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## Abstract

The year 2020 marked a period of profound upheaval, defined by the emergence of COVID-19 and the tragic murder of George Floyd. This thesis investigates the rise of protest music during this period, focusing on Anderson .Paak's song "Lockdown" as a case study.

Despite extensive literature on COVID-19, systemic racism, and their intersection, there is a noticeable gap in understanding how the convergence of these crises can catalyze activism through music. This research aims to address this gap by examining how .Paak's song "Lockdown" uses the backdrop of the pandemic to encourage activism for racial justice by framing COVID-19 and systemic racism as "dual pandemics".

Employing a multi-method approach, this thesis includes a textual analysis of .Paak's lyrics and a discourse analysis of the accompanying music video. Thereby, the theoretical frameworks of Fernando Orejuela et al., Janine M. Jones, and William F. Danaher provide a foundation for understanding the song's role in inspiring change. The key message of this research is that protest music, exemplified by "Lockdown," not only raises awareness of societal issues but has the ability to mobilize collective action, even when physical protests are restricted.

## “We Ain’t Gonna Stop Cause They Tell Us To” – Protest Music in a Time of Dual Pandemics

### Introduction

The year 2020 came with a series of tumultuous events, each leaving a permanent mark on society. At the forefront of this year was the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, a global health crisis that dominated the news. The rapid spread of the coronavirus unleashed a wave of fear and uncertainty, prompting governments worldwide to implement strict measures. Lockdowns, social distancing, and other restrictions became the new norm, disrupting daily life and creating economic turmoil. Amidst the chaos created by the pandemic, another crisis evolved – one deeply rooted in centuries of systemic oppression and injustice. The murder of George Floyd, an African American man, at the hands of a white police officer in Minneapolis, triggered widespread outrage, serving as a stark reminder of the pervasive nature of systemic racism and police brutality.

In the face of these two crises, a wave of protest music emerged, serving as a powerful mode of expression, unity, and resistance. Artists across various genres channeled their anger, grief, and hope into anthems of protest, underscoring the urgent need for justice and reform. Tracks like H.E.R.'s "I Can't Breathe" or Kendrick Lamar's "This is America" became rallying cries, while other songs like Beyoncé's "Black Parade" celebrated Black culture and resilience. The role of music during this period was multifaceted. It provided comfort in times of isolation, functioned as a means of virtual solidarity when physical gatherings were restricted, and worked as a voice to amplify the messages of the Black Lives Matter movement. Within this context, Anderson .Paak's song "Lockdown" (2020) functions as a powerful example. It sheds light on the intersecting crises COVID-19 and systemic racism, showing how people of color experience the greatest impact of the pandemic, enduring disproportionately high rates of

infection, mortality, and economic hardship. Thereby, the song's main message is for .Paak's audience to continue the fight for racial justice, despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, because people of color are dying either way. While lockdown measures may keep some people safe from COVID-19, they do not protect people of color from the ongoing struggle of systemic racism that prevents them from safely staying at home. Within this context, "Lockdown" emerges as an interesting case study, highlighting music's ability to create action even in a time when physical protest was not possible. It showcases the power of music in creating awareness, inspiring solidarity, and mobilizing audiences to societal change.

The current state of the art on literature about protest in times of crisis encompasses an in-depth exploration of both COVID-19 and systemic racism. Extensive research exists thereby both on the individual impact of these two crises, as well as their interconnectedness. However, despite the substantial literature on COVID-19, systemic racism, and their intersection, a noticeable gap persists in understanding how the convergence of these crises can serve as a catalyst for activism and societal change through music. While existing studies address the dual impact of the pandemic and systemic racism on society, they often overlook the role of music as a mobilizing force in these contexts. This gap is particularly evident in the analysis of how protest music can simultaneously address public health and issues of social injustice, inspiring both collective action and societal transformation.

In the following, this thesis aims to bridge this gap by examining Anderson .Paak's song "Lockdown" as a case study. It will explore how .Paak uses the backdrop of COVID-19 to highlight systemic racism and encourage activism for racial justice. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a profound global experience, one that has touched the lives of every individual in one way or another. It required a collective effort to prevent the further spread of the virus, demanding measures such as social distancing, mask-wearing, vaccination campaigns, and even lockdowns. Consequently, .Paak acknowledges that we must employ

measures to protect people from the pandemic of systemic racism too. Just as with COVID-19, systemic racism imposes restrictions on individuals, creates economic barriers, and perpetuates health disparities. Thus, .Paak's song prompts individuals to recognize that, like a virus, racism infects and harms people too. It urges its audience to recognize COVID-19 and systemic racism as dual pandemics, calling for urgent and immediate action. Thereby, music functions as a powerful tool to inspire such engagement. Not only can it work to raise awareness, but it can also work to inspire a new commitment in the fight against both pandemics.

In this context, it is important to acknowledge that the goal of this analysis is not to compare systemic racism to COVID-19, as they are two fundamentally different things. While systemic racism is deeply rooted in history, spanning centuries of racial injustice and oppression, COVID-19 is a contemporary global health crisis, posing a temporary, and in some ways much more transparent threat to the public. Instead, the argument is that in the song "Lockdown", COVID-19 is used as a lens to recognize systemic racism as a parallel pandemic that, just like the coronavirus too, calls for immediate action.

This said, this thesis will answer the following question: How does Anderson .Paak make use of the backdrop of COVID-19 in his song "Lockdown" to encourage activism in the struggle for racial justice, and how does the concept of "dual pandemics" factor into this narrative? To answer this question, this thesis will draw on the following concepts:

First, it will focus on the concept of music as a form of protest, whereby the book *Black Lives Matter & music: protest, intervention, reflection* (2018) by Fernando Orejuela et al. will function as the primary source of reference. Consisting of a collection of critical case studies about the role of music in the Black Lives Matter movement, this book explores how music creates awareness about societal issues and inspires individuals to take action.

Moreover, the article "The Dual Pandemics of COVID-19 and Systemic Racism: Navigating Our Path Forward" (2021) by Janine M. Jones will function as the main theoretical

framework. This article provides insight into the concept of “Dual Pandemics”, referring to the simultaneous occurrence and interaction of two major crises; systemic racism and COVID-19. This concept highlights the need to address both COVID-19 and systemic racism as dual pandemics that both require collective and immediate action. While the COVID-19 pandemic is combatted through social distancing, lockdowns, and mask-wearing, the racism pandemic calls for broader systemic changes to implement racial justice.

Thus, .Paak calls for collective action in the fight against the dual pandemics, proving also as a powerful anthem within the Black Lives Matter movement. This is inspired through four pivotal concepts introduced by William F. Danaher in his chapter on “Music and Social Movements” (2010); collective identity, emotions, free space, and social movement culture. In the following, these concepts will provide a lens through which to analyze the song “Lockdown” and its role in inspiring change.

Adding to Danaher’s framework, the article “Collective Identity” (2015) by David Snow will provide further insight into the creation of collective action. This is central, not only in .Paak’s song, but for protest music in general, serving as a powerful tool for mobilization, inspiration, and solidarity.

To make my argument, I will conduct a multi-method approach, including a textual analysis of Paak’s lyrics, as well as a discourse analysis of the accompanying music video. More specifically, the lyrics of the song will be analyzed to identify themes, motifs, and narrative elements. Furthermore, key linguistic devices, such as metaphors or symbolism will be examined to understand their contribution to the song’s meaning. In addition, the music video will be analyzed with a focus on visual details, such as costume, editing, and graphic elements. Overall, the primary objective of this analysis is to gain a comprehensive understanding of .Paak’s song “Lockdown” and how it works to inspire change. This analysis will occur in the following sequence:

First, Chapter One will offer an overview of the literature employed for the following analysis. Thereby, the theoretical frameworks of Fernando Orejuela et al., Janine M. Jones, and William F. Danaher will first be introduced and then their relevancy will be discussed. This will include a discussion of how the concepts interrelate and complement each other, thereby establishing a robust foundation for the analysis.

The second chapter will constitute the analysis, which will be conducted in two sub-chapters. First, .Paak's lyrics will be analyzed, situating the song within a time of crisis. Thereby, particular focus will lie on the dual pandemics COVID-19 and systemic racism and how .Paak draws attention to their intersection. Consequently, the second sub-chapter will employ the concepts of collective identity, emotions, free space, and social movement culture by William F. Danaher to further analyze .Paak's song. These will be used as a lens through which to analyze the methods .Paak employs to create collective action in the fight against the dual pandemics.

Finally, this thesis will foreground .Paak's song "Lockdown" as a powerful example of protest music. By drawing parallels between the restrictions imposed by COVID-19 and the societal confinements endured by marginalized communities due to systemic racism, .Paak underscores the need for a unified and urgent response to both crises.

## Chapter 1

### Theoretical Framework

The following analysis draws heavily on the concept of dual pandemics, which is further explored in the article “The Dual Pandemics of COVID-19 and Systemic Racism: Navigating Our Path Forward” (2021) by Janine M. Jones. According to Jones, this concept describes the intersecting existence and impact of two crises: the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racism (Jones 427). It highlights how people of color suffer the most during these two crises, enduring disproportionately high rates of infection, mortality, and economic hardship. Hence, this concept underscores the urgency of addressing racial inequality and injustice. Just as governments and communities mobilize resources to combat a viral pandemic like COVID-19, the term “dual pandemics” works to encourage similar efforts to address issues of systemic racism. This becomes particularly relevant in the song “Lockdown”, in which .Paak draws attention to the pandemic and how it exacerbates these issues. Despite measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, people of color are still dying, not because of the coronavirus but because of systemic racism. It is for this reason his song serves as a cry for action. While lockdowns may protect people from the COVID-19 pandemic, only the fight for racial justice can protect people of color from the pandemic of systemic racism.

Within this context, “Lockdown” emerges as a powerful song within the Black Lives Matter movement, whereby the book *Black Lives Matter & music: protest, intervention, reflection* (2018) by Fernando Orejuela et al. will provide further insight into this field. This book consists of a collection of critical case studies, each examining the role of music in the Black Lives Matter movement and its contribution to raising public awareness about societal injustices. In the book’s foreword, Portia K. Maulsby explains how social movements, like Black Lives Matter, often rely on various forms of cultural expression to communicate their



messages, build solidarity, and inspire action (Maultsby 9). Music, in particular, has proven to be an effective medium in these efforts (9). Since the seventeenth century, music has been a central mode of expression in the fight against institutional racism (9). It serves as a voice for people of color to express their discontent within society, particularly regarding issues of social justice, employment, housing, and education (9). Thus, in the context of Black Lives Matter, music has been indispensable in conveying the movement's core messages and galvanizing support (Maultsby 11). Artists from various genres have used their platforms to address issues of racial injustice, police violence, and systemic oppression. Through powerful lyrics and emotive performances, these musicians have brought attention to the lived experiences of Black individuals and the urgent need for societal change (Maultsby 13). Thus, tracks like .Paak's "Lockdown" not only highlight the harsh realities faced by Black communities but also offer a sense of hope and resilience. By articulating the pain and frustration of those affected by racism, protest music fosters empathy and understanding among listeners, creating a broader base of support for the movement.

Within this context, the article "Music and Social Movements" (2010) by William F. Danaher, offers additional insight into the relationship between music and social movements, which is discussed through four foci: free space, collective identity, emotions, and social movement culture. In the following analysis, these concepts will be employed to show how "Lockdown" emerges as a powerful anthem within the Black Lives Matter movement, calling for simultaneous action in the fight against both COVID-19 and systemic racism.

First, Danaher argues that music plays a crucial role in what he refers to as "free spaces" (814), a space of either physical or symbolic presence, for individuals to criticize existing power structures. Within these spaces, music serves as a powerful tool for communication and solidarity, enabling listeners to connect with like-minded people who share similar values and beliefs. These spaces also become a place for subordinate groups to reclaim their agency and

assert their presence in the public sphere. Set against the backdrop of government-imposed lockdown measures, the song “Lockdown” serves as a poignant example of how free spaces can come into being, for instance, amidst circumstances of physical confinement and restriction. While the lockdown measures restrict literal freedom by confining individuals to their homes and limiting social interactions, they paradoxically spark symbolic free spaces for expression and resistance. Thus, by navigating the tension between confinement and liberation, the song “Lockdown” invites audiences to reflect on the complex interplay between external constraints and internal resilience, highlighting the activist potential of music in times of crisis.

Moreover, Danaher suggests that music holds significant power in evoking emotions and fostering connections among people (813). Beyond mere entertainment, music acts as a mediator for shared experiences and collective identity formation. Firstly, music has a profound impact on people’s emotions (813). It has the ability to resonate deeply with listeners, evoking a wide range of feelings. Through these emotional responses, music creates a sense of belonging and unity among individuals who find common ground in their shared musical experiences. Whether through communal singing, dancing, or simply listening together, people bond over the shared emotional journey facilitated by music, forming strong connections that contribute to the development of a collective identity. In turn, Danaher argues that this sense of collective identity is central to social movements (812). In the face of the Black Lives Matter movement, for instance, it works to connect people around shared values and emotions, whereby music can work as a mediator to bring about this connection (812). Through both lyrics and accompanying music videos, it can work to communicate pressing issues of racial injustice, uniting people around common goals for change (Danaher 817).

In this context, the article “Collective Identity” (2015) by David Snow will be of additional relevance to the following analysis. Not only does this article add to Danaher’s concept of collective identity, but it also suggests the concept of ‘collective agency’ as a result

of collective identity formation. Thereby, Snow suggests that a sense of collective identity inevitably goes along with a sense of agency (175). He argues that when individuals feel a strong connection to a group's identity and its objectives, they are more inclined to engage in collective action to further those goals (175). Thus, by fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose, collective identity can empower individuals to mobilize and pursue common interests, for instance, in the fight for racial justice.

Consequently, Danaher argues that music plays a central role in what he refers to as social movement culture (816). A social movement culture, as Danaher suggests, refers to certain norms and values central to a particular social movement (816). It encompasses the way members of a social movement interact with each other, with society at large, and with the issues they are advocating for. Thereby, collective identity plays a central role within social movement cultures. When individuals unite via shared identities, they reinforce a social movement culture through shared norms and values. Consequently, social movement culture can lead to social movements through collective action. In the face of the Black Lives Matter movement, for instance, collective action is inspired by shared struggles of racial injustice and a common interest in advocating for change.

In the following, these concepts, in combination with the concept of dual pandemics, are central to understanding how .Paak's song "Lockdown" works to encourage activism. Drawing on both COVID-19 and systemic racism, his lyrics and music video create two groups of collective identity, those in the fight against the coronavirus, and those simultaneously in the fight for racial justice. However, Paak's song works to bring these two groups together, creating one collective identity for all. Rather than seeing each other as different, through racial identity, .Paak urges his audience to recognize what unites them instead. Though to different extents, every one of us has experienced COVID-19 in one way or another. Thus, by drawing on common experiences like the government-imposed lockdown measures, .Paak creates a sense

of unity in the fight against COVID-19, while simultaneously calling for solidarity in the fight against the pandemic of systemic racism. Thereby, his song creates a symbolic free space, amidst circumstances of physical confinement, for people to come together in solidarity in the fight against the dual pandemics.

## Chapter 2

### 2.1: Situating “Lockdown” amidst Dual Pandemics

Anderson .Paak, born Brandon Paak Anderson, is an American artist celebrated for his unique fusion of hip-hop, R&B, and soul. He is of mixed heritage, his father being African-American, and his mother Korean. This diverse ethnic background has heavily influenced his music, which explores themes of identity, culture, and social justice.

.Paak’s career has been marked by critical acclaim and commercial success. He first gained significant recognition with his 2016 album *Malibu*, which was praised both for its sound and lyrics (Bradley). The album earned .Paak a Grammy nomination and established him as a prominent figure in the music industry. His follow-up albums, including *Oxnard* and *Ventura*, further solidified his reputation, with the latter winning him the Grammy Award for Best R&B Album in 2020 (Bradley).

Furthermore, .Paak’s role within the Black Lives Matter movement is significant. His music frequently addresses themes of racial injustice, inequality, and the struggles of marginalized communities. Through his lyrics, he sheds light on the lived experience of Black individuals in the United States, foregrounding his music as a powerful tool for social change. Moreover, .Paak’s involvement also goes beyond his music. He has participated in various initiatives and events supporting the Black Lives Matter movement, using his influence to advocate for justice and equality (van Gaalen). By doing so, he not only amplifies the movement’s messages but also inspires his fans and followers to engage in social activism.

Within this context, „Lockdown“ emerges as a powerful example of protest music, whereby his groovy, laid-back musical style creates a striking contrast with the serious themes explored in the lyrics. More specifically, his lyrics draws particular attention to the dual

pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism. It highlights how these pandemics are not just co-existing, but instead are interacting in a way that COVID-19 intensifies issues of racial inequality (Jones 428). It brings “our attention to an issue that needs redress, which ultimately challenges the status quo” (Clough 275). Thereby, he specifically criticizes the lockdown measures imposed to prevent the further spread of the pandemic. While these health measures are presented as a means to protect public health, .Paak’s song shows how they fail to account for the socioeconomic disparities that prevent people of color from safely staying at home. Instead, marginalized communities are often compelled to continue working in essential service jobs, exposing themselves to heightened risks of contracting the virus (Ivanova). Consequently, .Paak’s lyrics expresses anger and confusion at the discrepancy between the proclaimed purpose of lockdown measures and the harsh realities faced by people of color. Thereby, his lyrics criticizes those that refuse to see these inequalities: “Said it’s civil unrest but you sleep so sound/ Like you don’t hear the screams when we catchin’ beatdowns/ Stayin’ quiet when they killin’ n\*\*\*\*<sup>1</sup> but you speak loud/ When we ride, got opinions comin’ from a place of priv’” (.Paak 0:34). He directly addresses people who are in a place of privilege, telling them to stop looking the other way. Rather, they should look the problem in the eye and realize that people of color are being killed because of racist police officers and that it is time to act. It is “sicker than the COVID how they did him on the ground” (.Paak 0:44), .Paak raps, underscoring the urgent need for action. Thereby, he uses the term “sick” to describe the killing of George Floyd. In the broader context of this thesis, this term highlights how this act of racial violence, among other issues like high unemployment rates (.Paak 0:54), is just another symptom of the pandemic of systemic racism (Jones 427). By saying that police violence is “sicker“ than the COVID” (.Paak 0:44), .Paak makes use of a term typically used to describe the symptoms of a medical disease. Thus, by describing the killing of George Floyd as “sick”,

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<sup>1</sup> Racial slur censored for appropriateness

.Paak draws a connection between COVID-19 and systemic racism, foregrounding them as dual pandemics (Jones 427). In fact, he seeks to compare the two pandemics, claiming that systemic racism is “sicker” (.Paak 0:44). Compared to COVID-19, a contemporary pandemic that started to spread only in the year 2019, the pandemic of systemic racism dates back to centuries of oppression and racial injustice (Jones 428). In fact, Jones argues that it is the “oldest existing pandemic” (428), which is why .Paak expresses his frustration that there are still no measures in place to protect people against it. Every day people of color die, not because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but because of systemic racism, a pandemic against which lockdown measures provide no protection. Thus, .Paak’s lyrics suggests that it is time to find suitable measures to shield marginalized communities against the pandemic of systemic racism too. While lockdowns may protect people against the pandemic of COVID-19, racial justice will protect people of color from systemic racism.

It is, for this reason, the song culminates in a cry for action: “Ready for the revolution, who ready to ride? It won’t be televised/ so tell me who ready to die?” (Rock 2:00). It urges for immediate action, despite the lockdown measures, because people of color are dying either way: “Lockdown, we ain’t gotta stop ‘cause they tell us to” (.Paak 3:10). Though before the revolution begins, .Paak asks for a prayer. As a matter of fact, he says, he’ll need two of them (.Paak 2:38), one to protect him from COVID-19 and another to protect him from systemic racism. Consequently, “Lockdown’s” powerful message ties directly into the traditions of protest music, which has long been a tool for marginalized communities to voice their struggles and demand justice (Damodaran 1). It embodies the spirit of the Black Lives Matter movement, illustrating the power of music to rally people toward collective action, even in the face of unprecedented challenges like a global pandemic.

## 2.2: “Lockdown” through the lens of Free Spaces, Collective Identity, Emotions and Social Movement Culture

The previous chapter offers a brief contextualization of .Paak’s song “Lockdown”, highlighting its situatedness in a time of crisis. It shows how COVID-19 and systemic racism are foregrounded as dual pandemics and deserve equal treatment and measures of action. The following analysis will show how .Paak’s song attempts to inspire action through Danaher’s concepts of free space, collective identity, emotions, and social movement culture.

First, the concept of free space will be discussed within the context of .Paak’s song. According to Danaher, a free space is defined as “an opening within the framework of society where people are allowed to criticize the dominant culture within acceptable limits” (814). Thus, a free space can occur, for instance, within the realms of a social movement, where activists take to the streets to protest (814). However, Danaher suggests that a free space can also be of symbolic nature (814). In the case of the song “Lockdown”, for instance, a symbolic free space emerges because government-imposed lockdown measures prevent the emergence of literal free spaces. However, while individuals find themselves confined to their homes, unable to engage in physical protest, .Paak creates a symbolic free space for his listeners to come together within the confinement of their homes.

Moreover, as COVID-19 forced people into isolation and social distancing measures prevented traditional forms of protest and community gatherings, online platforms became the new arena for collective expression (Hernandez-Ruiz). Thereby, music, with its universal appeal, played a central role in connecting people across various digital spaces (Wakefield). Whether through streaming platforms, social media, or virtual events, individuals found comfort in sharing their favorite songs and discussing their significance. In this way, “Lockdown” resonated deeply with listeners who were grappling with the dual realities of the pandemic and systemic racism. Through online discussions, comments, and shares, the song



sparked dialogue and engagement. For instance, “Lockdown’s” accompanying music video prompted a variety of reactions from .Paak’s fans in its comment section below. According to Danaher’s concept of free space, it created a space for his audience to reflect and discuss the song’s meaning and relevance today. Moreover, this space ignited a form of online protest, marked by a chain reaction of raised fist emojis.

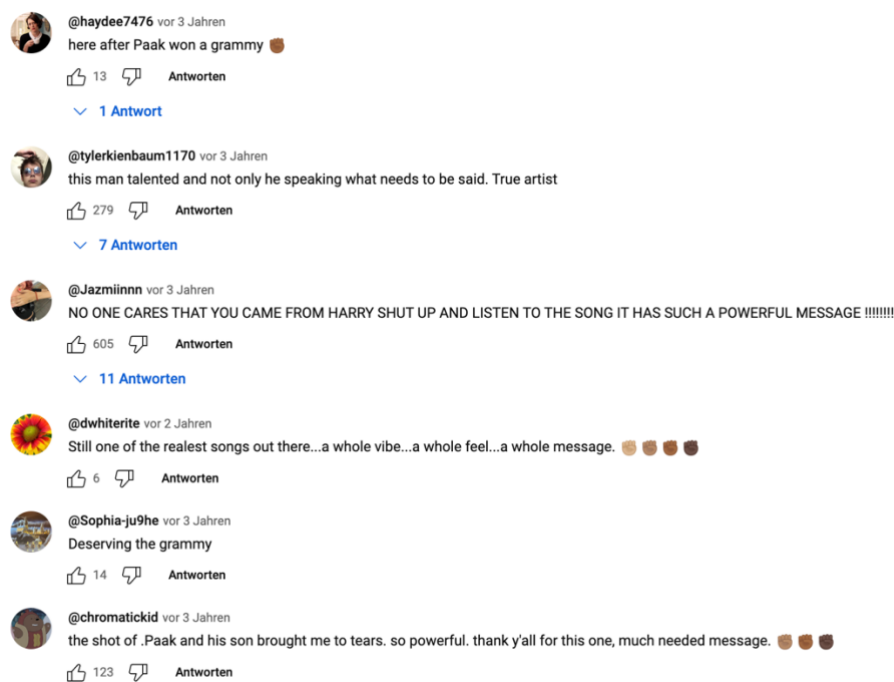


Fig. 1. Anderson .Paak, *Online Reactions to "Lockdown's" Music Video*, YouTube, 2021.

Originating from the Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the raised fist represents strength, unity, and resistance against oppressive systems (Stout). In contemporary movements like Black Lives Matter, the raised fist continues to be a symbol of defiance (Stout). It is frequently seen at protests, rallies, or on social media, symbolizing the ongoing fight for Black liberation and empowerment. Thus, within this context, “Lockdown” emerges as a powerful anthem within the Black Lives Matter movement. It sparks both dialogue and resistance, even in a period where physical protest is restricted. Hence, marked by the reactions of .Paak’s audience, “Lockdown” proves the ability of music to spark collective action, even

in circumstances of isolation, marking it as a powerful form of expression within social movements (Maultsby 9).

Thereby, free spaces, both of literal and symbolic nature, provide fertile ground for the formation and expression of social movement culture. According to Danaher, “social movement culture refers to norms and values specific to a particular social movement” (816). It serves as the cultural glue that binds together individuals within the movement, providing them with a sense of belonging and purpose. In the case of “Lockdown”, a social movement culture is created in the comment section of its music video, where fans connect not only through their shared admiration of .Paak and his song but also through a common identification with the song’s message. Moreover, they are united through common goals for change, forming a social movement for racial justice.

In this context, collective identity and emotions emerge as pivotal components of a social movement culture. Not only do they help shape the identity of a particular movement, but they also work to mobilize participants and sustain their commitment to social change. According to David Snow, collective identity is defined by a shared and interactive sense of ‘we-ness’ (175). It highlights that collective identity is distinct from personal and social identities but often overlaps and interacts with them (Polletta 285). The essence of collective identity lies in a feeling of belonging to a group and the willingness to act collectively towards common goals (Snow 177). In the song “Lockdown”, collective identity is established on different levels. First, a feeling of ‘we-ness’, as defined by Snow, is created among people of color. In fact, this is done, quite literally, through the usage of the term “we”, whereby .Paak fosters a sense of shared identity among the black community of which he is a part of himself. Whether it is facing issues of systemic racism or navigating the challenges of COVID-19, the term “we” emphasizes that individuals are not alone in their experiences and that they are part of a larger collective with shared interests and concerns.

Moreover, Snow argues that a sense of ‘we-ness’ only exists in the “actual or imagined sets of ‘others’ (175). When people identify with a particular group, they often distinguish themselves from those who are perceived as different or outside of their group. Thus, the presence of ‘others’ serves as a point of reference against which individuals can define their own identity and sense of belonging. Just as with the term “we”, this is done with the term “they” in .Paak’s song, forming an us vs. them mentality: “We thought it was a Lockdown/ They opened the fire” (.Paak 0:10). In the context of the song, the term “they” encompasses people of white privilege, particularly white police officers who are often directly involved in the killing of black people, like in the case of George Floyd. Thus, .Paak directly contrasts people of color who “just wanna break chains like slaves in the South” (.Paak 0:58) and the ‘others’ who “throw away black lives like paper towels” (.Paak 0:50).

However, .Paak’s song attempts to bridge this difference by drawing attention to the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism. Rather than recognizing the things that separate people and create ‘others’, such as the color of skin or racial identity, .Paak’s lyrics urges his audience to realize what unites them instead. While affected to different extents, the struggle of living through a global pandemic is one that everyone can relate to in one way or another. Thus, .Paak’s song creates a sense of unity in the common fight against COVID-19, while simultaneously calling for solidarity in the fight against the pandemic of systemic racism.

This becomes particularly relevant in .Paak’s accompanying music video. Throughout the video, .Paak and his friends are depicted wearing masks, showing their collective commitment to protecting themselves and others against the spread of the pandemic. Ironically, the opening scene shows how they are even wearing masks while protesting for racial justice (.Paak 0:07). While trying to fight the pandemic of systemic racism, they still show solidarity in combatting the pandemic COVID-19. Thus, this visual representation underscores the idea that defeating the pandemic requires a unified effort. Only through collective action and

solidarity can we effectively combat the challenges posed by the virus. Accordingly, .Paak suggests the same for the pandemic of systemic racism, whereby the masks transcend their practical purpose, emerging instead as a powerful metaphor for collective action and solidarity amidst the dual crises of COVID-19 and systemic racism. Thus, while the COVID-19 pandemic requires collective efforts such as social distancing, lockdown measures, or mask-wearing, .Paak suggests that we must find other measures to protect people of color from the pandemic of systemic racism too.

In turn, .Paak calls for solidarity through the image of a clenched fist, made up of the names of victims who died due to issues of systemic racism (.Paak 3:44). Not only does this serve as a memorization of thousands of tragic deaths, but it also serves as a call for action. When individuals raise a clenched fist together, either physically or virtually as stated above, it signifies their commitment to standing in solidarity for a common struggle or cause (Stout). It creates a sense of collective identity which, in turn, results in a sense of collective agency towards common goals.

According to Rob Rosenthal, collective agency is considered essential for empowering movement members to take risks and make sacrifices (14). It encourages prioritizing the common good over personal interests or finding fulfillment through collective action (14). Thereby, Snow suggests that “identifying with a social movement cause or collectivity enhances the probability of participation for individuals across a variety of movements” (176). A shared ‘sense of we’, he says, is “animating and mobilizing cognitively, emotionally, and sometimes even morally” (Snow 175). It creates “shared perceptions and feelings of a common cause, threat, or fate that constitute the shared ‘sense of we’ (and) motivate people to act together in the name of, or for the sake of, the interests of the collectivity” (175). Thereby, emotions play a central role too.

According to Danaher, “music can bring about ‘vitalizing emotions’ to social movement participants” (813). This means that music has the power to stir emotions within individuals, inspiring them to action and instilling them with a sense of purpose and solidarity. In .Paak’s music video, this is done, for instance, in the opening scene, where .Paak and his friends are seen gathered around a diner table in the direct aftermath of a protest (.Paak 0:11). While they seem cheerful at first, their smiles quickly fade away as they realize the hopelessness of their situation (.Paak 0:18). Blood running down .Paak’s forehead, he gazes directly into the camera, serving as a powerful invitation for his viewers to confront issues of police brutality and racial violence (.Paak 0:30). Similarly, the music video’s final scene shows .Paak putting his son to bed with tears running down his eyes (.Paak 3:17). As the violent events of the day set in, he realizes the future his child is set up to have, plagued by oppression and injustice. Both scenes create an emotional reaction which, in turn, may function as a means to mobilize .Paak’s audience (Danaher 813).

Thus, “Lockdown” works to inspire collective agency, even amidst circumstances of physical confinement, through free spaces, collective identity, emotions, and social movement culture. In turn, this foregrounds “Lockdown” as a powerful example of protest music, foregrounding the simultaneous existence of dual pandemics and the urgency of combatting them.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has shown the major effects COVID-19 has had, particularly on communities of color. Next to already existing inequalities, the pandemic posed new challenges marked by higher rates of infection and limited access to healthcare. Within this context, music emerged as a powerful tool of expression. Artists across various genres turned to powerful lyrics to voice the injustices perpetuated in society, whereby Anderson .Paak's song "Lockdown" emerged as a powerful example. Issued as a response to the murder of George Floyd, his song draws attention to issues of racial violence and systemic oppression, functioning as a powerful anthem, particularly within the Black Lives Matter movement. Since the seventeenth century, music has posed a central element for people of color to express their discontent in society. Moreover, it has worked to unite people under common grievances and shared aspirations for societal change. Similarly, this thesis has shown how .Paak's song "Lockdown" does this too. By drawing on emotions of anger and despair, "Lockdown" creates a collective identity among his audience who share the common goal of fighting the dual pandemics. It creates a social movement culture that reflects the spirit of Black Lives Matter, mobilizing his audience to fight for racial justice. It highlights the urgent need for action, showing that people of color are still dying, despite the lockdown measures imposed to protect. While they do protect some people from COVID-19, they fail to protect people of color from the ongoing struggle of systemic racism that prevents them from safely staying at home.

Moreover, "Lockdown" has proven the ability of music to create action, even in a time when physical gatherings were not possible. When lockdown measures confined people to their homes, preventing people from physical protests, music sparked symbolic free spaces for individuals to engage with pressing issues, nonetheless. Moreover, in a time when literal free spaces were reduced to people's homes, virtual free spaces gained renewed recognition. While people could not interact in person, online platforms like Twitter, Instagram, or YouTube

allowed them to like, share, or comment on their favorite tracks and artists. In the comment section of “Lockdown’s” music video, for instance, fans engaged in dialogue about the song’s significance and the powerful themes discussed. Consequently, this resulted in a form of online protest, marked by a chain reaction of raised fist emojis, proving that protest is possible even in isolation.

In summary, “Lockdown’s” significance derives from its ability to create action, even when physical protest was not possible. It harnesses the power of music to create awareness, amplify voices, inspire solidarity, and mobilize communities in the ongoing struggle against systemic racism and social injustice.

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