

Hagar's spirituality prior to and after captivity: An African and gendered perspective



Authors:

Xolani Maseko¹ Thandi Soko-de-Jong² 

Affiliations:

¹Department of Systematic and Historical Theology, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

²Department of Practical Theology and Mission Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

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Corresponding author:

Xolani Maseko,
xlnmaseko@gmail.com

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This study is an exploration of the Hagar narrative from the perspective of African Womanist Theology. The article focuses on the spirituality of Hagar before and after her captivity (Gn 16). The research takes an Afrocentric perspective and uses a postcolonial lens to comment on the preceding text as well as consider how this story is captured in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. At the core of the article is an attempt at reclaiming the African in Hagar who is largely portrayed in the stories of Sarah and Abraham within a Hebrew perspective which itself is arguably imperial. The aim is to inspire modern African women (and in the diaspora) to reclaim their African spirituality within their stories and experiences. Summarily, the article is a critique of the colonial project, slavery and its legacies in dehumanising and disenfranchising people and African knowledge systems. The article is structured as follows: firstly, it introduces the Hagar and/or Hajar traditions from the perspectives of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Secondly, it takes a step back to consider Hagar's identity as an Egyptian princess before she encountered Sarah and Abraham. The article also discusses how Hagar's past in Egypt had a bearing on her spiritual encounters when she and her son Ishmael and/or Ismail were exiled. Finally, the article concludes with a recommendation for continued reflection on an African spirituality narrative of the Hagar traditions alongside the predominant narratives from Abrahamic religions.

Contribution: This article demonstrates that the religious scriptures must be read from liberation perspectives such as the postcolonial paradigm to inspire the recovery of authentic experiences of the oppressed and displaced, and it is an inspiration to African women to reclaim their true identity and spirituality.

Keywords: Hagar; surrogate; spiritualicide; postcolonial; womanist; feminist.

Introduction

Hagar and/or Hajar is depicted in different ways in the Jewish, Islamic and Christian Sacred texts. Each tradition presents her story in a different light, prompting the consideration of who she is in each faith tradition and what her story offers for interreligious dialogue. By adopting an African and gendered perspective and focusing on her spirituality and positioning prior to and after her life spent enslaved in Sarah and Abraham's household, this article seeks to explore alternative possibilities for the significance of Hagar's story. This article argues that Hagar traditions in the three Abrahamic religions are embedded in a monotheistic context and centre the respective religions' interpretation of Hagar. Thus, this article overlooks her possible spiritual formation as an Egyptian princess prior to her time in slavery. Taking into account her (likely) Egyptian spirituality is a more holistic approach to her role in religion, liminality and her body 'as a site of multiple oppressions and as hope and transcendence' (Thabede 2022:iii).

This article aims to respond to the question: 'What can we learn from taking a step back, and considering Hagar's story before she enters into the Jewish, Islamic and Christian portrayals of her life?' I suggest that taking a step back may help add to a richer exploration of her story in ways that are significant to black women's theologies. Thus, my response is divided into two parts. The first part briefly explores Hagar's life before her introduction to Sarah and Abraham, arguing that this era of her life should hold great significance for the present discussion.

The second part suggests that the theological telling of Hagar's story from the perspective of women of African descent ought to challenge the limiting of her story to the monotheistic,

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Abrahamic traditions that she became part of likely without her consent. In this way, equal emphasis is given to her agency, spiritual knowledge and the impact of her life prior to her captivity and conversion. This approach also encourages what Musa W. Dube describes as a critical examination that considers 'the interaction of biblical texts with African people and their cultures, within the postcolonial framework' (2012:6).

Hagar before Sarah and Abraham

Taking a step back to Hagar's life before she was enslaved offers a recognition of Hagar's humanity. Hagar's life experiences, spiritual impact and legacy did not begin during her captivity. Her life and status before her encounter with Sarah have a bearing on black women's theology in a similar way that African history before encounters with the three Abrahamic faiths have a bearing on our understanding of the life experiences and spiritualities of women of African descent through history.

Hagar, Pharaoh's daughter

Accounts of Hagar's origins before she encountered Sarah and Abraham vary. The Old Testament of the Christian Bible describes Hagar in Genesis chapters 16 and 21 as Egyptian (Gn 16:1-4)¹ but makes no mention of her royal status. Furthermore, the name Hagar was an acquired name and therefore does not provide insight into her Egyptian royalty through records that might exist outside of Judaic and Islamic traditions. Thus, the interpretations of the acquired name are in Arabic and Hebrew. In Arabic, translations include '*Ha ajruka*' "'here is your recompense'" – to refer to what Sarah said to Abraham when offering Hagar to him to bear children in her (Sarah's) name' (Fatani 2006:236). Other translations suggest that the name '*Hajar*' means 'the fugitive', derived from the Arabic '*hajar*' [to flee] (Schechter et al. 2021). Hebrew translations include the word *agrekh* (Hebrew word for 'gift'), or 'Ha-Agar', meaning 'this is the reward' (Mindel in Chabad 2024).

In the absence of archaeological and historical evidence outside of Abrahamic religions, much of what is known about her background comes from Judaic and Islamic traditions. Knowledge regarding her royal status and origins in Islam is based on traditions (*Sunnah*) in commentaries on the *Qur'an* and the *Qışaş al-anbiyā*' [*Stories of the Prophets*] 'in accordance with the Jewish tradition'.² The *Qur'an* itself only hints at Hagar's (Hajar in Arabic) existence and does not mention her directly in two passages. Thus, *Qur'an* 14: 37 refers to Ibrahim and/or Abraham leaving part of his family in a *wilderness*:

1. Genesis 16:1-4: 'Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar, and Sarai said to Abram, "You see that the LORD has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her". And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. 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. He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress'. New Revised Standard Version.

2. See Afnan, p. 234.

O our Lord! I have made some of my offspring to dwell in a valley without cultivation, by Thy Sacred House; in order, O our Lord, that they may establish regular Prayer: so, fill the hearts of some among men with love towards them, and feed them with Fruits: so that they may give thanks. Ibrahim: 37. (transl. Ali 2000)

Qur'an 2: 158 refers to the two hills of al-Safah and al-Marwa in Mecca. These two hills are significant in the performance of the Islamic ritual pilgrimages of *Hajj* and *Umrah* – which, according to Islamic tradition, were the two hills that Hagar 'went back and forth seven times between, frantically in search of water' to quench Ishmael's thirst in the aftermath of *Qur'an* 14: 37. The ritual of walking or running between the two hills (*sa'ee*) is modelled after Hagar's running between the two hills. *Qur'an* 2: 158 states:

Indeed, Safa and Marwah are among Allah's sacraments. So, whoever makes *hajj* to the House, or performs the *umrah*, there is no sin upon him to circuit between them. Should anyone do good of his own accord, then Allah is indeed appreciative, all-knowing. Al-Baqara:158 (transl. Al-Islam.org n.d.)

Islamic traditions provide further insights into Hagar and generally agree that she was a princess, as will be shown in this article. However, there is some disagreement over whether she was the daughter of a pharaoh. While some scholars describe Hagar as being from Musri in northern Arabia (Winckler 1893:29), others such as Afnan H. Fatani³ point to the Hagar tradition, as described by al-Rabghuzi,⁴ to describe her as a 'daughter of the King of Maghreb' (Fatani 2006:236). According to the latter tradition, Hagar's father – a descendant of the Prophet Salih (also known as Saleh) of the ancient community of Thamud – was killed by an Egyptian pharaoh during wartime (Fatani 2006:236). Following her father's death, Hagar was captured and enslaved, and 'later, because of her royal blood, she was made the mistress of all the female slaves and given access to all of Pharaoh's wealth and possessions' (Fatani 2006:236).

Fatani's account seems to be disputed in *Sahih Muslim*, where Abu Dharr refers to Hagar as an Egyptian (2543b, Book 44, *Hadith* 323). In this tradition, Abu Dharr reported the Prophet Muhammad as saying:

You would soon conquer Egypt and that is a land which is known (as the land of *al-qirat*). So when you conquer it, treat its inhabitants well. For there lies upon you the responsibility because of blood-tie or relationship of marriage (with them). (*Sahih Muslim* 2543b, Book 44, *Hadith* 323)

According to Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (839–923 CE), a hadith scholar, this tradition points to a kinship between Arabs and Egyptians, which was explained as follows:

When Ibn Ishaq⁵ asked al-Zuhri⁶ to clarify what was their kinship that the Prophet mentioned, al-Zuhri answered: 'Hajar, the mother of Isma'il, was one of them [*i.e. Egyptians*]'. (Calabria 2014:88)

3. Fatani, Afnan H. 'Hajar'. In Leaman, Oliver (ed.). In *Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*.

4. A collector and writer of prophetic stories from Turkey born around 1310 CE.

5. Abu Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn Yasar al-Muttalibi (d. 767 CE) was a biographer of the Prophet Muhammad.

6. Muhammad ibn Muslim al-Zuhri (d. 742 CE), a Hadith scholar.

It appears that these early Islamic scholars did not contest Hagar's Egyptian roots. Rather, they saw Hajar as the root of their kinship with Egyptians through her son Ishmael.

In Judaism, the story of Hagar appears in the Torah in both Genesis 16:1–16 and Genesis 21:8–21 (Adamo & Eghwubare 2005:456). Regarding her origins, the Torah refers to Hagar as Egyptian (Gn 16:1^{7,8}; 21:9⁹). A reference to her royal status is found in the biblical exegesis in the Midrash tradition. For instance, commenting on Genesis 16:1, Rashi¹⁰ (1040 CE–1105 CE) expounds on Hagar's royal status and origins by stating, 'And Sarai the wife of Avram had not borne (children) unto him. And she had an Egyptian handmaid [the daughter of Pharaoh], whose name was Hagar' (transl. *Sefaria* 2022). In comparison, the verse, without comment, reads, 'Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar' (*Sefaria* 2022). Another example is the *Chumash* which refers to both her origins and status as a princess in a comment simply noting that 'despite her many years in the home of Abraham and Sarah, Hagar remained an Egyptian princess' (Scherman in Chheenah 2014:24).

Adding further insight into her background that takes into account her transition into captivity, Tamar Kadari describes rabbinic¹¹ portrayals and traditions detailing how Hagar might have become part of Sarah and Ibrahim and/or Abraham's household (1999). In addition to the well-known portrayals of Hagar as enslaved and later a rejected and abandoned mother to Ibrahim and/or Abraham's son Ismail and/or Ishmael, there are two other portrayals that this article wishes to highlight in this response. The first is her portrayal as an Egyptian princess as discussed here and according to some rabbinic (see Grypeou & Spurling 2013:240) and Islamic traditions (*Hadith* as narrated by Abu Huraira) (see also Chheenah 2014). The second is her 'ability to perceive and interact with divine messengers, demonstrating her spirituality and ability to connect with God' (Kadari 1999). These two portrayals invite us to recognise aspects of Hagar's life that were not confined to her subjugated position in Sarah and Abraham's household. As stated previously, we wish to focus on the *princess of Egypt* part of her story as a way of taking a 'step back' into her life before her conversion.

According to Kadari (1999), 'the Torah does not explain how Sarah came to have an Egyptian handmaid'. Rather, the Rabbis suggest that the couple encountered Hagar during

7.'Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had not borne to him, and she had an Egyptian handmaid named Hagar'. (For a translation available online see https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/8211/jewish/Chapter-16.htm)

8.'So Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her handmaid, at the end of 10 years of Abram's dwelling in the land of Canaan, and she gave her to Abram her husband for a wife'. (For a translation available online see https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/8211/jewish/Chapter-16.htm)

9.'Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing'. (For a translation available online see <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.21.9?lang=bi&aliyot=0>)

10.Rashi (Shlomo Yitzchaki) authored comprehensive Talmud and Hebrew Bible commentaries.

11.Based on the Genesis Rabbah.

their stay in Egypt in the years of famine, a period described in the Christian Bible in Genesis 12:10–20 – a passage in which Abraham deceives Pharaoh that Sarah is his sister, and, in turn, Sarah becomes part of the Pharaoh's household. Thus, in the Hebrew Bible, in response to Abraham's deception,

God afflicted Pharaoh and all his household with mighty plagues. When, in the Midrashic amplification, Pharaoh sees the miracles that were performed for Sarah in his house, he gives¹² her his daughter Hagar as a handmaid. He said: 'It would be better for my daughter to be a handmaid in this house [i.e., Sarah's] than a noblewoman in another [in the palace in Egypt]'. The Rabbis offer an etymological explanation of Hagar's name: Pharaoh said to Sarah, 'This is your reward [agrekhi]', as he gave her his daughter as a handmaid. (Gn Rabbah 45:1in Kadari 1999)

Hagar's birth into Pharaoh's family likely prepared her to understand leadership and gave her insight into the dynamics of power. Her later subjugation likely did not erase these traits.

Understandably, the latter part of her story has impacted theologies of liberation and women's theologies. Theologies of liberation and Womanist traditions interpret Hagar's story as that of a silently victimised woman through whom similarly victimised women can identify (see Ahmad 2022). Also, Sarah's complicity in Hagar's oppression is viewed as an example of the pitting of women against each other under patriarchy (see Williams 1993:197–198). Women in Africa and its diaspora look to her story for liberating, empowering and affirming theologies. The Womanist theologian, Delores S. Williams, approaches Hagar's story in Genesis as a portrayal of an African enslaved, homeless exile, forced/single/surrogate mother – cast into the desert by Sarah and Abraham but protected by God (1993). She overcame her despair and became the mother of a nation through Ismail and/or Ishmael for whom God said: 'I hereby bless him. I will make him fertile and exceedingly numerous. He shall be the father of twelve chieftains, and I will make of him a great nation' (Gn 17:20, The Contemporary Torah).

For Williams, therefore, Hagar is a 'prototype for the struggle of African-American women' as her story 'provides an image of survival and defiance appropriate to black women today' (1993:cover). In other words, Hagar's story offers parallels to the history of women in Africa and its diaspora. Thus, for scholars such as Williams, Hagar's experiences parallel the themes described in some of African women's literary and music traditions (1993:52). From slavery to the present, hers is a shared experience of the intersecting oppressions of racism, sexism, classism, poverty, slavery, sexual exploitation and encounters with God in exile (Williams 1993). Her eventual triumph is a reminder that God hears the plight of women of African descent¹³ and will bring deliverance that will far outweigh the pain endured.

12.In contrast, the Christian Bible does not state that Hagar was given as a gift. Genesis 12:16 does not name Hagar among what Abram acquired during this period, instead stating: 'And for [Sarai's] sake he dealt well with Abram, and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female slaves, female donkeys, and camels'.

13.Here I include all women of African descent because of the shared history of the impact of racism that ranges from experiences of race-based chattel slavery, discrimination, colonisation, xenophobia and apartheid.

However, when we consider her life before these themes emerge, we reflect on the double stripping of her dignity. She was: (1) stripped of her rights as a daughter of Pharaoh and (2) her identity was reduced to an enslaved, abandoned mother who eventually overcomes adversity, among others. I see parallels between how the three Abrahamic faiths emphasise Hagar's story as *beginning* with her slavery and how people of African descent (in diaspora/global Africana) are portrayed as people whose history *began* with dehumanisations and injustices justified by interpretations of the Hamitic myth that emerged from the three Abrahamic faiths (see, for example, El Hamel 2013).

As with African her-story/history, which cannot be confined to a 'single story', Hagar's story goes beyond the binary of a princess and an enslaved woman. Going beyond Hagar's 'single stories' offers the space to explore various knowledge and spiritualities that disrupt the intersecting systems of gender-based violence and (racial) injustices. It also contributes to the reclaiming of methods that affirm black women and other marginalised communities' rich cultural heritages, agency and sense of community.

Affirmation helps empower such communities to tell their story/ies without confining or limiting themselves to the perspectives of Abrahamic faith traditions. This can help challenge what Vuyani Vellem describes as spiritualicide (2016:3). Spiritualicide is the epistemic suppression and erasure of indigenous histories and knowledge of God (Vellem 2016:3).

Hagar, the spiritual giant

Taking a step back

Hagar's spirituality is a significant aspect of her portrayal making it important to consider it from different perspectives. Slavery can deeply affect a person's spirituality by forcing them to adopt the spiritual and religious beliefs of their enslavers. In Hagar's case, Abrahamic traditions tend to centre her later conversion on her father the Pharaoh's encounter with Abraham's God in Genesis 12. From their perspectives, Hagar became *worthy* to live in Sarah and Abraham's home because the Pharaoh had acknowledged the existence of the true God (Kadari 1999). According to scholars such as Tamar Kadari, the Midrash suggests that Hagar's spirituality was so influenced by that of Sarah and Abraham's household that she became accustomed to, for example, seeing angels (1999). Thus, she was not alarmed by an angel's visitation later when she was alone at Beer-lahai-roi (Kadari 1999). This view sheds some light on her spirituality. However, it overlooks the cultural and spiritual traditions that may already have shaped Hagar in her early years and likely led to the later events through which it became evident that 'the spiritual level of Sarah's handmaiden was higher than that of people from later generations (Kadari 1999).'

Encountering God in the wilderness as a spiritual continuity

Furthermore, Hagar, as an individual with her intersecting particularities and identities such as being African, female, transported/trafficked and enslaved, was only the second woman in the Bible – after Eve – with whom God had a conversation, as attested by both the Bible and Quran (see Arguetta 2022). Interestingly, the Christian tradition has no record of a conversation between slave mistress, Sarah and God. In contrast, Genesis 21 describes God speaking directly to Hagar, comforting her, and rescuing her and her son from death in the desert.

Accounts of her spirituality from her time in Egypt remain unknown. However, themes from African spirituality are recognisable from the Sacred Texts and traditions that refer to Hagar. This is unsurprising considering the geographic proximity that enabled 'Hebrew people were able to tap into the surrounding cultures as these cultures had also formulated praise and thanksgiving to the God' (Adamo & Eghwubare 2005:456). According to David Adamo, Eriwvierho Eghwubare, and Afolarin Ojewole, respectively, some themes that suggest the influence of African spirituality include:

- *Hagar's assertive approach to her role as a mother*: Ojewole argues that while 'the Bible is silent on the roles of some mothers at critical moments in the lives of their children', Hagar is clearly depicted as a responsible, active party in, among other things, 'interceding for, and preserving the life of her offspring' (2017:82). He compares how extensively her role in response to her child's trauma is described in the Old Testament to the silence in other narratives, such as in the accounts of Dinah, Tamar and Jephthah (Ojewole 2017:82).
- On a similar note, Hagar evidently had the spiritual insight to parent and raise Ishmael to fulfil the promises God gave Abraham in Genesis 17 and Hagar in Genesis 21:18 (Ojewole 2017:85). Her insight included her unique influence in being 'the only woman mentioned in the Bible as choosing a wife for her son (Gn 21:21)' (Ojewole 2017:84) – notably a wife she chose for him from Egypt.
- Ojewole further suggests that Hagar's experience of God differed from that of women associated with Abraham's patriarchal religious heritage. In other words, Hagar was not limited to a patriarchal biblical text and tradition whereby it was mostly men who are recorded in the Old Testament to have conversed with or received messages from God (Ojewole 2017:82). This, in our view, implies that Hagar had an understanding of God that was not in total conformity to what she had been introduced to in Sarah and Abraham's household. It is notable that God, 'whether in person or through a messenger, speaks to her (as opposed to Sarah, whom "God never directly, but only indirectly, addressed")' (Claassens 2005 in Adamo & Eghwubare 2005:467) and 'makes her mother of a nation' (Ojewole 2017:79). Hagar, in turn, encounters God on a personal level and names him [*El -Roi*, that is, God who sees] (Adamo & Eghwubare 2005:467).

- *Regarding the practice of her faith:* Adamo and Eghwubare seem to suggest that Hagar may have experienced God in a way that is familiar to expressions now associated with African (Christian) spirituality such as through 'various extraordinary activities such as glossolalia, trembling, or uncontrollable shouting and singing' (2005:462). They cite Genesis 16:13 – whereby Hagar exclaimed, 'Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing Him?'¹⁴ to suggest that Hagar may have been under 'divine influence when she gave God an enduring name' (Adamo & Eghwubare 2005:462).

The above suggestions highlight how African spirituality may have influenced Hagar's experiences. The suggestions also supplement how we can perceive Hagar beyond her depictions in traditions that relegate her to the margins of Sarah and Abraham's story such as Paul's discourse in Galatians 4:21–31 where he describes Hagar as 'the spiritually-rejected slave woman' (Thomas-Smith 2008 in Ojewole 2017:85).

It is also worth noting that the Abrahamic religions' Hagar traditions seem to focus on telling her story, rather than relaying her account of events, which reflects the undertones of patriarchy. Fortunately, their telling of Hagar's story still manages to relay the breadth of her spirituality. Commenting on the role of Hagar in the story of Sarah and Abraham, Philip R. Drey highlights, for example, that Hagar is the only woman to have received special recognition from God by being promised the blessing of descendants (2002:193).

Hagar as an African and diaspora matriarch

Lastly, scholars such as Delores Williams see some religious resonance in a foreign, outcast woman's encounters with God in the desert (1993). We wish to suggest that Hagar's period of foreignness and status as an outcast need not discount her spiritual her-story. She was able to hear from God outside the confines of Sarah and Abraham's home where she supposedly first encountered God. As such, there seem to be similarities between some of Hagar's experiences before and after her conversion, and the experiences of African women whose spiritual beliefs fell/fall outside of/or persisted in addition to the three Abrahamic faiths. For instance, the central African priestess *Makewana* was seen as having direct access to God (Smith 2005:1028). In modern-day Zimbabwe, Mbuya Nehanda (c.1840–1898), through her role as a spirit *medium*, greatly impacted the Shona struggle for liberation from colonisation (Dube 2018:2).

Taking a step back and the Sankofa concept

We will not speculate on what Hagar knew from her life before conversion; that is outside the scope of this response. However, we wish to stress the need to reclaim, in the telling of her story, the fuller range of her portrayals to highlight that she held within her lived experience both the reality of being enslaved and a princess – daughter of Pharaoh. Reclaiming

14.NRSVUE.

her fuller history and its bearing on her stature, knowledge, spiritual awareness and legacy offers space for women of African descent such as Hagar to reclaim their her-stories in their work of building their future.

Reclaiming their her-stories is challenging. The legacies of slavery, colonisation and forced conversion have removed and continue to deny many the necessary access to their respective epistemologies and spiritual knowledge. However, where it is possible, looking to the past by reclaiming indigenous, African knowledge systems can help 'build the future' through decolonising their spirituality. In the book, *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations*, the editors approach the '*sankofa*' and '*Nyame dua*' *adinkra* symbols from Ghana as examples for such methods of critical reflection (Dube et al. 2012). The *sankofa* symbol means 'go back and take it' – an encouragement towards a critical appropriation of one's heritage, her-story and traditions (Oduyoye in Dube et al. 2012:6).

The *Nyame dua* [the tree of God] is a symbol that represents the 'traditional altar to the Supreme Being, the constant presence of God' (Oduyoye in Dube et al. 2012:6). The book emphasises these symbols to encourage a critical examination of 'the interaction of biblical texts with African people and their cultures, within the postcolonial framework' (Dube in Dube et al. 2012:6). The book encourages the reading of biblical texts with and through frameworks of African indigenous religions.

From such a perspective, reading Hagar's story also through frameworks that include what can be inferred from her heritage before conversion may help challenge the notion that her faith was 'weak'.¹⁵ Rather, her practice of faith in the desert may signify her 'reading' of her new faith through the frameworks of her indigenous faith and contextual realities. Her return to what was perceived as idolatry in the desert may not have been a weakness or a 'relapse'. Rather, it may have been her way of seeking to continue to communicate with the God who sees her – whose existence she is portrayed as having a direct experience of – in the ways that were familiar to her life story.

Also, according to David Adamo and Erivwierho Eghwubare, her choice of an Egyptian woman for Ishmael (Gn 21:21) 'may have been divinely guided' (Adamo & Eghwubare 2005:462). Thus, her choice may have been an attempt to provide her son with a woman who shared her beliefs. Controversial as this may be from the perspective of monotheistic faiths, which may consider these suggestions as a submission to idolatry, syncretism and sacrilege, these suggestions seem to fit the decolonial call to interrogate the tension between African women's spirituality, struggle and conversion. Doing so also contributes to the preservation of indigenous knowledge about God from generation to generation.

15.Rabbi Yitzhak applies the saying, 'Throw a stick into the air, and it will [always] fall on its end' to mean 'a person has a tendency to go back to their roots eventually' – and so, 'Hagar was an Egyptian handmaiden and she selected a wife for Ishmael from Egypt', that is, from a society she must have still highly regarded to consider a woman from there the best choice for Ishmael. See *Sefaria*, 'Bereshit Rabbah 53: 15'. *The Sefaria Midrash Rabbah*, 2022. Available at: https://www.sefaria.org/Bereshit_Rabbah.53.15?lang=bi.

Conclusion

Lastly, Hagar's story illustrates what happens when one's spiritual narrative is told from the perspective of non-adherents of that spirituality. Her story has usually been told from Abrahamic faith perspectives, neglecting Egyptian concepts of spirituality and divinity. This prompts questions such as: (1) *Given the chance, how would she have told her story?* and (2) *How would the Egyptians of her day tell her story and where would it differ from the narratives of the Abrahamic faiths?*

The absence of a well-known Egyptian Hagar tradition in our discussions today should serve as a reminder to women of African descent to continue to record and disseminate their narratives within, outside and in the liminal spaces of conversation and conversion. This provides a record of a fuller, multiple-layer account of their diverse experiences of God and faith. This is important in a time in which *kyriarchy*, as interconnected social structures of power, domination and subjugation persists (Schüssler 1992). *Kyriarchy* continues to facilitate conditions where the powerful – such as the Pharaoh – can easily give away their most vulnerable – such as Hagar – to those deemed more powerful such as Sarah.

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Authors' contributions

X.M. conceptualised and titled the study, designed the abstract and drafted the methodology. T.S. assisted in the writing of some paragraphs and editorial as well as formatting of the article.

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Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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