ארץ-ישראל: מחקרים בידיעת לג הארץ ועתיקותיה (2018):116. See also Katheryn P. Darr, "More than Just a Pretty Face: Critical, Rabbinical, and Feminist Perspectives on Esther," in *Far More Precious than Jewels: Perspectives on Biblical Women* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 175. Holmstedt and Screnock assert Mordecai's response on why he refused to bow was claiming he was exempt from bowing because he is Jewish. See Holmstedt and Screnock, *Esther: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*, 118.

[505] John Anthony Dunne, *Esther and Her Elusive God: How a Secular Story Functions as Scripture* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 37.

[506] See Lisa M. Wolfe, *Ruth, Esther, Song of Songs, and Judith* (Eugene: Cascade, 2011), 95; Holmstedt and Screnock, *Esther: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*, 118.

[507] Ronald W. Pierce, "The Politics of Esther and Mordecai: Courage or Compromise?," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* (1992): 75-89, 85.

a personal rivalry for influence on the court.[508] Like Pierce and Dunne, I deduce that Mordecai's refusal to bow was grounded in animosity toward Haman based on lineage and reputation and the issue of respect. Mordecai's actions disrespected Haman, and Joseph Quayesi-Amakye notes that disrespect was also an issue of class.[509]

Nevertheless, Mordecai's refusal to bow angers Haman so much that he concocts a plan to eliminate Mordecai and kill all Jewish people throughout the kingdom. The unconscionable plan would keep anyone else from claiming exemption from bowing before Haman.[510] This heinous plan entails him lying to the king about who the Jewish people are and their intentions while offering an insane amount of money in return for an edict from the king. The order would allow people throughout the kingdom to kill all Jewish people, young, old, women, and children, and to abscond their goods. Aware of danger and filled with grief, Mordecai enlists Queen Esther to wield her influence to help her people. After initially rebuffing his requests, Queen Esther agrees to risk her life and approach the king uninvited to prevent Haman's plot against the Jewish people.

Instead of immediately telling the king that she is Jewish and Haman plans to destroy her people, she develops a more elaborate strategy. Queen Esther requests a banquet for the king and Haman, a great honor for Haman.[511] After wining and dining with King Ahasuerus and Haman,

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[508] Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 147. W. Gunther Plaut also asserts Haman viewed Mordecai's refusal as engaging in a political power struggle. Plaut, "A Radical View of Esther," 96. Helge Bezold states Haman's hurt pride is the root of his hostility and that he uses access to the court and imperial resources for his plan to exterminate the Jewish people. Helge Bezold, "Violence and Empire: Hasmonean Perspectives on Imperial Power and Collective Violence in the Book of Esther," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 10, no. 1 (2021): 48.

[509] Quayesi-Amakye, "Beneath Religious Claims," 35.

[510] Holmstedt and Screnock, *Esther: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*, 119.

[511] It was considered a great privilege to be the table companion of the king. Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East, C. 3000-330 BC*, vol. II (New York: Routledge, 1995), 688. John Craghan notes that the motif of banqueting is present in Esther and the book of Ruth. In both books there is an empowering and disempowering of

she requests a second banquet. Haman was again insulted and frustrated on his way home when Mordecai refused to bow. Angered and humiliated, he returns home and complains to his wife, Zeresh, and other friends. Zeresh advises him to have Haman hanged. The king suffers insomnia, and that evening the annuals are brought and read to him, essentially to bore him to sleep. Reading the annuals makes the king remember how Mordecai saved his life years earlier. When Haman returns to the palace the next day, there is another reversal–Haman is forced to honor Mordecai with a parade he planned for himself. He goes home again, mourning, and embarrassed, and when he tells Zeresh and his other advisors what happened, they advise that since Mordecai is Jewish, he cannot win.[512]

A deflated Haman arrives back at the palace for the second banquet, and while being wined and dined again, Queen Esther reveals she is Jewish and names him the enemy of the Jews who planned their destruction. Angered by this new development, the king, as if he did not already approve of Haman's plan to destroy the Jewish people, walks outside to cool off and presumably process what has just occurred. When King Ahasuerus returns, Haman is begging Esther for his life, and the king accuses him of assaulting his wife. Having prepared the gallows for Mordecai, Haman is executed instead, and the king grants Esther Haman's house.

Esther and Mordecai request a new edict to allow the Jewish people to defend themselves from attack to save themselves. After the first day of destruction planned by Haman, the Jewish people struck down their enemies and killed all ten of Haman's sons but did not plunder.

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humans that occurs when banquets are called. In Esther at this second banquet Esther is empowered and Haman is disempowered. See John F. Craghan, "Esther: A Fully Liberated Woman," *The Bible Today* 24 (1986): 8. Johnny Miles also examines the banquets. Johnny Miles, "Reading Esther as Heroine: Persian Banquets, Ethnic Cleansing, and Identity Crisis," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 45, no. 3 (2015).

[512] I translate the passage with "since" instead of "if" because Zeresh and the advisors know at this point that Mordecai is Jewish. I argue they are not questioning if Mordecai is Jewish but stating that because of his Jewishness, Haman will fail.

Haman's death eliminated the immediate threat of annihilation of the Jewish people. However, Esther requests a second day of killing in Susa and Haman's sons to be hanged on the gallows. Francisco-Javier Ruiz-Ortiz argues this request, coupled with the acts of violence, shows what the end will be for those who oppose Jews.[513] The king grants her requests, and in another reversal of the story, the oppressed become oppressors as Jewish people go out in Susa and kill more people when there is no threat to their safety. There is no clear indication of Esther's conduct, if any, toward Zeresh.[514] That said, Zeresh is not mentioned again after Haman is killed, and her sons are hanged.

Zeresh in Scholarship

There is not much written about her in the biblical text, and scholarship on Zeresh is sparse. Scholars focusing on Esther or women in the bible either briefly mention her, categorize, compare, or ignore her, including scholarship focusing on women in the bible. Leilah Bronner notes Zeresh is primarily ignored in feminist scholarship.[515] When Zeresh is addressed in biblical scholarship, she is the object, not the subject. Zeresh is usually treated as a minor character whose only purpose is to advance the Jewish survival story as she plays a supporting role for her powerful and evil husband, Haman. The commentary on Zeresh in scholarship is often based solely on her relation to her husband.

[513] Francisco-Javier Ruiz-Ortiz asserts the authors insert words in the vocabulary of violence to point to the good of the Jewish people and their preservation. The author's use also indicates divine design for the Jewish people. Francisco-Javier Ruiz-Ortiz, *The Dynamics of Violence and Revenge in the Hebrew Book of Esther*, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017), 83-118.

[514] Debelak, *Hidden in Plain Sight: Esther and a Marginalised Hermeneutic*, 47.

[515] Leila Leah Bronner, "Esther Revisited: An Aggadic Approach," in *Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith, and Susanna* ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 191.

Athalya Brenner proclaims that the three named women in Esther are depicted as wives. Vashti is a "bad" wife, Esther a "good" wife, and Zeresh a model wife, wise and knowing to a bad companion.[516] Zeresh is oft-times referenced in scholarship as the wife of Haman or because of her words to him.[517] Some commentaries do not mention her name; Zeresh is only called "Haman's wife."[518] Philip Davies' first-person autobiography of Haman tells the story from Haman's perspective and does not mention Zeresh by name, only in a letter to his wife at the end.[519] Granted, she is described as the wife of Haman in the text; even so, that is only one part of her identity.

[516] Athalya Brenner, "Figurations of Woman in Wisdom Literature," in *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 206.

[517] See Susan Niditch, "Esther: Folklore, Wisdom, Feminism and Authority," in *Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffied: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 31; André Lacocque, *Esther Regina: a Bakhtinian Reading* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 200; Alison Thorne, "The Politics of Female Supplication in the Book of Esther," in *Biblical Women in Early Modern Literary Culture, 1550–1700*, ed. Victoria Brownlee and Laura Gallagher, 1550–1700 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015); Judith Rosenheim, "Fate and Freedom in the Scroll of Esther," *Prooftexts* 12, no. 2 (1992): 144; Moshe David Simon, "'Many Thoughts in the Heart of Man...': Irony and Theology in the Book of Esther," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 31, no. 4 (1997); Robert J. Littman, "The Religious Policy of Xerxes and the 'Book of Esther'," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 65, no. 3 (1975); Patricia K. Tull, *Esther and Ruth*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox 2003), 11, 55; John F. Craghan, "Esther, Judith, and Ruth: Paradigms for Human Liberation," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 12, no. 1 (1982); Ericka Shawndricka Dunbar, *Trafficking Hadassah: Collective Trauma, Cultural Memory, and Identity in the Book of Esther and in the African Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2021), 38; Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible: Jonah, Daniel, Koheleth, Esther*, 196. Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: B&H, 1993), 480; Carol M. Bechtel, *Esther* (Louisville: John Knox, 2002), 169; Christine Meroz, *Esther in Exile: Toward a Spirituality of Difference* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 51, 54; Joshua Joel Spoelstra, "The Function of the משחהיין in the Book of Esther," *Old Testament Essays* 27, no. 1 (2014): 296.

[518] Melba Padilla Maggay, "Esther," in *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans (Downers Grove: InterVarsity 2002), 263-72; *The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles & Introduction, Commentary, & Reflections for each Book of the Bible, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books in Twelve Volumes*, III vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 911. Kenneth M. Craig, *Reading Esther: A Case for the Literary Carnivalesque*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 115. Michael Fox also refers to Zeresh as Haman's wife when referencing her. He does not address her as a named character in sections on characters. Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), 74, 79.

[519] Philip R Davies, "Haman the Victim," in *First Person. Essays in Biblical Autobiography* (London; New York: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 137-54.

When looking further into Zeresh beyond her status as a wife, the few words she speaks are viewed as wise. Her words and wisdom are the basis of her being called counselor and advisor.[520] She sees what Haman cannot and speaks with indifference to her own well-being.[521] To that end, Zeresh has two roles in the text, an advisor to Haman, and she facilitates his quick downfall.[522] Silvia Schroer includes Zeresh with many other biblical wives who counsel their husband, noting that almost all of the husbands obey their wife's advice, whether it is good or bad, except Job's wife (Job 2:10).[523] Alternatively, Matthew Schwartz and Kalman Kaplan in their psychological study of biblical women argue Zeresh is as heartless as Haman and say while women in the bible can be strong, wise, and supportive Zeresh is not one of them.[524]

Her words are also the basis of her being called evil or a mastermind of the evil plot. Jean-Dean Macchi says, "Zeresh's speech portrays a woman who is determined, brutal, ad devoid of scruples."[525] Robert Williamson argues the text attributes the plan to hang Mordecai to

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[520] Elie Wiesel, *Sages and Dreamers: Biblical, Talmudic, and Talmudic Portraits and Legends* (New York: Summit Books, 1991), 147; Athalya Brenner, *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2004), 76; Silverstein, *Veiling Esther*,123; Holly Morse, *Encountering Eve's Afterlives: A New Reception Critical Approach to Genesis 2-4* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 83; John H. Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed: The Status of Woman in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 107; Mira Morgenstern, *Conceiving A Nation: the Development of Political Discourse in the Hebrew Bible* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 173; Tal Davidovich, *Esther, Queen of the Jews: The Status and Position of Esther in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake; Eisenbrauns, 2013), 70.

[521] Samuel Wells and George Sumner, *Esther & Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Brazos 2013), 69.

[522] Davidovich, *Esther, Queen of the Jews: The Status and Position of Esther in the Old Testament*, 71.

[523] Silivia Schroer, "Wise and Counseling Women in Ancient Israel: Literary and Historical Ideals of Personified HOKMA," in *Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature*, ed. Athalya Brenner-Idan (London: Bloomsbury 1995), 73.

[524] Matthew B. Schwartz and Kalman J. Kaplan, *The Fruit of Her Hands: A Psychology of Biblical Woman* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 172-73.

[525] Macchi, *Esther,* 193.

Zeresh and friends in 5:14, and he focuses on her as the main proponent.[526] Linda Day does not refer to her as evil but concurs with her being the main proponent because the Hebrew syntax emphasizes her speaking.[527] Following this reading, it is Zeresh who plans to propose a specific manner of execution.[528] Furthermore, her proposed plan is considered analogous to Memuchan offering a plan in Esther 1:16-20.[529]

Comparing Zeresh to other women is another typical method of discussing her. Zeresh is compared to Job's wife and Jezebel by John Otwell, as he also outlines the difference in the examples included in the Israelite examples of the wise wife motif.[530] Rebecca Hancock juxtaposes Esther and Zeresh with two women in Proverbs 7-8 who advise men.[531] Other comparisons of Zeresh to Jezebel interpret her negatively as a wife consoling her pouting husband and devising a scheme to use the law grounded in false accusations to satisfy a sulking ruler to get them what they want.[532] Jezebel is perceived as one who takes whatever action

[526] Robert Williamson, *The Forgotten Books of the Bible: Recovering the Five Scrolls for Today* (1517 Media, 2018), 160.

[527] Linda Day, *Esther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 107. Holmstedt and Screnock also ascribe these words to her observing that she addresses Haman using an imperative rather than a jussive. Holmstedt and Screnock, *Esther: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*, 174. Eugen Roop asserts Zeresh takes the lead on counseling Haman to build the gallows and execute his adversary. Eugene F. Roop, *Ruth, Jonah, Esther* (Scottdale: Herald, 2002), 215.

[528] Jonathan Grossman, *Esther: The Outer Narrative and the Hidden Reading*, vol. 6 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 135.

[529] Macchi, *Esther*, 193.

[530] Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed: The Status of Woman in the Old Testament*, 105-07.

[531] Rebecca S. Hancock, *Esther and the Politics of Negotiation: Public and Private Spaces and the Figure of the Female Royal Counselor* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 112.

[532] Leslie C. Allen and Timothy S. Laniak, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, New International Biblical Commentary (Carlisle: Hendrickson, 2003), 9. See also Grossman, *Esther: The Outer Narrative and the Hidden Reading*, 6, 139-40; Jobes, *Esther*, 204.

necessary to seal her husband's happiness.[533] Alice Laffey also compares her to Jezebel because she plots evil on behalf of her husband. She also equates her to Abigail (1 Sam 25:28), who predicted good tidings for David, although Zeresh predicts doom for Haman.[534] Helen Zlotnick contrasts Esther, Vashti, and Zeresh, observing that the only mother in the text is Zeresh, and she never displays any maternal affection.[535] In another comparison to Vashti, it is recognized that although they both say few words, their presence is great.[536] Finally, Jonathan Grossman evaluates connections in Esther with numerous biblical characters and equates Zeresh telling Haman to kill Mordecai to Esau's intention to kill Jacob.[537] Comparisons can be helpful in establishing characterizations and motifs in biblical texts; at the same time, there is utility in examining characters individually.

Andre LaCocque states while Zeresh is a secondary character, "she contributes to the tale's insistence on the decisive feminine role of liberation."[538] Recognizing how her character is minimized, LaCocque does see value in her role and that of women in Esther. Francisco-Javier Ruiz Ortiz views Zeresh as a literary tool in which her advice, along with that of the advisors,

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[533] Carol L. Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 168, 71-72. Jonathan Grossman, "'Dynamic Analogies' in the Book of Esther," *Vetus Testamentum* 59, no. 3 (2009): 404.

[534] Alice L. Laffey, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 217.

[535] Helena Zlotnick, *Dinah's Daughters: Gender and Judaism from the Hebrew Bible to Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 81.

[536] Day, *Esther*, 113.

[537] Jonathan Grossman, "'Dynamic Analogies' in the Book of Esther," *Vetus Testamentum* 59, no. 3 (2009): 400.

[538] Lacocque, *Esther Regina: A Bakhtinian Reading*, 64.

turns out to be for the good of the Jewish people and Haman's downfall.[539,] Despite that, she is still considered just as ruthless and uncaring as her husband. In early interpretations, Zeresh is deemed an unprincipled woman juxtaposed to Esther, the exemplary woman.[540] Most of this scholarship does not examine the text from her perspective or give any consideration to her as a mother.

Day attends more to Zeresh in her commentary, initially describing her as playing the role of a supportive wife who is willing to listen to her husband and show concern for his happiness.[541] She also notes Zeresh reaches the point where she may no longer be willing to play the "good wife." According to Day, Zeresh speaks with the voice of a seer, and her vision proves to be accurate. Further, she does acknowledge Zeresh's circumstances when Haman and her sons were killed. Day also identifies Haman's murdered ten sons as Zeresh's children as well. Finally, she notes Zeresh is left completely bereft when her family is murdered, her financial means are taken, and she is publicly shamed. For Day, this ending for Zeresh is ironic because she is the first non-Jewish person to take the side of the Jews and recognize the power of Mordecai.

Rabbinic literature characterizes Zeresh as either a wise advisor or a model of wrongdoing and impiety.[542] Zeresh would not necessarily be alone in being portrayed negatively in rabbinic writings. "Rabbinic literature frequently portrayed women as potential sources of

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[539] Francisco-Javier Ruiz-Ortiz, *The Dynamics of Violence and Revenge in the Hebrew Book of Esther*, vol. 175 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017), 119.

[540] D. R., "Striking Instance of Christian Beneficence," *New York Observer and Chronicle (1833-1912)*, vol. 25, Issue 37, Sep 11, 1847.

[541] Day, *Esther*, 107.

[542] Leila Leah Bronner, "Esther Revisited: An Aggadic Approach," in *Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith, and Susanna,* ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 190.

sexual enticement and social disorder."[543] In the *Midrash Rabbah*, Haman calls for Zeresh and 365 advisers to discuss what should be done to Mordecai. She is called the cleverest of them all.[544] Zeresh is knowledgeable about the prevailing stories of Daniel, Joseph, and Sampson and tells Haman the only way to prevail is to do something to him that no other Jews experienced, which is to hang him. She also presumably loses a daughter by the end of the story because Haman's daughter witnesses him being humiliated while honoring Mordecai, and she kills herself. In addition, Zeresh is envisioned as not faithful to her husband and going to lovers when he goes to his.[545] Bronner posits that idol-worshipers are always characterized as promiscuous in comparison to the virtuous daughters of Israel.[546]

Zeresh has been brought to life outside scholarship through creative writing and the arts. Michael Lemberger offers short stories reimagining Zeresh and other biblical women.[547] In Lemberger's writing, Zeresh is the sister of Vashti and has a close relationship with the palace eunuch Shaashgaz. She is portrayed as ambitious and eager to see her husband finally obtain more power with his position to improve her status. However, Zeresh is not credited with advising Haman on how to deal with Mordecai. Interestingly, Esther is never named in this retelling of Zeresh's story. Though the story considers Zeresh, she still does not tell her own story; the narrator does.

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[543] Judith R. Baskin, "Erotic Subversion: Undermining Female Agency in *b. Megillah* 10b–17a," in *A Feminist Companion to the Babylonian Talmud*, ed. Tal Ilan et al. (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck 2007), 227.

[544] Harry Freedman, et al., *The Midrash Rabbah*, New Compact Edition. (London: Soncino, 1977), 110; Louis Ginzberg, Henrietta Szold, and Paul Radin, ed. *The Legends of the Jews*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 430.

[545] *Panim Aherim*, 72.

[546] Bronner, "Esther Revisited: An Aggadic Approach," 191.

[547] Michael Lemberger, *After Abel and Other Stories* (Los Angeles: Prospect Park, 2015), 113-54.

Older dramatic stage productions have shown Zeresh to be both against and for her husband. For example, in *Dramatic Fragment*, Zeresh despises her husband because of his role in banning her friend Vashti.[548] Yet, in A. Duncan Goody's *Esther, A Drama in Vers*e, she sides with him against the Jewish people.[549] Even more, recent dramatic episodes render her continuously working against other women.[550] The theatrical depictions of Zeresh show complexities in her character and explore the possibilities of her perspective or her experiences as a mother.

A Closer Look at Zeresh

Zeresh is a character with a handful of appearances in the Esther story. Her few words and interaction with others in the text are significant to the storyline. When she is first introduced in 5:10 and in 6:13, she is listed second as being summoned by Haman along with his friends. In each of these instances, Haman has a problem with Mordecai that must be addressed. Haman is turning to Zeresh and his friends for advice. Zeresh is the first one to speak the first time they advise him in 5:14. As she speaks to him using an imperative, she tells him to build gallows and have Mordecai hanged. The language could suggest death by hanging or public exposure after death.[551] Zeresh instructs Haman to eliminate Mordecai. Although, there is nothing in the text that indicates Zeresh plotted with Haman to kill the Jewish people. Esther 3:6 states that Haman plotted to destroy the Jewish people. He does not consult with Zeresh or his friends prior to

[548] Franz Grillparzer and A. Burkhard, *Esther: Dramatic Fragment* (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1953), 107.

[549] Duncan Goody, *Esther, a Drama in Verse* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, and Company, 1899).

[550] See Carolyn Gage, *Esther and Vashti: A Play In Two Acts* (Morrisville: Lulu, 2012), 78.

[551] Day suggests it most likely public exposure after death. See Day, *Esther*, 107.

making this plan, and he casts lots. Haman does not turn to Zeresh and his friends until he realizes his plan is not expeditious enough.

Once Haman does look to Zeresh and his friends, he must first build himself up before explaining the problem. In his rambling, one of the things he is proud of is the number of children he has, although he does not state the exact number.[552] Haman also tells Zeresh and his friends in the first meeting that Mordecai is Jewish, and Zeresh tells him to have him killed, and the friends agree. Later Zeresh informs Haman of his impending fall after he is humiliated by being forced to honor Mordecai. The reversal is not because they are just learning Mordecai is Jewish; this was information they already understood from the first referenced meeting.[553] Zeresh is listed second as speaking to Haman here. He was talking to Zeresh and his friends, and the response came from his advisors and Zeresh. The others who were speaking were first called friends, they do not get considered wise or advisers until after Haman's fall began, and they warned him.[554] The warning to Haman does not exalt God but exalts the Jewish people.[555] Yoram Hozany suggests that upon the recognition that Jews cannot be easily brought under control, a ruler will transition from viewing Jews as inconsequential to vastly exaggerating their

[552] The term בני is typically translated as "sons," however, keeping with my inclusive reading strategy I interpret the term as children.

[553] Stan Goldman argues there is a reversal in Zeresh's language after she realizes Mordecai is Jewish. Stan Goldman, "Narrative and Ethical Ironies in Esther," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 15, no. 47 (1990): 20. Fox states the "if" is a rhetorical conditional because Zeresh and the friends already knew Mordecai was Jewish. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther*, 79. See also Fredric Bush, *Ruth-Esther, World Bible Commentary,* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018), 416. However, Holmstedt and Screnock assert the "if" is a conditional clause and Fox and Bush's claim that it is not a "real" conditional ignores the use of language because sometimes conditionals are used even when the outcome is already known. Holmstedt and Screnock, *Esther: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*, 190.

[554] Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, 480.

[555] Wells and Sumner, *Esther & Daniel*, 69.

power. Zeresh's warning is an example, as well as Pharoah's belief Jews are mightier than Egyptians.[556] Her "words reinforce the inevitability of Haman's demise."[557]

In chapter 6, after Zeresh tells her husband of his fate, she fades from the story, and her fate is never revealed to the reader. In chapter 9, the names of the ten sons are listed as killed, along with the other 500 people in Susa that were murdered. Perhaps she, too, was killed as she was guilty by association. Maybe she survived the loss of her family, home, and the two days of massacres throughout the kingdom because while the text details the murders of her husband and her sons, there is no mention of her execution. Her loss, pain, and experience are dismissed in the biblical text and scholarship. Since her experiences outside of her advice to Haman do not speak to the survival of Jewish people or specifically Jewish males, her background and other details are absent from the text.

Consequently, she is frequently overlooked by scholars. Showing regard for her and her experience and presuming her survival, I examine her life after the trauma of her husband and sons being killed and losing her home. What would her life have been like if she had survived? Zeresh's sons being killed by orders from the king is analogous to Lezley McSpadden's experience of her son Michael Brown being killed by the police. Unfortunately, Zeresh does not have the opportunity to tell what happened from her point of view. McSpadden, however, determined not to let everyone else speak for her son, tells her own story. Therefore, I look to McSpadden's autobiography to give a possible explication of Zeresh's implied survival.

[556] Yoram Hazony, *The Dawn: Political Teachings of the Book of Esther* (Jerusalem: Shalem, 2000), 109.

[557] Roop, *Ruth, Jonah, Esther*, 222.

Lezley McSpadden, Mother of Michael Brown

Growing up in St. Louis, Missouri, in a close-knit family that struggled financially, Lezley McSpadden learned about trauma and survival early on. Living with her mother and younger sister, McSpadden becomes a mother at age sixteen, giving birth to Michael Brown. As an unwed teenage mother trying to provide for her young child, she finds herself having to decide between working and completing high school. Even with government assistance, she would not have enough for her and her child to survive if she did not work full time. So McSpadden drops out of school and works many low-paying jobs, sometimes two at a time to provide for her family.

McSpadden suffers many other traumatic experiences as she grows into adulthood and her son comes of age. For example, she witnessed her mother's boyfriend physically abuse her. Similarly, McSpadden wound up in an abusive relationship with the father of her second child, who was later murdered. Nevertheless, McSpadden continues to care for her children while experiencing multiple and ongoing trauma and grief while negotiating life as a single mother. When her son Michael, who she affectionately calls Mike Mike, encounters health issues, McSpadden is by her son's side in the hospital, reciting what she says is the one bible verse she knows, the 23rd Psalm. In her autobiography, McSpadden details the numerous traumatic experiences she maneuvers and survives before her son is murdered. These details help the reader understand the layers of oppression that foster her continuous traumatic stress.[558]

August 9, 2014, started as just another day of work for Lezley McSpadden at Straub's, a local grocery store. She had just assisted Mrs. Hirschfield, one of her favorite customers before

[558] The term *continuous traumatic stress* was suggested by South African counselors during apartheid to describe exposure to ongoing and unpredictable stress that is often paired with the absence of safe spaces to rest and recover. See Gill Straker, "The Continuous Traumatic Stress Syndrome: The Single Therapeutic Interview," *Psychology in Society* 8, no. 1 (1987): 48-79.

she went to her car for a smoke break. Just as she lit her cigarette, the phone rang. The caller told her the police had just shot Mike Mike.[559] McSpadden rushed to the scene. She saw a lifeless body covered by a white sheet in the street and questioned if that was her child lying dead in the street. She ran around asking the police questions. There was no response. Tasting the salt of her tears, she thinks, "Do anybody hear me?"[560] Her fear becomes her reality as she realizes that her son is the dead body on the ground in front of the large crowd. When she asks who was responsible, she is told it was the police. Hurt and angry, she yells the police are supposed to protect. Finally, she could no longer stand after a crude encounter with one of the officers when he responded while giving her the middle finger. "I fell to my knees, weak, drenched in sweat, and cried out, 'Why God?'"[561]

The lifeless body of McSpadden's son lay in the street under the hot St. Louis August sun for over four and a half hours. Michael's body was on display for any onlookers to see, and then as the image was broadcasted on news outlets and social media, it was on display to the world. A mother forced to see her dead son's body on display and not afforded any dignity is cruel. McSpadden was prevented from attending to him and forced to watch this horror from a distance. The agony she experienced in losing her child and having to stand and look at his dead body in the street for hours is inconceivable. Further, she stood there knowing he was killed by a police officer while surrounded by police officers. The killer of her child could be beside her.

Two weeks later, the day of the funeral was the first time she was able to see her son. Leading up to that day, the funeral home employees kept telling her the body was okay, but for

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[559] Lezley McSpadden, *Tell the Truth & Shame the Devil: The Life, Legacy, and Love of My Son Michael Brown*. (New York: Regan Arts, 2016) 4.

[560] McSpadden, *Tell the Truth*, 13.

[561] McSpadden, *Tell the Truth*, 14.

McSpadden, "the body isn't OK. It is as for from OK as it can be. It don't have life in it anymore." Facing the reality that her son is no longer a life but now simply a body, she must figure out how to continue and survive this trauma. She had other children who depended on her to help them and guide them in surviving the murder of their brother. This murder of her child was state-sanctioned violence is not uncommon in the Black community.[562] Further, the murder of Brown thrust her, like others before, into the media spotlight.[563] As Esther McIntosh states, "mothers whose lives have been shattered by violent crime; their visibility is not necessarily intentional, but they may find themselves thrust into the media spotlight when journalists decide to home in on their reaction to the loss of a child through violent crime."[564]

McSpadden, angry and hurt, wanted the murderer of her son brought to justice. However, no charges were brought against Darren Wilson for the murder of Michael Brown. A federal investigation was also conducted, and while it found the Ferguson Police Department engaged in unconstitutional stops and arrests, patterns of excessive force, imposition of unduly harsh

[562] For more on police killings and state sanctioned violence see Franklin E. Zimring, "Police Killings as a Problem of Governance," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 687, no. 1 (2020). Kimberlé Crenshaw et al., "Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women" at the African American Policy Forum, 2015. Accessed January 6, 2022. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53f20d90e4b0b80451158d8c/t/. Lori D. Patton and Nadrea R. Njoku, "Theorizing Black Women's Experiences with Institution-Sanctioned Violence: A #BlackLivesMatter Imperative Toward Black Liberation on Campus," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 32, no. 9 (2019). For a historical look on anti-Blackness, racism and violence being intertwined with white supremacy and capitalism in St. Louis, see Walter Johnson, *The Broken Heart of America: St. Louis and the Violent History of the United States* (New York: Basic, 2020).

[563] See Mamie Till, "Nation Horrified by Murder," *Jet Magazine*, September 15, 1955, 6-9.; Sabrina Fulton, Eyeder Peralta, "Trayvon Martin's Mother: Committed to Getting Justice, If It Takes the 'Rest of My Life'," *New Hampshire Public Radio NPR*, 2/23/22, 2012. Accessed July 23, 2022. https://www.nhpr.org/npr-blogs/2012-04-25/trayvon-martins-mother-committed-to-getting-justice-if-it-takes-rest-of-my-life; and Samaria Rice, "My 12-Year-old son, Tamir Rice, Was Killed by Police. I'm Not Allowed to be Normal," ABC News, 2012. Accessed February 23, 2022. https://abcnews.go.com/GMA/News/12-year-son-tamir-rice-killed-police-im/story?id=71654873.

[564] Esther McIntosh, "The Trauma of Mothers: Motherhood, Violent Crime and the Christian Motif of Forgiveness," in *Feminist Trauma Theologies: Body, Scripture & Church in Critical Perspective*, ed. Katie Cross Karen O'Donnell (London: SCM, 2020), 507.

penalties, and discriminatory intent and practice that have a disparate impact on Black people, no federal civil rights complaint was filed on behalf of Brown.[565] McSpadden then had to discover how to keep going forward after yet another heartbreaking disappointment and how to survive.

Implied Survival in Esther 9

Killing Haman appears fair to some scholars and modern readers, as he planned to eliminate the Jewish people.[566] Unfortunately, this passage has been used as anti-Jewish propaganda.[567] However, scholars or casual readers cannot disregard anti-Semitism and the imminent threat to Jewish people. These heinous efforts fueled by anti-Semitism have continued to the present day.[568] As Michael Fox states, Haman wanted to eliminate Jews, and "other Hamans are always waiting to revive the attempt."[569] The wailing and wearing of sackcloth by the Jewish people throughout the city, as they learned of Haman's plan approved by the king to

[565] Department of Justice, *Department of Justice Report Regarding the Criminal Investigation into the Shooting Death of Michael Brown by Ferguson, Missouri Police Officer Darren Wilson*, Department of Justice (March 4, 2015). Accessed January 28, 2022. https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/03/04/doj_report_on_shooting_of_michael_brown_1.pdf. Department of Justice, *Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department*, Department of Justices (March 4, 2015). Accessed January 28, 2022.https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/pressreleases/attachments/2015/03/04/ferguson_police_department_report.pdf.

[566] Adele Reinhartz asserts our twenty-first century perspective may allow the reader to see the murder of Haman as justice. Adele Reinhartz, "LXX Esther: A Hellenistic Jewish Revenge Fantasy," in *Early Jewish Writings*, ed. Eileen Schuller and Marie-Theres Wacker (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 9-28, 12.

[567] Elliot Horowitz explains how anti-Jewish interpretations from Martin Luther and Michaelis inform scholarship for centuries and fueling anti-Semitism propaganda. See Elliot Horowitz *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006),12-16.

[568] Beth A. Griech-Polelle, *Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust: Language, Rhetoric and the Traditions of Hatred* (London; Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); John Weiss, *The Politics of Hate: Anti-Semitism, History, and the Holocaust in Modern Europe* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003); Phyllis Goldstein and Harold Evans, *A Convenient Hatred: The History of Antisemitism* (Boston: Facing History and Ourselves, 2012); Mark Oppenheimer, *Squirrel Hill: The Tree of Life Synagogue Shooting and the Soul of a Neighborhood* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2021); Amma and Hastings Nawaz, Dorothy, "Jewish Americans Are 'Terrified' Amid Rising Anti-Semitic Attacks. How Can They Feel Safe?," in *PBS News Hour*, January 17, 2022. Accessed January 24, 2022. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/jewish-americans-are-terrified-amid-rising-anti-semitic-attacks-how-can-they-feel-safe,

[569] Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther*, 12.

kill them. The idea of someone awaiting their likely death bears a striking resemblance to someone on death row awaiting their execution, and they both seem to be painful. Haman is the enemy of the Jews for the first eight chapters of Esther, and it is not until chapter nine that their enemies become plural.[570]

Haman is hanged not because of his evil plan to massacre the Jewish people but because he is falsely accused of attempting to rape Esther. She does not speak when the accusations are put forth, and her silence achieves the outcome she desires through violence.[571] The violence does not stop at Haman, as his ten sons are also killed. The killing of his sons was acceptable warfare in antiquity to prevent him from leaving heirs, degrade his memory, and emphasize his defeat.[572] These seemingly justified murders requested by Esther and approved by the king would eliminate the primary enemy of the Jewish people while still leaving Zeresh and any other family members to survive after their deaths, which I argue are implied survivors.

As previously indicated in Chapter 2, survival chronicled in the Hebrew Bible is predominantly focused on the survival of male Israelites. In the story Esther, there is a concern for Mordecai, a Jewish male, who becomes a hero after Esther risks her life to save him and the Jewish people. When understanding survival as continued existence after a traumatic event, numerous survivors are included in Esther 9 beyond Esther, Mordecai, and the Jewish people.

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[570] David J. A. Clines, *The Esther Scroll: The Story of the Story*, vol. 30 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 12.

[571] See also Tal Davidovich, *Esther, Queen of the Jews: The Status and Position of Esther in the Old Testament*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013); Nicole Duran, "Who Wants to Marry a Persian King? Gender Games and Wars and the Book of Esther," in *Pregnant Passion: Gender, Sex, and Violence in the Bible*, ed. Cheryl Kirk-Duggan (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2003), 81; Angeline Song, "Heartless Bimbo or Subversive Role Model?: A Narrative (Self) Critical Reading of the Character of Esther," *Dialog : A Journal of Theology* 49, no. 1 (2010): 65. Carey Moore argues Esther acted appropriately because Haman had not been completely defeated and removed from power. Carey A. Moore, *Esther (The Anchor Bible)* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1971), 74.

[572] Yoram Hazony, "Mordecai's Challenge: An Essay on War, Leadership, and Purim: An Argument for the Morality of the Controversial Climax of the Book of Esther," *Commentary* 141, no. 3 (2016): 37.

Table 4.1 Women and Girls Survival Texts in Esther

לקח	שמד	תלה	מלט	חרג	אבד	הצלה
Esth 2:7	Esth 3:13	Esth 2:23	None	Esth 9:5	Esth 4:14	Esth 4:14
Esth 2:8	Esth 4:8	Esth 7:10		Esth 9:6	Esth 4:16	
Esth 2:15	Esth 7:4	Esth 8:7		Esth 9:10	Esth 7:4	
	Esth 8:11	Esth 9:13		Esth 9:11	Esth 8:11	
		Esth 9:14		Esth 9:12	Esth 9:6	
				Esth 9:15	Esth 9:12	
				Esth 9:16	Esth 9:24	

As evidenced by the above table, there are more survival texts for women and girls in Esther 9 from the *Lexicon of Survival* than in any other chapter in the book.

In Esther 9, the Jewish people are no longer slated to be subjected to accepting any harm done to them by others on the day of destruction scheduled for the thirteenth day of Adar. Instead, they gather and strike any of their presumed assailants, killing them and doing as they pleased. In Susa, five hundred people and Haman's ten sons are killed. Each of these five hundred people and sons who were killed on that day conceivably had a family who was left behind. Zeresh, a wife, and mother, is a named relative of these murdered men and experiences an indirect trauma.[573] It is likely these murdered men also had wives and children of their own. Zeresh, like many others, would have endured the traumatic experience of that day of destruction. Anyone who lived through that day had to survive that day and then figure out how

[573] Maria Root identifies direct, indirect, and insidious trauma as the three categories of trauma. She states that direct trauma is when a person or community of people directly experiences trauma. Indirect trauma is when a person is traumatized by the trauma sustained by another person they identify closely with, witnessed trauma, or received information about devastation or violence. Insidious trauma is associated with the social status of a person being devalued because of a characteristic intrinsic to their identity is different from what is valued by those in power, such as gender, race, sexual orientation, and physical ability. Therefore, it often presents throughout the person's lifetime, starting at birth. Root also notes that women are more likely to be victims of direct and indirect trauma. See Maria Root, "Reconstructing the Impact of Trauma on Personality," in *Personality and Psychopathology: Feminist Reappraisals*, ed. Laura Brown and Mary Ballou (New York: Guilford, 1992), 239-40.

to continue to live after that day. This might have been more burdensome for women and girls if they lost the male protection of their fathers, husbands, or even brothers. However, as previously noted, some males could have survived this traumatic event.[574] Thus, the reader should continue to bear in mind the wide-reaching impact of the trauma in these survival texts and the numerous lives involved. Further, I emphasize that trauma from one event can be multiplied and/or ongoing based on the circumstances, which can necessitate compounded survival experiences.

The implied survival of non-Jewish girls and women in Esther 9 quickly expands when Esther requests a second day for the Jewish people to go out again and kill. Noah Hacham suggests the Jews were living peacefully, Haman and his family were the enemies of the Jews, and the Jews did not have any interest in harming non-Jews unless confronted.[575] Yet, after they have killed hundreds in Susa and thousands throughout the kingdom, and people are afraid of them because of Mordecai, they go out for the second day of killing. Helge Bezold argues Esther 9:1-16 can be viewed as an anti-imperial struggle as the narrative negotiates rejection, cooperation, and imitation of certain aspects of imperial power.[576] Gerrie Snyman states that the Jewish people mutate into their adversaries, and the oppressed become oppressors.[577] Likewise, Shirley Bahar asserts the Jews end up using the hateful and violent tactics of their enemies, and the victimized group becomes the victimizer.[578] This storyline reversal shows the Jewish people

[574] A table indicating the survival texts in Esther where others are likely survivors would essentially duplicate Table 4.1, except for the לקח column, which would only include Esther 2:8 and 2:16.

[575] Noah Hacham, "3 Maccabees and Esther: Parallels, Intertextuality, and Diaspora Identity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 4 (2007): 782.

[576] Bezold, "Violence and Empire: Hasmonean Perspectives on Imperial Power and Collective Violence in the Book of Esther," 46.

[577] Gerrie Snyman, "Race in South Africa: A Hidden Transcript Turned Public? The Problem of Identifying with Esther/Mordecai or Haman in the Book of Esther," *Scriptura* 84 (2013): 438-52, 50.

[578] Shirly Bahar, "Coming Out as Queen: Jewish Identity, Queer Theory, and the Book of Esther," *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 13, no. 3 (2012): 175.

are no longer marginalized and on the defense but are now feared and powerful since Mordecai gained prominence in Esther 9:3, and they have killed many people, likely leaving many others struggling to continue on after their deaths.

Shirley Castelnuovo notes that biblical stories illustrate how minoritized people survive. Esther appears to be a successful survival strategy orchestrated by a court Jew but emphasizes the Jewish people's reliance on the political obligations that bind Esther to the King for their survival.[579] Castelnuovo is correct that there is a reliance on an obligation to political power, and I also contend a reliance on unnecessary violence. Focusing on the violence in this chapter, I now turn to the language in Esther 9 to examine the traumatic experiences attached to the violence and envision its survival.

Survival Language

The ninth chapter of Esther includes three of the initial terms used in the *Lexicon of Survival*, תלה, הרג, and אבד. Starting with the semantic range of each term, I probed McSpadden's autobiography to see what type of language she used and if any of it was terminology in the *Lexicon of Survival*. In the telling of her experience McSpadden uses some of the terms included in the semantic range I engaged, including hang, kill, killers, death, execute, slaughter, slay, murder, die, destroy, lost, and perish.[580] She writes numerous times about *killing, killers,* and *murder*.[581]

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[579] Shirley Castelnuovo, "The Jewish Experience of Oppression as Portrayed in the Hebrew Bible: Leadership and Survival Strategies," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 3, no. 1/2 (1991): 33, 45.

[580] See Chapter 2 Appendix F. Semantic Range for אבד, Appendix G. Semantic Range for חרג, and Appendix H. Semantic Range for תלה for complete listing of semantic range.

[581] McSpadden does not speak of *hanging* in a sense it is used in Esther, nor does the terms *slaughter, destroy, slay, annihilate, or perish* appear in her writing.

Growing up in St. Louis as a young Black girl, she knew about violence and the police.[582] McSpadden speaks of her son being *killed* and *murdered*, relatives being *killed* and *murdered*, and other Black men being *killed* and *murdered* by the police. She even discusses her fear of being *killed*. To that point, while being subjected to a violent domestic assault, she prays, "God don't let me *die.*"[583] The majority of the other uses of *die* are not violent deaths except when she details her struggles after her son *died.* Eleven passages include the term *killer*, nine of which reference her son's killer. Her experience with violence in the city where she lived necessitated knowing how to remain safe and alive. Information passed on from her mother and grandmother and firsthand experiences all inform her decisions and actions. McSpadden writes about parents who have *lost* their children to violence caused by street violence or police brutality.[584] The only time *execute* is used is when her husband, Louis McSpadden, made a sign after the murder of Michael Brown that read, "FERGUSON POLICE JUST EXECUTED MY UNARMED SON."[585]

Looking beyond the initial terms and adding the cluster subfields, I explored McSpadden's words to see if and how cluster fields operated in her narrative. One cluster subfield that was generative in my search was the term *mother.* McSpadden, the mother of the executed Brown, writes in detail about her experience as a *mother* before and after his murder.

[582] McSpadden, *Tell the Truth*, "The police always had a presence over there." 58.

[583] McSpadden, *Tell the Truth*, 133.

[584] McSpadden, *Tell the Truth*, 210, 235, 239, 242, and 247.

[585] McSpadden, *Tell the Truth*, 181.

Notably, she speaks of *mothers* whose sons have been *killed* in several instances.[586] Further, she states, "I was just a *mother* who was refusing to give up," which underlines her survival.[587]

Another cluster subfield term utilized in McSpadden's narrative is *blood.* She is specifically describing the "*blood*-covered white sheet" that covered Brown's dead body and the *blood*-stained concrete where his body lay in the street for hours. Additionally, McSpadden asserts the police killed her son in cold *blood*. There is also more than one situation where her own *blood* was shed as she encountered violence.[588] I notice how the term *blood* is often coupled with violence in McSpadden's narrative, communicating a traumatic event that necessitates a survival experience.

Lastly, in McSpadden's autobiography, she verbalizes the pain she feels and her emotions when she cries. The word *cry* is used over forty times in *Tell the Truth*. Almost half of the usages are references to McSpadden *crying.* Standing at the casket holding her son's body, she began to *cry*; when her son was sick, she broke down *crying*. It is also a sign of survival that her tears are shed at the points of trauma and pain. As I examined McSpadden's words, it became apparent that the *Lexicon of Survival* is also present in her autobiography. The usage of the terms in her narrative reveals the trauma she endures and must survive.

I now turn to the language surrounding Zeresh and her family. Zeresh is not explicitly present and does not speak in the passages when violence is enacted against her family. However, she calls for violence when she tells Haman to *hang* Mordecai in Esther 5:14. The violence she suggests befalls her family, who is *killed* and *hanged*. These are the only two terms

[586] McSpadden, *Tell the Truth,* 241, 246, and 248.

[587] McSpadden, *Tell the Truth,* 229.

[588] McSpadden, *Tell the Truth,* 37, 133-134.

in the lexicon which are present in narratives surrounding Zeresh. Still, violence emerges from these texts.

Zeresh is interpreted as being as violent and ruthless as her husband, though seldom is consideration given to her perspective. Perhaps she is advising her husband to *hang* only the one person with whom he had a problem. It seems reasonable to surmise that Zeresh would also be accustomed to violence in her surroundings. Life in the Persian court was perilous with the constant jockeying for position and power.[589] Her husband was a member of the royal court; there had been plots to kill the king and others *hanged*.[590] It must be noted that it was Haman's idea to attempt to annihilate the Jewish people. Nothing in the text shows she was part of the evil plan. Any hatred toward Jewish people could have simply been her husband's issue, not hers. She told him since Mordecai was Jewish, his plan would fail.[591] Her husband's hatred and plan end with her losing her sons, her home, and her husband.

The terminology in Esther 9 and McSpadden's autobiography suggests they both had experience with violent trauma involving their children's murder, this shared site of trauma necessitated survival. Further, because their environments were violent, it likely required some understanding of how to maneuver to safety and survival. These two women had the horrific experience of watching their dead children on display. How did they manage to survive that experience? In the case of Zeresh, how does one survive losing everything?

[589] Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, *King and Court in Ancient Persia 559 to 331 BCE* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 126.

[590] See Esth 2:21.

Survival Strategies

Unlike McSpadden, Zeresh most likely did not grow up in poverty and her marrying a member of the royal court suggests she probably came from a family of means. With the presence of many socioeconomic groups in Susa and throughout the Persian empire, what is likely was that with the death of her husband and sons and the loss of her home, Zeresh faced a dramatic change in financial status and social location.[592] According to Victor Matthews, widows could become the subject of physical and economic abuse without the protection of their husbands.[593] I argue as an implied survivor she would have to struggle to survive the initial trauma of their deaths and the continuing trauma of economic insecurity of being a widow without sons. Thus, survival for her and others is not a one-time event, even if the trauma stems from a single occurrence.

After Lezley McSpadden endured the murder of her child, she had to learn how to deal with this different type of loss, and she turned to other women who had also had a child murdered by the police to help her survive. This was her first time truly opening to a support system outside of her family as she went to therapy, and she met with Sabrina Fulton, the mother of Trayvon Martin, and Valerie Bell, Sean Bell's mother.[594] Each of these women survived what

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[592] Haideh Salehi-Esfahani, "Rule of Law: A Comparison Between Ancient Persia and Ancient Greece," *Iranian Studies* 41, no. 5 (2008): 644.

[593] Matthews, "Marriage and Family in the Ancient Near East," 22.

[594] Trayvon Martin was a seventeen-year-old unarmed Black boy murdered on February 26, 2012, after being stalked and fatally shot by a community watch member George Zimmerman in Sanford, FL. Sean Bell was killed when plainclothes undercover New York Police fired a total of fifty rounds on November 25, 2006, in Queens, New York. There were charges in both of these cases, but the defendants were found not guilty. It is my position that these were murders. See *History.com*, "Florida Teen Trayvon Martin is Shot and Killed," November 12, 2013. Access Date June 30, 2022. https://cnnpressroom.blogs.cnn.com/2014/08/25/cnn-exclusive-three-grieving-mothers-michaelbrown/. Ryan Sit and Leonard Greene, "Ten Years Later, Sean Bell's Family Still Struggling to Understand Why Cops Opened Fire−And how They Got Away with It," New York Daily News, November 20, 2016. Accessed October 5, 2022. https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/sean-bell-loved-struggling-understand-death-article-1.2880295

she was going through, and they let her know it was okay to scream and let the pain out.[595] Again, this aligns with Delores Williams' life-line politic of developing strong bonds with other women and men.[596] McSpadden was able to learn from other women and get the tools and support she needed to continue after the murder of her child.

In addition to leaning on other women, McSpadden began actively working against the state-sanctioned violence that claimed her son's life and supported other mothers who lost their children. She created Rainbow of Mothers for all mothers who lost a child to street violence, gun violence, excessive police force, or just untimely death due to illness.[597] In the vein of Mamie Till and other mothers whose children were killed and turned to activism, this part of McSpadden's work was part of her survival.[598] I identify this pursuit as a life-line politic of challenging government authority.

Further, Anne Marie Mingo argues, "confronting state-sanctioned violence requires challenging the ways that we see, hear, advocate, and remember Black women victims."[599] Extending Mingo's argument, I assert the confrontation of state-sanctioned violence helps one

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[595] McSpadden, *To Tell the Truth*, 239.

[596] Delores S Williams, "Women's Oppression and Lifeline Politics in Black Women's Religious Narratives," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 1, no. 2 (1985): 65-66.

[597] McSpadden, *To Tell the Truth*, 243.

[598] Mamie Till was the mother of Emmet Till, a fourteen-year-old boy who was brutally beaten, murdered, and thrown into the river and August 28, 1955, while visiting family in Money, MI, for allegedly flirting with a white woman. His mother insisted on having an open casket to show the world what the racist murderers did to her son. See Mamie Till-Mobley and Christopher Benson, *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime that Changed America* (New York: Random House, 2005); Ed O'Keefe and Aaron Blake, "Trayvon Martin's Mother asks Congress to Clarify 'Stand Your Ground' Laws: Sabrina Fulton Says Her Son 'Was Not Going to Get Cigarettes or Bullets or Condoms' The Night he was Killed," *Washington Post*, October 29, 2013. Accessed September 29, 2022. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2013/10/29/sybrina-fulton-asks-congress-to-help-clarify-stand-your-ground-laws/.

[599] AnneMarie Mingo, "Speaking to Stop the Silence: A Womanist Ethical Confrontation of Injustice," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 37, no. 1 (2021): 5-25, 7.

also to hear, see, and remember other victims and those who survive their deaths. To that end, McSpadden sought justice for the murder of her child and for laws to be changed so that other mothers would not have to suffer the pain that she did. Her experience made her uniquely qualified to speak to the need for change, the depth of her trauma, and the systemic injustices that resulted in her son becoming a statistic.

Lezley McSpadden made sure that she spoke for herself, her son, and other mothers who faced the murder of a child. "I want lawmakers to think about me and my family and other families that need closure and the truth. The death of my son and all the other unarmed victims of police-involved shootings whose deaths must not be in vain. Their blood cries for answers from the streets."[600] After successfully organizing an event for mothers, she realized the power of her voice and that she could reach people. Using her voice, pain, and passion was essential for her survival.

McSpadden narrating the murder of her son and subsequent struggles paints a vivid picture of this trauma and her aim to survive. I was able to identify survival strategies she used that Delores Williams names as life-line politics. I assert that seeing the survival strategies used by McSpadden can help one imagine the efforts made by Zeresh in her struggle to survive her multiple losses and traumatic experiences. Though these two women have differences in their lives and experiences, the shared loss and traumatic event produces an image of a hurting mother that should not be unattended. It is essential that McSpadden had the opportunity to tell her story with her voice after her voice being suppressed for so long. Her survival is now documented, and

[600] McSpadden, *Tell the Truth*, 245.

Zeresh's survival is implied. If Zeresh could tell her own story, what other issues would arise for consideration? How could her story help others struggling to survive their traumas?

Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the survival texts from Esther 9 and Zeresh's experience and names her as an implied survivor. Understanding survival as the struggle for continued existence after a traumatic event allows the reader to see Zeresh as a survivor, yet different from the young virgin girl survivors in Chapter 2. The young virgin girls were survivors of sexual trauma, a direct trauma they personally experienced, and had to assess how they would continue to exist after that traumatic experience. For Zeresh, the traumatic experience was not the actual violence, but the loss experienced as a result of the violence, and she experienced indirect trauma. Since her husband and sons are the named murder victims, and there is nothing to indicate she died, she is an implied survivor. I argue the *Lexicon of Survival* identifies numerous possible survival instances, and each of the occurrences culminates in different types of survivors who are forced to figure out how to keep going after a traumatic event. These survival instances may have a wide-ranging impact and create multiple survivors and/or an ongoing struggle for survival.

This chapter illuminates survival texts from the *Lexicon of Survival,* where there is an implied survivor and when survival occurs due to the loss of life of a relative or loved one. Thus, indicating an extended usefulness for additional scholarship on survival. In addition, in this chapter, I analyzed the biblical text and scholarship on Zeresh and shifted her from a marginal object to the subject, showing other layers of her identity, including being a mother. Examining Zeresh as a non-Jewish mother of murdered

children centers the experience of a non-Jewish woman survivor in the Hebrew Bible. Though she is an implied survivor, her indirect trauma of a loss of a child due to murder is similar to the experience of Lezley McSpadden. Both women suffered significant losses. One who has lost her husband is a widow, but no single term refers to a parent who has lost their child.

I assert these two mothers have the same type of traumatic event in which they must survive, and McSpadden's story provides insight into the pain and struggles Zeresh may have experienced. Thus, I read Esther 9 and McSpadden's autobiography in tandem. After carefully comparing the language of both narratives, I determined how the terminology of the *Lexicon of Survival* functions within the survival texts of the bible and contemporary survival narratives. The language in both narratives includes terms from the *Lexicon of Survival*, again indicating it can help to identify survival instances correctly.

I demonstrate how the language of the *Lexicon of Survival* functions in traumatic survival instances of other violent actions such as murder. This terminology again does indicate traumatic experiences in which one must navigate survival. In my reading, Zeresh struggled to continue to not only live on but exist after the murder of her family. I argue she has also struggled to be seen and heard. Finally, reading their stories together, I identify McSpadden's survival strategies that Zeresh could have also used and articulated a survival narrative for rendering her experience. The trauma-informed womanist survival narrative for Zeresh centers her experience and amplifies the experience of implied survivors. Finally, this chapter adds to the field of scholarship on Zeresh.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

Entering this project with the image of Lesley McSpadden in the middle of Canton Street crying over the murder of her son permanently etched in my mind, the question of how one survives such a significant loss arose. What does it take for a person to continue existing after a traumatic event? While reading Esther with this lingering question in mind and pondering what else this often-visited story could reveal led me to consider the question of survival. My question stemmed from seeing trauma in the experiences of McSpadden and other survivors of sexual abuse who came forward in the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements. Thus, I contemplated how trauma, and womanism, which center on the experience of Black women, inform a study of survival.

After reviewing Esther, the history of scholarship, and recognizing that a common interpretation is that it is a story of Jewish survival, in Chapter 1, I question if there are other narratives of survival. If one were to focus on distinct aspects of the story in Esther, are there other stories of survival? What does survival look like in Esther and throughout the Hebrew Bible when not focused on the survival of Israelite males? I note that survival in the Hebrew Bible has not been explored in scholarship. I establish that with the scope of studies on Esther using various hermeneutics and reading it as numerous genres, none examine survival outside of the Jewish experiences. Further, though reading biblical texts as survival literature and studying survival throughout biblical scholarship, none focus on the survival of non-Jewish characters or define survival.

The three components for consideration in my methodology for examining Esther are survival, womanism, and trauma theory. Combining trauma theory with womanist interpretation, I develop my trauma-informed womanist hermeneutic to engage the question of survival—

particularly, the survival of women in the Hebrew Bible. I propose reading Esther with the autobiographies of Black women to aid in identifying and understanding survival strategies. I argue a trauma-informed womanist interpretation could bring new insights to the study of Esther, womanism, trauma, and survival.

In chapter 2, I survey previous studies on survival and survivors and observe that survival is not defined. Therefore, I define survival as the continued existence after a traumatic event. I examine survival widely throughout the Hebrew Bible and center on the survival experiences of women and girls. I identify seven initial terms to identify survival in Esther לקח ("to take"), תלה ("hang"), שמד ("destroy"), אבד ("die, be destroyed"), הרג ("kill"), מלט ("escape"), and הצלה ("deliverance") and document every use of each term throughout the Hebrew Bible in my lexical work. In addition, I capture cluster subfields, which indicate conflict, action, weapons, and relationships near the initial term. Analyzing each term, I establish a semantic field and review each use of the term. Since I am particularly interested in the survival of women and girls, I employ an inclusive reading strategy to highlight the presence of women and girls in the biblical text and to ascertain if they are in danger.

As the fruit of my research, I develop a *Lexicon of Survival* and identify 983 survival passages in the Hebrew Bible. Of these, 512 are survival experiences of women and girls. I demonstrate that the *Lexicon of Survival* can identify terminology that indicates survival experiences within biblical narratives. Finally, using a trauma-informed womanist hermeneutic, I use the text to identify those who have survived and amplify their voices. I conclude there are distinct types of survivors in the survival texts, those directly impacted by trauma and those who remain after the violence, the implied survivor.

Focusing on Esther 2, a survival text from the *Lexicon of Survival,* chapter three centers on young virgin girls gathered by the king's order in the passage; I argue these are girls and not women who are *taken*, sexually trafficked, and abused. I read the passage intertextually with Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Angelou, like the girls, endures the interpersonal trauma of sexual abuse. Exploring Angelou's language alongside Esther 2 using a trauma-informed womanist hermeneutic with childist interpretation and narrative criticism, I construct a survival narrative that centers on the experience of the young virgin girl. Khina's story emphasizes the presence and experience of the young virgin girl and reveals the multitude of instances of abuse and survival that reach far beyond the primary character Esther. This narrative compels the reader to see and consider the prevalence of sexual abuse against girls, which merits additional critique and scholarship. I maintain that with the *Lexicon of Survival,* one could locate other survivors of interpersonal trauma, including sexual abuse, for further study.

In chapter four, I shift the focus from the young virgin girls (e.g., Esther and the Jewish people) who are actual survivors of violence to the implied survivor, Zeresh, who is the wife of Haman. I conclude that Zeresh has been ignored in scholarship, and when she is addressed, she is often viewed negatively. This chapter looks closely at Zeresh and moves past the typical interpretation that focus focuses on her as a wife, her words, or comparisons to other biblical women. Here I provide an interpretation of Zeresh that goes beyond her status as Haman's wife and her words. I name Zeresh as not only a wife but a mother, counselor, and implied survivor of the murder of her husband and children. My interpretation considers her as an individual and a mother, recognizing that for me being a mother is an integral part of my experience and

womanist maternal thought is always present.[601] Centering her experience and reading it alongside the experience of Lezley McSpadden, I raise the issue of a mother struggling to continue after the murder of her child. In the case of Zeresh, her ten children. This interpretation presents an in-depth alternative view of Zeresh that adds to the field of scholarship on women, mothers, and survivors in the biblical text.

I conclude Zeresh is an implied survivor of the murder of her husband and ten sons. Noting there is nothing in the text to indicate she is deceased, I read the passage as her struggling to survive this traumatic event. Zeresh is an implied survivor because she is not the actual victim of the violence but one who must figure out how to continue after such violence is inflicted on a loved one in Esther 9. Comparably, I record ten survival experiences for women and girls in Esther 9, more than any other chapter in Esther. Next, I explain how the second day of violence requested by Esther increases the number of women and girls forced to discover how to continue to exist after the murder of their loved ones. Subsequently, I clarify the wide-reaching impact of the traumatic events and the lives impacted.

Furthermore, by identifying Zeresh as an implied survivor, I highlight the presence of those who may not experience direct interpersonal trauma personally but are unquestionably impacted by indirect trauma and loss. It is easy to read violent narratives in the biblical text and consider the named persons impacted by the traumatic violence. However, a requisite of trauma-informed womanist hermeneutic is the expansion of the circle of concern to others related to or

[601] Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder articulates womanist maternal thought is an approach to understanding what it means to be Black, woman, and a mother. For Buckhanon Crowder, being a mother is always a significant part of a mother's identity. It does not matter what profession or other relationship such as wife, or sister, they are also a mother which often influences decisions and actions. Stephanie R. Buckhanon Crowder, *When Momma Speaks: The Bible and Motherhood from a Womanist Perspective* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 24.

in the community with the directly impacted person. Accordingly, considering those who may not be named but who are still living after the violent acts.

In reading the passages that include Zeresh's experience with Lezley McSpadden's autobiography, *Tell the Truth, and Shame the Devil,* I illustrate how both women experienced violent trauma involving the murder of their child. In each instance, I demonstrate how the *Lexicon of Survival* functions in biblical and contemporary survival narratives. In addition, I look at both of their experiences for survival strategies. Centering on Zeresh's experience, I develop a survival narrative with Zeresh as an implied survivor. This survival narrative requires the reader to imagine the experience of a marginalized character and expands their view beyond the central characters' experience. Specifically, the reader is directed to the survival experience of a non-Jewish woman in Esther. Redirecting the reader's attention to other characters encourages them to consider marginalized people's experiences.

This Project and Going Forward

This project intertwines the three initial components of survival, womanism, and trauma theory, with Esther contributing a resource to not only the field of biblical scholarship but also trauma studies and womanism. My exploration of Esther and survival has produced the *Lexicon of Survival,* articulated a trauma-informed womanist hermeneutics, analyzed sexual abuse in the biblical text, violence in the biblical text, types of survivors, and the use of narratives.

This project focuses on individual, interpersonal trauma moving beyond the conventional concern of Jewish communal survival. To further advance the field, scholars must examine traumatic events impacting individuals and communities.[602] Julia Claassens agrees that "Trauma

[602] Sonya Andermahr and Silvia Pellicer-Ortín, *Trauma Narratives and Herstory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1-12.

hermeneutics, especially with transdisciplinary focus, is proving useful in its ability to open up new vistas, to offer novel answers, to old questions, and to reframe experiences and texts in such a way that it rings true to a new generation of readers."[603] My contribution to this scholarship is that when placed explicitly in conversation with womanism, creating the trauma-informed womanist hermeneutic generates even more layered questions and valuable perspectives to biblical scholarship. The trauma-informed womanist hermeneutic utilized in this project illustrates how consideration for the experience of all people with attentive care to their trauma can generate questions, narratives, and strategies for survivors, all of which are essential.

In contributing to the field of biblical studies, Esther, trauma, womanism, gender, literary studies, sociology, and narrative criticism, a trauma-informed womanist hermeneutic can raise questions about other trauma experiences not addressed in this project or different questions about survival or sexual abuse. The questions put forth can also help diverse readers beyond religious academic disciplines with their own history of survival with their narratives and strategies. Employing the trauma-informed womanist hermeneutic while drawing from the *Lexicon of Survival* and adding childist interpretation, narrative criticism, and Black women's autobiographies, I have offered two examples of survival narratives in Esther. The components included in the understanding and the interpretations in these two narratives provide a distinct original picture of Esther for consideration.

It is well-established in scholarship that biblical writers and subsequent generations of interpreters have marginalized and disregarded women and girls.[604] The Hebrew masculine

[603] L. Juliana M. Claassens, *Writing and Reading to Survive: Biblical and Contemporary Trauma Narratives in Conversation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2020), 6.

[604] See Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible* (New York: Arno, 1972), 48; Carol L. Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 34; Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Women's Bible Commentary*, 3rd ed.

plural and the translations of certain terms can bury the presence of women and girls in the biblical text. The *Lexicon of Survival* makes it clear how ubiquitous this is in the biblical text. This inclusive reading strategy recovers and highlights their presence. In addition, this study quantifies that the presence of women and girls will typically double with an inclusive reading strategy. Increasing gender inclusivity, intentionally naming female characters and girls who are often occluded in biblical interpretation is advantageous to scholarship and ecclesial communities. Inclusive readings benefit not only the marginalized but also those who have been historically centered.[605] Cheryl Anderson states that the Bible can only be more inclusive with interpretation.[606] An intentional inclusive reading strategy in biblical studies could serve as a segue into promoting inclusive language in ecclesial communities. Furthermore, intentional inclusive reading of the Hebrew Bible was crucial to this discovery of the survival trope in the Hebrew Bible.

This project introduces the *Lexicon of Survival,* which can be used to study survival in other books and narratives throughout the Bible, in social analysis, in political critique, in anthropological discovery, and by any scholarship regarding the human experience. Adding more terms could improve the Lexicon and amplify other characters' experiences in the biblical text, which are often neglected in scholarship. Future studies could focus on additional violent terms such as: (violence), דם (bloodshed), עשק (oppress), ינה (tyrannize), ענה (afflict), לחץ (afflict, torment), and שלט (to gain dominion) used by Matthew Lynch and Francisco-Javier Ruiz-Ortiz in

(Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 44, 114; Wilda Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*, First ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017), 50.

[605] Cheryl B. Anderson, *Ancient Laws and Contemporary Controversies: The Need for Inclusive Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.

[606] Anderson, *Ancient Laws and Contemporary Controversies: The Need for Inclusive Biblical Interpretation*, 157.

their studies.[607] The terms that Susanne Scholz suggests signify sexual coercion, such as נגע (to touch [a woman]), צחק (to fondle), and קרב (to approach), could also generate possible survival instances for study.[608] In addition, the cluster subfields I use in creating the *Lexicon of Survival* could be used as primary terms for the study. I am confident that exploring words such as weapons, land, crying, and more may help reveal more survival instances for inquiry. To be clear, additional terms do not have to be limited to those listed above or the cluster subfield, any term that could indicate a site of trauma should be considered for the lexicon.

Another future study could expand the *Lexicon of Survival* by examining terms when they are uttered by God or attributed to the Divine. For example, the MT of Esther does not have any explicit references to God. Therefore, while some survival instances located with the initial terms are attributed to God, none are examined in this study. Would survival look different when God is explicitly present in the passages? Who must survive when the trauma is attributed to the actions or words of God? What does the survival of non-Israelites look like? These questions and others could be deliberated as the *Lexicon of Survival* could help produce beneficial scholarship.

Further, the *Lexicon of Survival* allows one to detect survival not only in biblical texts but also in contemporary contexts. The autobiographies of Maya Angelou and Lezley McSpadden include terminology in the lexicon, and the language functions similarly to how it functions in the biblical text. While I chose to use the lexicon to help build survival narratives, the usage is not limited to survival narratives. Moreover, I engage the scholarship of Black women. I expect there may be refreshing questions and readings of the survival text with other Bakhtinian

[607] Matthew Lynch, *Portraying Violence in the Hebrew Bible: a Literary and Cultural Study* (New York; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 269; Francisco-Javier Ruiz-Ortiz, *The Dynamics of Violence and Revenge in the Hebrew Book of Esther*, vol. 175 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017), 67-82.

[608] Susanne Scholz, *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 22.

intertextual readings, queer readings, or other minoritized communities such as Latinx/Latino/a, Indigenous, and Asian.

This project adds to the field of womanist interpretation in several ways. First, the project demonstrates how womanist interpretation can be paired with other theories and methods for innovative readings of the biblical text that resonate with contemporary readers. As Renita Weems notes, it is essential for Black women to use whatever means necessary to recover the voice of the oppressed in the biblical text, and I add to help the modern reader.[609] Secondly, I build on Delores Williams' hermeneutic of survival, an original concept of her womanist biblical interpretation. Situating questions of this project on survival, I identify survival texts to illustrate the survival tradition she suggested was present in scripture. I conclude that the hermeneutic of survival is attainable and valuable because it allows one to reevaluate the biblical text, others, and even self. Survival is often viewed as instinctual; however, using it as a guiding question or concern permits the reader to see actions in the text or their own lives differently. Particularly, by using the voices of Black women to shape the understanding of survival, there is a shift in viewpoint and awareness of the experiences of those who are not centered in the text or society. Third, Williams argues there is a connection between covenant and promise in the Hebrew Bible and Christian Scriptures with survival and quality of life. This project does not address this connection, but the *Lexicon of Survival* makes it easier to select texts to assess for exploration of the connection. Lastly, this project increases womanist interpretations of Hebrew Bible texts. Though womanist interpretation is expanding, more scholarship is available on Second

[609] Renita J. Weems, "Reading Her Way through the Struggle:African American Women and the Bible," in *Stony the Road We Trod*, ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis: 1517 Media, 1991), 72-73.

Testament texts.[610] This project makes available another resource on womanist interpretation for scholars and ecclesial communities.

A further value of this project is that it names and addresses sexual abuse in the biblical text using a womanist trauma-informed approach. The #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements highlight pervasive sexual abuse in contemporary culture. I maintain it has been consistently widespread in cultures across time, and not naming and attending to the issue and those impacted by it has profound implications. Emily Cogan states, "by refusing to name the severity of abuse described in the Hebrew text, however, readers risk reinscribing ancient ideas of acceptable sexual behavior, potentially normalizing violence against marginalized others."[611] I not only name the issue of abuse but also raise awareness of the experiences and amplify the voices of silenced girls. This project differs from other studies that only name the problems in the biblical text, many of which deconstruct or reject the text. Louis Stulman argues, "although a trauma reading finds violence utterly reprehensible, it refuses to banish it from the text; instead, it reads

[610] In the past ten years more womanist monographs have been released on Second Testament texts than Hebrew Bibles. In Second Testament see Angela N. Parker, *If God Still Breathes, Why Can't I?: Black Lives Matter and Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans 2021); Febbie C. Dickerson, *Luke, Widows, Judges, and Stereotypes* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2019); Shively T. J. Smith, *Strangers to Family: Diaspora and 1 Peter's Invention of God's Household* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016); Shanell T. Smith, *The Woman Babylon and the Marks of Empire: Reading Revelation with a Postcolonial Womanist Hermeneutics of Ambiveilence* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014). Mitzi Smith and Stephanie Crowder engage both testaments in Mitzi J. Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social (In)justice, Intersectionality, and Biblical Interpretation* (Eugene: Cascade, 2018); Stephanie R. Buckhanon Crowder, *When Momma Speaks: The Bible and Motherhood from a Womanist Perspective*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016). In Hebrew Bible Kimberly D. Russaw, *Revisiting Rahab: Another Look at the Woman of Jericho* (Nashville: Wesley's Foundery, 2021); Ericka Shawndricka Dunbar, *Trafficking Hadassah: Collective Trauma, Cultural Memory, and Identity in the Book of Esther and in the African Diaspora* (New York: Routledge, 2021); Wilda Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017); Wilda Gafney, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, vol. 38 (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2017). Gay Byron and Vanessa Lovelace's edited volume is comparably divided between the two testaments but still has more essays on Second Testament text. See Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace, *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016).

[611] Emily Colgan, "Reinscribing Rape: Tracing Connections Between the Experience of Women and Land in Biblical and Contemporary Texts," in *Rape Culture, Gender Violence, and Religion* (Manhattan: Springer, 2018).

the violence as an integral part of a contested communal dialogue over the meaning of disaster."[612]

Biblical scholarship must continue to acknowledge, address, and critique sexual abuse and violence in the text because there are lives at stake far beyond those named therein. Religious institutions are a potentially powerful resource for preventing and ending violence and sexual abuse against women and children.[613] As the #ChurchToo movement has demonstrated, it can also be the perpetrator of abuse and violence. It is imperative that these institutions use their power to end this abuse and violence. Further scholarship can shape questions and conversations for religious institutions and their communities. Resources such as this project can open dialogue in these religious communities to discuss sexual abuse and help survivors and other supporters in the community. It is my hope that these conversations foster caring spaces for survivors to self-identify and share their survival narratives. Other sexual abuse survival narratives could be developed using other survival texts and as an initial point for discussion and generation of contemporary narratives.

In addition to sexual violence, I underscore physical violence in Esther and elevate the people in the biblical text who are victims or indirectly impacted. Examining the second day of violence and the request to hang the ten sons of Haman, I identify numerous people throughout the kingdom who were not Jewish, including Zeresh, who would have been forced to determine how to survive after these massacres. This project considers these victims as survivors. As previously stated, the *Lexicon of Survival* could be used to identify other instances of violence

[612] Louis Stulman, "Reading the Bible as Trauma Literature: The Legacy of the Losers," *Conversations with the Biblical World* 34 (2014).

[613] Michael L. Penn and Rahel Nardos, *Overcoming Violence Against Women and Girls: The International Campaign to Eradicate a Worldwide Problem* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 162.

and examine the victims and survivors. The inclusion of more terms will increase the number of survival instances and survivors.

This work is likewise essential for ecclesial communities to have a resource to engage in discussing violence in the biblical text. Helping congregants attend more closely to the individual lives in the narratives and not just the overarching story may transform their engagement with biblical texts. I argue this could also be used in conversations on the presence or absence of God during trauma. More work on the *Lexicon*, such as terms uttered by God, will significantly improve the resource.

"Biblical trauma narratives can be said to serve as a means by which we as readers may bridge the vast divide in space and time that exists between our own context and that of the biblical writers many centuries ago."[614] The production of survival narratives amplifies the voices of survivors while offering counterstories of individual non-Israelite survival. Hilde Lindeman Nelson offers,

> "Counterstories, then are tools designed to repair the damage inflicted on identities by abusive power systems. They are purposive acts of moral definition developed on one's own behalf or on behalf of others. They set out to resist, to varying degrees, the stories that identify certain groups of people as targets for ill-treatment. Their aim is to reidentify such people as competent members of the moral community and in doing so enable their moral agency."[615]

For Nelson, counterstories help uproot harmful stories that constitute a subgroup's identity from the perspective of an abusive dominant group which can alter the person's self-perception and the dominant group's perception of the subgroup. Nelson further asserts that counterstories are depictive of human experience, selective in what they depict, interpretative as they offer a

[614] Claassens, *Writing and Reading to Survive*, 3.

[615] Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), xii.

particular way of construing the acts and events, and connective by connecting relationships among their elements and to other stories.[616]

Julianna Claassens suggests, "trauma victims need trauma narratives in order to become trauma survivors."[617] I argue that when a trauma victim shares their narrative, it becomes a survival narrative. As such, survival narratives not only acknowledge the trauma and the experience but also communicate how one continued to exist after the trauma. In this project, I generate survival narratives with an internalized focus on behalf of those who were silenced. I assert that survival narratives with an internalized focus of survivors could assist survivors of various abuse in improving their perception of themselves and empowering them to share their own survival narratives. Sharing these narratives helps others see the trauma and experiences they may have overlooked or ignored.

I demonstrated a trauma-informed womanist hermeneutic, the *Lexicon of Survival,* and survival narratives have cut pieces for a picture of Esther not previously considered. These critical pieces also add images of non-Jewish women and girls and their experiences into the picture. The story, typically viewed as a Jewish survival story, now makes more visible the survival of women and girls who are not Jewish intertwined as counterstories.

In conclusion, this project confirms for me the importance of intentionally considering the experiences of marginalized people, including their trauma, when reading the biblical text. As Ellen Davis argues, "The interpretation of sacred texts may be a matter of life and death, and whose life is at risk shifts according to time and circumstances, none of our religious

[616] Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*, 12.

[617] Claassens, *Writing and Reading to Survive*, 2.

communities can afford to be naïve about that danger."[618] Thus, "survival is not an academic skill"[619] for me. I must always be conscious of survival, even when it is not my own. The content of this project can serve as a base for sustaining the importance and seriousness of survival, for which I hope further scholarship is developed.

[618] Ellen F. Davis, *Opening Israel's Scriptures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 385.

[619] Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing, 2007), 112.

Appendix A. Survival Terms

	DCH	HALOT	NRSV	ESV	JPS
מלט	escape, survive	flee to safety, save someone			survive
מצא	be left over, survive; survivor				survivor, surviving
נמצא	survivor, refugee				
עמד	remain, endure, continue, survive	to remain standing	survives	survives	survive
שאר	remain, be left over, be left behind, stay back, escape, survive	to survive, escape	survive	survived, survivor	survive, survivor, surviving, survival
שארית		remnant, remainder of Judah and Israel who managed to survive	Survive	survive	survivor
נשארים				survive	survived, survive
קום		to endure			survive
תקומה	power to stand, ability to survive				
פליט	survivor, escaped one, fugitive	survivor	Surviving	surviving	survive, survivor, surviving
פליטה	survivor	survivor, survival, someone or something remaining	surviving, survived, survivor	survivor	
שרד	escape, flee, survivor	runaway from, escape			
שריד	survivor, escapee, refugee, remnant	those who survive, someone fleeing	survived, survive, survivor	survive, survived, survivor	survive, survivor
חי	living	life, existence			survival
יחיה					survive, survival
מחיה	survival				
יתר	remain, be left over	to be left over	survive, survived	surviving	survive, survivor, surviving
יצב	stand	be left behind			survive
ברת					survive
גלה	be exiled	go into exile, leave			survived

	DCH	HALOT	NRSV	ESV	JPS
אחרית				survivors	

Appendix B. Cluster Subfields Categories

Relationships	Conflict	Action	Weapon	Emotion	Others
concubines	ambush	abuse	armed	affliction	ashes
daughters	army	annihilate	arrow	anger	blood
daughters in law	battle	attacked	bow	anguish	bodies
maid	booty	attacks	gallows	cried	boils
married woman	captives	beat	hammer	crying	bones
mother	captivity	beheaded	knife	distress	bound
orphans	custody	birth	ropes	dread	calamity
secondary wives	defeat	buried	spear	fear	dead
servant woman	fight	burn	stone	feared	death
servants	fought	burned	sword	gasping	defiled
sister	hostages	captured	weapons	groaning	defiled woman
slave girl	overtook	carry		hates	die
slaves	plunder	conceive		hunger	disaster
widows	siege	conception		injured	enemies
wives	soldiers	crush		pain	enemy
	spoil	curses		tears	exile
	subdued	cut		terror	famine
	surrender	cut her		wrath	fetters
	surrounded	cut off			fire
	troops	delivered			girl
	war	destroy			Heads
	warriors	dispossess			illness
		escape			land
		execution			midwife
		fled			naked
		force			Nakedness
		hanged			Oppression
		harm			Pestilence
		hide			Plague
		humiliated			Possession
		hunt			Pregnant
		impale			prison
		killed			Prisoners
		lay			Promiscuous
		mourn			Prostitutes
		mourning			refuge

		murder			sackcloth
		offer him			sex
		offered him			sick
		overtake			sickness
		perish			snare
		pluck			survivors
		plucked off			thirst
		punish			violence
		punished			virgin
		pursue			virginity
		pursued			waste
		raid			whore
		rape			whored
		recover			whoredom
		rescue			whorings
		rescued			widowhood
		scrape			without covering
		seize			woman
		shut up			womb
		slain			
		slaughtered			
		slaughtering			
		sling			
		smash			
		stabbed			
		stole			
		stricken			
		strike			
		strip			
		strip your clothes			
		struck			
		struck			
		struck down			
		surrender			
		tear down			
		threw			
		thrust			
		trampled			
		trap			

		wail			
		weep			
		weeping			
		wept			
		whip			
		wounded			
		wounding			

Cluster Subfields with Terms

לקח	הרג	שמד	אבד	תלה	מלט	הצלה
abuse	ambush	affliction	afflict	army	army	none
ambush	annihilate	annihilate	affliction	cut	attacked	
anger	army	armed	anguish	death	blood	
army	attack(s)	attack	arm	gallows	bow	
arrow	attacked	battle	army	killed	burn	
ashes	battle	blood	blood	land	captives	
attack	blood	curses	burn	struck	captivity	
battle	bow	cut off	burned	warriors	captured	
beat	burn	dead	calamity	weapons	concubines	
beheaded	burned	death	captive		cried	
birth	captives	destroy	captives		cut off	
blood	captivity	destruction	crush		daughters	
bodies	captured	disaster	cry		dead	
boils	cry	dispossesses	cut		disaster	
bones	cut	dispossessed	cut off		fetters	
booty	daughter	enemies	destroyed		fire	
bound	dead	enemy	destroy		fled	
bow	death	escape	die		fled	
buried	delivered	fire	dies		flee	
burned	destroy	hunger	disaster		flee	

captives	destroyed	kill	disease		kill	
captivity	destroying	killed	dispossess		killed	
captured	die	land	distress		killed	
carry	died	nakedness	enemies		land	
conceive	disaster	overtake	enemy		orphan	
conception	enemies	plucked off	escape		pain	
concubine	enemy	plunder	fire		perish	
cried	escape	possession	hide		pursued	
crying	famine	purse	injured		raid	
custody	fear	servants	kill		secondary wives	
cut	feared	sickness	killed		seize	
cut her	fire	slaves	laid waste		seized	
daughter-in law	fled	spoil	land		servant	
daughters	gasping	struck	oppression		servants	
dead	hanged	sword	pain		slaughtered	
death	hid	swords	pestilence		snare	
defeat	hunt	thirst	pluck		snares	
defiled	land	whored	plunder		spear	
defiled woman	naked	wives	possession		stabbed	
destruction	pestilence		prostitutes		strike	
die	plunder		punished		struck	
died	prisoners		punishment		surrender	
divorced	pursue		pursue		survivors	
dread	raid		pursued		sword	
enemies	rape		refuge		swords	
enemy	rescue		servant		trap	
escape	siege		sick		war	
escaped	servants		slaves		wife	
execution	sister		smash		wives	

exile	slaughtering		snare			
exiled	slaves		strike			
famine	soldiers		survivor			
fetters	spear		survivors			
fight	striking		sword			
fire	struck		tear down			
fled	surrounded		terror			
force	survived		violence			
forces	sword		war			
fought	thrust		waste			
girl	virgin		weapons			
groaning	war		without covering			
hammer	warriors					
harm	weep					
hates	widows					
heads	wife					
hid	wives					
hide	wounded					
hostages	wounding					
humiliated	wrath					
hungry						
hunting						
illness						
impale						
killed						
knife						
land						
lay						

maid						
married woman						
midwife						
mother						
mourn						
mourning						
murder						
nakedness						
offer him						
offered him						
orphans						
overtook						
perish						
plague						
plunder						
possess						
pregnant						
prison						
prisoner						
promiscuous						
prostitute						
punish						
pursue						
ransom						
recover						
refuge						
rescued						
ropes						

sackcloth						
scrape						
seize						
servant woman						
sex						
sexual relations						
shut up						
siege						
sister						
slain						
slaughter						
slave girl						
slaves						
sling						
soldier						
spears						
spoil						
stabbed						
stole						
stone						
stricken						
strike						
strip						
strip your clothes						
struck						
struck down						
subdued						
surrender						

survivors						
swords						
tears						
terror						
thirsty						
threw						
thrust						
trample						
trampled						
troops						
uncover						
virgin						
virginity						
wail						
war						
warriors						
weapons						
weep						
weeping						
wept						
whip						
whore						
whoredom						
whorings						
widow						
widowhood						
wife (wives)						
woman						

womb						
wrath						

Appendix C. Semantic Range for לקח

DCH	HALOT	TLOT	NRSV	CEB	ESV
take	take	take something/ someone	take	taken	taken
take in	to take as a wife for oneself	cause to fetch	took	took	took
marry	take and go away with	grasp	taken	married	take
marriage	brought	seize	marry	made her	Marry
sexual intercourse usually of a women being taken by or for a man	fetched	conquer	got	found	seized
bring	took and carried away	removal	obtain	choose	get
brought	taken away		married	get	married
place	take away someone's wife		seized	bring	taking
removed	take as one's own property as slaves		get	carried	put
captured			bring	marries	captured
be taken away			carried	seized	received
receive			submit	intermarried	received
accepted			enters into marriage	picked up	brought
obtained			bringing	gave	accept
			captured	laid	
			received	captured	
			make her	captured	
			brought	become a wife	
			accept	brought	
			adopted	accept	

				find	

Appendix D. Women and Girls Taken

Verse	Surrounding words	Woman in text
Gen 4: 19	wives	Adah and Zillah
Gen 6:2	wives	daughters, wives/women
Gen 11:29	wife	Sarai and Milcah
Gen 12:5	wife, land	Sarai and women and children who were included in the people they acquired
Gen 12:15		Sarai
Gen 12:19	sister, wife	Sarai
Gen 12:19	sister, wife	Sarai
Gen 16:3	land, wife, slave girl	Sarai and Hagar
Gen 19:15	daughters, wife	Lot's wife and daughters
Gen 20:2	wife	Sarah
Gen 20:3	married woman	a woman (Sarah)
Gen 20:14	slaves	Sarah, female slaves/servants
Gen 21:21	wife, land	mother, (Egyptian) wife
Gen 24:61		maids, young women, and Rebekah
Gen 24:67	mother, wife	Sarah, Rebekah
Gen 25:1	wife	Keturah
Gen 25:20	daughter, sister, wife	Rebekah
Gen 26:34	daughter, wife	Judith and Basemath
Gen 28:2	wife, daughters	mother, wife, daughters of Laban
Gen 28:6	wife	woman, Canaanite woma/en
Gen 28:9	daughter, sister, wife, wives	Mahalath, daughter of Abraham's son Ishmael
Gen 29:23	daughter	Leah
Gen 30:9	maid, slave, wife	Leah, Zilpah

Gen 32:23 (22)	wives, slave	wives, maids, women servants, female servants, girl children
Gen 32:24 (23)		Jacob's wives, daughters, and female slaves
Gen 34:2	force, humiliated	Dinah
Gen 34:4	wife	Dinah
Gen 34:9	daughters	daughters
Gen 34:16	daughters	daughters, women, and girls included in people
Gen 34:17	daughter	daughter
Gen 34:21	land	daughters and wives, women and girl included in people
Gen 34:26	killed, sword	Dinah
Gen 36:2	wives, daughter	Canaanite women, daughter, Adah, and Oholibamah
Gen 36:6	wives, daughters, land	wives, daughters, other females in the household
Gen 38:2	daughter	Shua
Gen 38:6	wife	Tamar
Exod 2:1	wife	Levite woman
Exod 4:20	wife, land	wife, possibly daughters
Exod 6:20	wife, sister	Jochebed
Exod 6:23	wife, sister	Elisheba
Exod 6:25	wife, daughters	Unnamed wife of Eleazar/daughter of Putiel
Exod 18:2	wife	Zipporah
Exod 21:10	wife	woman, wife
Exod 34:16	daughters, wives, prostitute	daughters and wives
Lev 21:13	virgin, wife	woman, wife, virgin
Lev 21:14	divorced, defiled woman, prostitute, virgin	widow, divorced woman, defiled woman, prostitute, virgin, women, and girls included in people
Num 12:1		Miriam, Cushite woman

Deut 20:7	wife, battle	woman, fiancée
Deut 21:11	captives, wife	beautiful woman, wife
Deut 22:13	wife, hates	woman, wife
Deut 22:14	virginity, virgin	woman, virgin
Deut 24:1	wife	woman, wife
Deut 24:3	wife, hates	her (a woman), wife
Deut 24:4	wife, defiled, land	woman (her), wife
Josh 7:24		women and girls included in Israel and Achan's daughters
Judg 3:6	daughters, wives	wives, daughters, women, and girls of Israel
Judg 14:2	daughters, wife	mother, Philistine woman, daughters of the Philistines
Judg 14:3	wife	woman, mother daughters, women and girls included in people
Judg 14:3	wife	woman, mother daughters, women and girls included in people
Judg 14:8		Philistine woman
Judg 15:6	wife, burned	Samson's wife
Judg 19:1	concubine	concubine, secondary wife
Judg 19:28		secondary wife
1 Sam 8:13	daughters	daughters
1 Sam 8:16	slaves	female slaves
1 Sam 25:39	wife	Abigail
1 Sam 25:40	wife	Abigail
1 Sam 25:43	wife	Ahinoam
1 Sam 30:18	rescued, wives	David's two wives
1 Sam 30:19	spoil, daughter	daughters, other women
2 Sam 3:15		Michal
2 Sam 5:13	concubines, wives	concubines, secondary wives, wives, daughters
2 Sam 11:4	lay	Bathsheba (unnamed in this verse)

2 Sam 12:9	struck, wife, kill, sword	Bathsheba (unnamed in the text)
2 Sam 12:10	wife, kill, sword	Bathsheba (unnamed in the text)
2 Sam 12:11	wives	wives
2 Sam 14:2	mourning (woman)	a wise woman
2 Sam 20:3	concubines, secondary wives, sex, shut up, widowhood,	concubines, secondary wives, sex, widowhood
Jer 29:6	wives, daughters, marriage	daughters and wives
Ezek 16:20	daughters, whore	daughters
Ezek 23:10	nakedness, killed, daughters, sword	Oholah, daughters; women
Hos 1:2	wife, whoredom, land	wife, daughters included in children
Hos 1:3	daughter	Gomer
Ruth 4:13	wife, conceive, pregnant, conception	Ruth
Esth 2:7	mother, girl, daughter	Hadassah (Esther)
Esth 2:8	custody	Hadassah (Esther), young women
Esth 2:15	daughter	Hadassah (Esther), other women
Ezra 2:61	wife	daughter(s) of Barzillai
Neh 6:18	daughter, wife	daughter of Meshullam
Neh 7:63	daughters, wife	daughter(s) of Barzillai
1 Chr 2:19		Azubah, Ephrath
1 Chr 2:21	sexual relations	daughter of Machir
1 Chr 7:15	wife, sister, daughters	wives of Huppim and Shuppim, Maacah, Zelophehad's daughters
1 Chr 14:3	wives	wives and daughters of David
2 Chr 11:18	wife, daughter	Mahalath, Abihail, and Eliab
2 Chr 11:20	daughter	Maacah

Appendix E. Semantic Range for שמד

DCH	HALOT	TLOT	NRSV	CEB	ESV
destroy	destroyed	be exterminated	destroyed	destroy	destroyed
destroyed	exterminated human beings	destroyed	destroyed	eliminate	destroy
exterminated	exterminate	strike	demolish	eliminating	demolish
broom of destruction	made unusable	destroy	destroying	destroyed	utterly destroyed
completely destroy people		annihilate	utterly destroyed	totally destroyed	bringing ruin
		sacral law ban	defeat	wipe off	destruction
		physical destruction	bring to ruin	annihilate	wiped out
		visible expurgation	exterminated	crush	perish
		exterminate	wipe out	wiping out	consumed
		to desolate	cut off	wiped out	
			wiped out	annihilating	
			destruction	kill	
			perish	elimination	
			consumed	cut off	
			destroy	torn down	

Appendix F. Semantic Range for אבד

DCH	HALOT	TLOT	NRSV	CEB	ESV
die	to be destroyed	direct agent of destruction	ruined	destroyed	ruined
be destroyed	to exterminate	to lose	destroy	destroying	destroy
disappear	to become lost	be lost	perish	destroy	perish
kill	to be carried off	perish	perished	perish	perished
person destroyed	to perish	lost forever	lost	disappear	undone
be about to die	continuously	to wander about	undone	eliminating	destruction
be in danger of death	to destroy	run away	destroyed	wipe out	destroying
destruction	to go astray	to destroy	destroying	loses	destroyed
be lost	to stray		demolish	starving	loses
stray	fail		blot out	dead	wandering
something lost	to cause to perish		loses	annihilates	void
perish	to obliterate from		wandering	die	lost
cease	to lead someone to disaster		destruction	not thoughtful	wiped out
vanish	ill made		void	vanish	fail
fade away	broken vessel		strayed	lost	banish
lose	to foil plans		wiped out	decimated	none remain
waste	disheartened		fail	perishes	stilling
place of escape	to squander		stilling	fail	nothing
deliverance	to give up as lost		nothing	disappeared	stones
	to drive someone mad		vanished	reduced to rubble	ruin
			stones	silence	broken

			ruined	no place	gone
			ruin	ravaged	squanders
			disappeared	gone	perishing
			broken	perished	corrupts
			nothing	vanished	perishes
			escape	dispose of	annihilate
			wretched	silencing	annihilated
			gone	faded	killed
			squander	obliterate	
			corrupts	stones	
			annihilate	no refuge	
			annihilated	devastation	
				exterminate	
				pass away	
				nothing	
				kill	
				dying	
				losing	
				corrupts	
				shattered	

Appendix G. Semantic Range for הרג

DCH	HALOT	TLOT	NRSV	CEB	ESV
kill	to kill	none	killed	killed	killed
slay	slay		kill	kill	kill
murder	kills		kills	kills	kills
assassination	arrange the death		destroy	death	killing
other small scale personal violence	kill judicially		death	execute	murderer
slay as retribution	kill in battle		slaughtering	killing	slain
punishment	killing		put to death	slain	slay
perversion of justice	slaughter		killing	slaughtered	slayers
slay at the command	to be killed		murdered	murdered	slaughter
killing animals	to cause a slaughter		slaughter	destroyed	death
slay in battle			slain	murdering	murders
conquest			dead	murderer	destroyed
slain one			killers	executed	
slaughter			cut down	dead	
be killed			slayer's	massacre	
dash in pieces			put to the sword	destroyer	
slain			destroying	slay	
slay because of oppression			victims	put to the sword	
slay with reference to destruction				destroy	
killing				cut down	

Appendix H. Semantic Range for תלה

DCH	HALOT	TLOT	NRSV	CEB	ESV
hang	hang someone on woods	none	hang	hang	hang
in order to put to death	shaming act		hanged	hanged	hanged
one who has been hanged	not capital punishment but shaming someone already killed		hung	hanging	hung
accursed	hang up		hanging	hung	hanging
hang up to dishonor	attach			impaled	
to be hung up after execution to dishonor	suspend			impale	
hung on a tree	to be hung				
suspend					

Appendix I. Semantic Range for מלט

DCH	HALOT	TLOT	NRSV	CEB	ESV
escape	flee to safety	fleeing from enemies	flee	save	escape
flee	save oneself	escape	escape	escape	escaped
be delivered	save someone	elude danger in relation to war	escaped	gotten away	get away
slip away	allow to escape	successful escape	save	escaped	saved
slip in	leave undisturbed	save his life	get away	got away	saved
save	lay and brood over eggs	process of flight	saved	slip away	escapes
deliver	to save	slip out of a strait	escapes	saved	let alone
leave undisturbed	to bear	slip through a dangerous strait	let alone	rescued	rescue
lay eggs	give birth	threat from which save	rescue	survive	lays
mortar or clay floor	clay floor	to spare	lay	left untouched	save
be bald	spew forth	get away	rescued	rescuing	rescued
fly out		be spared	delivered	lay	delivered
		delivered	clay pavement	rescue	surely save
		cause to slip	delivers	delivered	mortar
		will carry	leap out	captured	flees
		escape captivity	safely	defend	delivers
		to bear		eluded	deliver
		divine promise of salvation to individual		clay pavement	forth
		process of escape		run	out
		deliverance		run off	
		past saving acts		flee	
		show to be bald		rescues	
		escape the disaster		deliver	

		run away		out	
				safe	
				slipped out	

Appendix J. Semantic Range for הצלה

DCH	HALOT	TLOT	NRSV	CEB	ESV
deliverance	deliverance	deliverance	deliverance	rescue	deliverance
stand					
arise					

Appendix K. Survival Texts

Survival of Women and Girls

לקח	שמד	תלה	מלט	חרג	אבד	הצלה
Gen 2:22	Gen 34:30	Gen 40:22	Gen 19:17	Gen 4:8	Exod 10:7	Esth 4:14
Gen 3:23	Num 33:52	Gen 41:13	Gen 19:17	Gen 4:23	Numb 16:33	
Gen 4: 19	Deut 1:27	Deut 21:22	Gen 19:22	Gen 4:25	Num 17:27	
Gen 6:2	Deut 2:12	Deut 21:23	Judg 3:29	Gen 26:7	Num 21:29	
Gen 11:29	Deut 2:21	Josh 8:29	1 Sam 19:11	Gen 34:25	Numb 21:30	
Gen 11:31	Deut 2:22	Josh 10:26	1 Sam 19:12	Gen 34:26	Num 33:52	
Gen 12:5	Deut 2:23	Josh 10:26	1 Sam 19:17	Gen 49:6	Deut 8:20	
Gen 12:15	Deut 4:3	2 Sam 4:12	2 Sam 19:6	Exod 2:14	Deut 9:3	
Gen 12:19	Deut 9:25	2 Sam 18:10	2 Sam 19:10	Exod 2:14	Deut 11:4	
Gen 12:19	Deut 28:20	2 Sam 21:12	1 Kgs 1:12	Exod 5:21	Deut 12:2	
Gen 14:21	Deut 28:24	Lam 5:12	1 Kgs 18:40	Exod 13:15	Deut 12:2	
Gen 16:3	Deut 28:45	Esth 2:23	Isa 20:6	Exod 32:27	Deut 12:3	
Gen 19:14	Deut 28:48	Esth 7:10	Isa 49:25	Num 25:5	Josh 7:7	
Gen 19:15	Deut 28:51	Esth 8:7	Jer 38:23	Num 31:7	Judg 5:31	
Gen 20:2	Deut 31:4	Esth 9:13	Jer 51:6	Num 31:8	2 Kgs 13:7	
Gen 20:3	Deut 33:27	Esth 9:14	Jer 51:45	Num 31:17	2 Kgs 19:18	
Gen 20:14	Josh 9:24		Joel 3:5	Num 31:19	2 Kgs 24:2	
Gen 21:14	Josh 23:15		Zech 2:11	Josh 9:26	Isa 37:19	
Gen 21:21	Josh 24:8		Ps 22:6	Josh 10:11	Jer 6:21	
Gen 22:10	2 Sam 14:7		Ps 41:2	Josh 13:22	Jer 6:21	
Gen 24:48	2 Sam 14:11		Ps 107:20	Judg 7:25	Jer 40:15	
Gen 24:51	2 Sam 14:16		Ps 124:7	Judg 7:25	Jer 48:36	
Gen 24:61	2 Sam 21:5		Ps 124:7	Judg 8:17	Jer 48:46	
Gen 24:67	2 Sam 22:38		Job 1:15	Judg 8:18	Jer 51:55	
Gen 25:1	1 Kgs 16:12		Job 1:16	Judg 8:19	Ezek 22:27	
Gen 25:20	Isa 23:11		Job 1:17	Judge 8:21	Ezek 34:4	
Gen 26:34	Ezek 25:7		Job 1:19	Judg 9:5	Ezek 37:11	
Gen 28:2	Amos 2:9		Job 29:12	Judg 9:18	Joel 1:11	
Gen 28:6	Amos 2:9		Prov 11:21	Judg 9:24	Obad 12	
Gen 28:9	Ps 83:11		Ecc 9:15	Judg 9:24	Mic 7:2	
Gen 29:23	Ps 106:34		Dan 11:41	Judg 9:54	Ps 9:4	
Gen 30:9	Prov 14:11		Dan 12:1	Judg 9:56	Ps 119:92	
Gen 31:23	Lam 3:66		2 Chr 16:7	Judg 20:5	Ps 119:95	
Gen 32:23	Esth 3:13			1 Sam 22:21	Job 14:19	

Gen 32:24	Esth 4:8			2 Sam 3:30	Job 31:19	
Gen 34:2	Esth 7:4			2 Sam 4:10	Prov 11:7	
Gen 34:4	Esth 8:11			2 Sam 4:11	Prov 11:7	
Gen 34:9	2 Chr 20:10			2 Sam 4:12	Prov 11:10	
Gen 34:16				2 Sam 10:18	Prov 28:28	
Gen 34:17				2 Sam 12:9	Eccl 5:13	
Gen 34:21				2 Sam 14:7	Eccl 7:15	
Gen 34:25				2 Sam 23:21	Esth 4:14	
Gen 34:26				1 Kgs 2:5	Esth 4:16	
Gen 36:2				1 Kgs 2:32	Esth 7:4	
Gen 36:6				1 Kgs 9:16	Esth 8:11	
Gen 38:2				1 Kgs 11:24	Esth 9:6	
Gen 38:6				1 Kgs 18:13	Esth 9:12	
Gen 42:33				1 Kgs 19:1	Esth 9:24	
Gen 45:18				1 Kgs 19:10		
Gen 45:19				1 Kgs 19:14		
Gen 46:6				2 Kgs 9:31		
Gen 48:22				2 Kgs 10:9		
Exod 2:1				1 Kgs 11:18		
Exod 2:3				2 Kgs 17:25		
Exod 2:5				Isa 27:7		
Exod 2:9				Isa 27:7		
Exod 4:9				Isa 27:7		
Exod 4:9				Jer 4:31		
Exod 4:20				Jer 18:21		
Exod 6:7				Ezek 9:6		
Exod 6:20				Ezek 23:47		
Exod 6:23				Ezek 26:6		
Exod 6:25				Ezek 26:8		
Exod 7:19				Hos 6:5		
Exod 9:10				Amos 4:10		
Exod 12:7				Ps 10:8		
Exod 12:22				Ps 44:23		
Exod 14:6				Ps 78:31		
Exod 14:7				Ps 78:34		
Exod 14:11				Ps 78:47		
Exod 15:20				Ps 94:6		
Exod 16:16				Ps 135:10		
Exod 17:5				Ps 136:18		

Exod 18:2				Job 5:2		
Exod 21:10				Job 20:16		
Exod 21:14				Prov 1:32		
Exod 34:16				Prov 24:11		
Lev 20:14				Lam 2:4		
Lev 20:17				Lam 2:21		
Lev 20:21				Lam 3:43		
Lev 21:7				Esth 9:5		
Lev 21:13				Esth 9:6		
Lev 21:14				Esth 9:10		
Num 8:6				Esth 9:11		
Num 8:16				Esth 9:12		
Num 8:18				Esth 9:15		
Num 12:1				Esth 9:16		
Num 17:12				Neh 9:26		
Num 20:8				1 Chr 7:21		
Num 21:25				1 Chr 11:23		
Num 21:26				1 Chr 19:18		
Num 25:4				2 Chr 21:4		
Num 31:11				2 Chr 21:13		
Num 31:30				2 Chr 22:1		
Num 31:47				2 Chr 22:8		
Num 34:18				2 Chr 23:17		
Deut 3:8				2 Chr 24:22		
Deut 4:20				1 Chr 24:25		
Deut 15:17				2 Chr 25:3		
Deut 19:12				2 Chr 28:6		
Deut 20:7				2 Chr 28:7		
Deut 21:11				2 Ch 28:9		
Deut 22:13				2 Chr 36:17		
Deut 22:14						
Deut 22:15						
Deut 22:18						
Deut 24:1						
Deut 24:3						
Deut 24:4						
Deut 24:5						
Deut 24:19						
Deut 25:5						

Deut 25:7						
Deut 25:8						
Deut 29:7						
Josh 2:4						
Josh 7:24						
Josh 8:1						
Josh 8:12						
Josh 11:16						
Josh 11:19						
Josh 11:23						
Judg 3:6						
Judg 3:21						
Judg 4:6						
Judg 4:21						
Judg 6:27						
Judg 8:16						
Judg 8:21						
Judg 9:43						
Judg 11:5						
Judg 14:2						
Judg 14:3						
Judg 14:3						
Judg 14:8						
Judg 14:19						
Judg 15:6						
Judg 15:15						
Judg 19:1						
Judg 19:28						
Judg 19:29						
Judg 20:10						
Judg 21:22						
1 Sam 4:3						
1 Sam 4:11						
1 Sam 4:17						
1 Sam 4:19						
1 Sam 4:21						
1 Sam 4:22						
1 Sam 7:14						
1 Sam 8:11						

1 Sam 8:13						
1 Sam 8:14						
1 Sam 8:16						
1 Sam 9:3						
1 Sam 9:22						
1 Sam 10:23						
1 Sam 14:32						
1 Sam 16:11						
1 Sam 17:49						
1 Sam 17:51						
1 Sam 17:54						
1 Sam 17:57						
1 Sam 18:2						
1 Sam 19:14						
1 Sam 20:31						
1 Sam 24:3						
1 Sam 25:35						
1 Sam 25:39						
1 Sam 25:40						
1 Sam 25:43						
1 Sam 27:9						
1 Sam 30:16						
1 Sam 30:18						
1 Sam 30:19						
1 Sam 31:4						
1 Sam 31:12						
1 Sam 31:13						
2 Sam 1:10						
2 Sam 2:8						
2 Sam 3:15						
2 Sam 4:6						
2 Sam 4:7						
2 Sam 4:12						
2 Sam 5:13						
2 Sam 8:1						
2 Sam 9:5						
2 Sam 11:4						
2 Sam 12:4						
2 Sam 12:9						

2 Sam 12:10						
2 Sam 12:11						
2 Sam 13:19						
2 Sam 14:2						
2 Sam 18:14						
2 Sam 18:17						
2 Sam 20:3						
2 Sam 20:6						
2 Sam 21:8						
2 Sam 21:10						
1 Kgs 3:1						
1 Kgs 3:20						
1 Kgs 4:15						
1 Kgs 7:8						
1 Kgs 11:18						
1 Kgs 16:31						
1 Kgs 17:19						
1 Kgs 17:23						
1 Kgs 18:4						
1 Kgs 20:34						
2 Kgs 3:26						
2 Kgs 3:27						
2 Kgs 4:1						
2 Kgs 5:26						
2 Kgs 7:13						
2 Kgs 7:14						
2 Kgs 9:17						
2 Kgs 10:7						
2 Kgs 11:2						
2 Kgs 11:19						
2 Kgs 13:25						
2 Kgs 13:25						
2 Kgs 15:29						
2 Kgs 24:12						
2 Kgs 25:19						
2 Kgs 25:20						
Isa 14:2						
Isa 51:22						
Isa 52:5						

Jer 2:30						
Jer 27:20						
Jer 29:6						
Jer 36:26						
Jer 38:6						
Jer 39:5						
Jer 41:12						
Jer 41:16						
Jer 43:5						
Jer 48:46						
Jer 51:8						
Jer 52:25						
Ezek 16:20						
Ezek 17:12						
Ezek 17:13						
Ezek 17:13						
Ezek 23:10						
Hos 1:2						
Hos 1:3						
Amos 5:11						
Job 1:15						
Job 1:17						
Job 2:8						
Ruth 4:13						
Ruth 4:16						
Esth 2:7						
Esth 2:8						
Esth 2:15						
Esth 2:16						
Ezra 2:61						
Neh 5:3						
Neh 6:18						
Neh 7:63						
1 Chr 2:19						
1 Chr 2:21						
1 Chr 2:23						
1 Chr 7:15						
1 Chr 7:21						
1 Chr 10:4						

1 Chr 14:3						
1 Chr 18:1						
2 Chr 11:18						
2 Chr 11:20						
2 Chr 22:11						
2 Chr 23:20						

Survival of Others

לקח	שמד	מלט	חרג	אבד	תלה	הצלה
Gen 2:15	Gen 34:30	Gen 19:17	Gen 4:8	Exod 10:7	Gen 41:13	Esth 4:14
Gen 2:21	Num 33:52	Gen 19:17	Gen 4:14	Numb 16:33	Josh 8:29	
Gen 3:23	Deut 1:27	Gen 19:19	Gen 4:23	Num 17:27	2 Sam 18:10	
Gen 9:23	Deut 2:12	Gen 19:20	Gen 4:25	Num 21:29	2 Sam 21:12	
Gen 11:31	Deut 2:21	Gen 19:22	Gen 26:7	Numb 21:30	Lam 5:12	
Gen 14:12	Deut 2:22	Judg 3:26	Exod 2:15	Num 33:52		
Gen 14:21	Deut 2:23	Judg 3:26	Exod 5:21	Deut 8:20		
Gen 17:23	Deut 4:3	1 Sam 19:10	Exod 13:15	Deut 9:3		
Gen 19:15	Deut 9:25	1 Sam 19:11	Exod 32:27	Deut 12:2		
Gen 20:3	Deut 28:20	1 Sam 19:12	Num 25:5	Deut 12:2		
Gen 20:14	Deut 28:24	1 Sam 19:17	Num 31:19	Deut 12:3		
Gen 21:14	Deut 28:45	1 Sam 19:18	Josh 9:26	Josh 7:7		
Gen 22:2	Deut 28:48	1 Sam 22:1	Josh 10:11	Judg 5:31		
Gen 22:3	Deut 28:51	1 Sam 22:20	Josh 13:22	2 Kgs 19:18		
Gen 22:6	Deut 31:4	1 Sam 23:13	Judg 7:25	2 Kgs 24:2		
Gen 22:10	Deut 33:27	1 Sam 27:1	Judg 7:25	Isa 37:19		
Gen 22:13	Josh 9:24	1 Sam 27:1	Judg 8:18	Jer 6:21		
Gen 24:7	Josh 23:15	1 Sam 27:1	Judg 8:19	Jer 6:21		
Gen 31:23	Josh 24:8	1 Sam 30:17	Judg 8:20	Jer 40:15		
Gen 32:23 (22)	Judg 21:16	2 Sam 1:3	Judg 9:5	Jer 48:36		
Gen 32:24 (23)	2 Sam 14:7	2 Sam 4:6	Judg 9:18	Jer 48:46		
Gen 34:25	2 Sam 14:11	2 Sam 19:6	Judg 9:54	Jer 51:55		
Gen 34:26	2 Sam 14:16	2 Sam 19:10	Judg 20:5	Ezek 22:27		
Gen 36:6	2 Sam 21:5	1 Kgs 1:12	1 Sam 24:11	Ezek 34:4		
Gen 37:24	Isa 23:11	1 Kgs 18:40	1 Sam 24:11	Ezek 37:11		
Gen 39:20	Ezek 25:7	1 Kgs 20:20	1 Sam 24:19	Joel 1:11		
Gen 42:16	Amos 2:9	2 Kgs 19:37	2 Sam 14:7	Obad 12		

Gen 42:33	Amos 2:9	Isa 20:6	1 Kgs 9:16	Jonah 1:6		
Gen 42:36	Ps 83:11 (10)	Isa 37:38	1 Kgs 11:24	Jonah 1:14		
Gen 43:13	Ps 106:34	Isa 49:25	1 Kgs 18:13	Mic 7:2		
Gen 43:15	Prov 14:11	Jer 32:4	1 Kgs 19:1	Ps 9:4		
Gen 43:15	Lam 3:66	Jer 34:3	1 Kgs 19:10	Ps 119:92		
Gen 44:29	Esth 3:13	Jer 38:23	1 Kgs 19:14	Ps 119:95		
Gen 45:18	Esth 4:8	Jer 39:18	1 Kgs 11:18	Job 14:19		
Gen 45:19	Esth 7:4	Jer 39:18	2 Kgs 17:25	Job 31:19		
Gen 46:6	Esth 8:11	Jer 41:15	Ezek 9:6	Prov 11:7		
Gen 47:2	2 Chr 20:10	Jer 48:6	Ezek 23:47	Prov 11:7		
Gen 48:1		Jer 51:6	Ezek 26:6	Prov 11:10		
Gen 48:13		Jer 51:45	Amos 4:10	Prov 28:28		
Gen 48:22		Joel 3:5	Ps 10:8	Eccl 5:13		
Exod 2:3		Zech 2:11	Ps 44:23	Eccl 7:15		
Exod 2:5		Ps 22:6	Ps 78:31	Esth 4:14		
Exod 2:9		Ps 41:2	Ps 78:34	Esth 4:16		
Exod 4:9		Ps 107:20	Ps 78:47	Esth 7:4		
Exod 4:9		Ps 124:7	Lam 2:21	Esth 8:11		
Exod 4:20		Ps 124:7	Lam 3:43	Esth 9:6		
Exod 4:25		Job 1:15	Esth 9:5	Esth 9:12		
Exod 6:7		Job 1:16	Esth 9:6	Esth 9:24		
Exod 7:19		Job 1:17	Esth 9:11			
Exod 9:10		Job 1:19	Esth 9:12			
Exod 12:7		Job 19:20	Esth 9:15			
Exod 12:22		Job 29:12	Esth 9:16			
Exod 14:6		Prov 11:21	Neh 9:26			
Exod 14:7		Eccl 7:26	1 Chr 19:18			
Exod 14:11		Ecc 9:15	2 Chr 21:4			
Exod 15:20		Dan 11:41	2 Chr 21:13			
Exod 16:16		Dan 12:1	2 Chr 22:1			
Exod 17:5		2 Chr 16:7	2 Chr 22:8			
Exod 17:12			2 Chr 23:17			
Exod 21:14			2 Chr 24:22			
Lev 8:2			1 Chr 24:25			
Num 1:17			2 Chr 25:3			
Num 6:18			2 Chr 28:6			

Num 8:6			2 Chr 28:7			
Num 8:16			2 Chr 36:17			
Num 8:18						
Num 11:16						
Num 16:1						
Num 17:12						
Num 18:6						
Num 20:8						
Num 20:25						
Num 21:25						
Num 21:26						
Num 22:41						
Num 23:14						
Num 25:4						
Num 27:18						
Num 27:22						
Num 31:11						
Num 31:30						
Num 31:47						
Num 34:18						
Deut 1:15						
Deut 3:8						
Deut 4:20						
Deut 15:17						
Deut 19:12						
Deut 21:11						
Deut 22:14						
Deut 22:15						
Deut 22:18						
Deut 24:19						
Deut 25:5						
Deut 25:7						
Deut 29:7						
Josh 2:4						
Josh 7:24						
Josh 8:1						
Josh 8:12						

Josh 11:16						
Josh 11:19						
Josh 11:23						
Josh 24:3						
Judg 3:21						
Judg 3:25						
Judg 4:6						
Judg 4:21						
Judg 6:27						
Judg 8:16						
Judg 8:21						
Judg 9:43						
Judg 11:5						
Judg 14:11						
Judg 14:19						
Judg 15:6						
Judg 15:15						
Judg 16:12						
Judg 18:17						
Judg 19:29						
Judg 20:10						
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1 Sam 4:11						
1 Sam 4:17						
1 Sam 4:19						
1 Sam 4:21						
1 Sam 4:22						
1 Sam 7:14						
1 Sam 8:11						
1 Sam 8:13						
1 Sam 8:14						
1 Sam 8:16						
1 Sam 9:3						
1 Sam 9:22						
1 Sam 10:23						
1 Sam 14:32						
1 Sam 16:11						

1 Sam 17:49						
1 Sam 17:51						
1 Sam 17:54						
1 Sam 17:57						
1 Sam 18:2						
1 Sam 19:14						
1 Sam 20:31						
1 Sam 24:3						
1 Sam 24:12						
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1 Sam 27:9						
1 Sam 30:11						
1 Sam 30:16						
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2 Sam 11:4						
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1 Kgs 3:20						
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Isa 14:2						
Isa 51:22						
Isa 52:5						
Jer 2:30						
Jer 27:20						
Jer 28:10						
Jer 35:3						
Jer 36:26						
Jer 38:6						
Jer 38:10						
Jer 38:11						
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Jer 39:12						
Jer 39:14						
Jer 40:1						
Jer 40:2						
Jer 41:12						
Jer 41:16						
Jer 43:5						
Jer 48:46						
Jer 51:8						
Jer 52:24						
Jer 52:25						
Jer 52:26						
Ezek 4:9						
Ezek 16:20						
Ezek 17:12						
Ezek 17:13						
Ezek 17:13						
Ezek 23:10						
Amos 5:11						
Ps 18:17						
Job 1:15						
Job 1:17						
Job 2:8						
Ruth 4:2						

Ruth 4:16						
Esth 2:8						
Esth 2:16						
Neh 5:3						
1 Chr 2:23						
1 Chr 7:21						
1 Chr 18:1						
1 Chr 19:4						
2 Chr 18:25						
2 Chr 22:11						
2 Chr 23:20						
2 Chr 26:1						
2 Chr 36:1						
2 Chr 36:4						

Appendix L. Primary Terms in Esther and Angelou

Term	Esther	Angelou
לקח	take	take
לקח	sexual intercourse	sexual intercourse
תלה	hang	hang
הרג	kill	kill
מלט	escape	escape
שמד	destroy	none
אבד	die	die
הצלה	deliverance	none

Appendix M. Cluster Subfields

Terms highlighted in green are in Angelou's narrative.

Relationships	**Conflict**	**Action**	**Weapon**	**Emotion**	**Others**
concubines	ambush	abuse	armed	affliction	ashes
daughters	army	annihilate	arrow	anger	blood
daughters in law	battle	attacked	bow	anguish	bodies
maid	booty	attacks	gallows	cried	boils
married woman	captives	beat	hammer	crying	bones
mother	captivity	beheaded	knife	distress	bound
orphans	custody	birth	ropes	dread	calamity
secondary wives	defeat	buried	spear	fear	dead
servant woman	fight	burn	stone	feared	death
servants	fought	burned	sword	gasping	defiled
sister	hostages	captured	weapons	groaning	defiled woman
slave girl	overtook	carry		hates	die
slaves	plunder	conceive		hunger	disaster
widows	siege	conception		injured	enemies
wives	soldiers	crush		pain	enemy
	spoil	curses		tears	exile
	subdued	cut		terror	famine
	surrender	cut her		wrath	fetters
	surrounded	cut off			fire
	troops	delivered			girl
	war	destroy			heads
	warriors	dispossess			illness
		escape			land
		execution			midwife
		fled			naked
		force			nakedness
		hanged			oppression
		harm			pestilence
		hide			plague
		humiliated			possession
		hunt			pregnant

		impale			prison
		killed			prisoners
		lay			promiscuous
		mourn			prostitutes
		mourning			refuge
		murder			sackcloth
		offer him			sex
		offered him			sick
		overtake			sickness
		perish			snare
		pluck			survivors
		plucked off			thirst
		punish			violence
		punished			virgin
		pursue			virginity
		pursued			waste
		raid			whore
		rape			whored
		recover			whoredom
		rescue			whorings
		rescued			widowhood
		scrape			without covering
		seize			woman
		shut up			womb
		slain			
		slaughtered			
		slaughtering			
		sling			
		smash			
		stabbed			
		stole			
		stricken			
		strike			
		strip			
		strip your clothes			
		struck			

		struck down			
		surrender			
		tear down			
		threw			
		thrust			
		trampled			
		trap			
		wail			
		weep			
		weeping			
		wept			
		whip			
		wounded			
		wounding			

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