

RITUALISTIC USE OF RELIGIOUS MUSIC: A COMPARISON BETWEEN OLD TESTAMENT PSALMS AND PEDI PSALM-LIKE SONGS OF THANKSGIVING AND LAMENT

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Abstract

In both the culture of ancient Israel and that of the modern-day Pedi people of South Africa the medium of song plays a significant role in expressing personal and communal views on how life affects those born into it. In this article the author attempts to provide a descriptive and comparative assessment of the various types of psalms in the Old Testament Psalter vis-à-vis Pedi psalm-like songs. Such an investigation has hitherto not been attempted and this paper is meant to investigate the Pedi psalm-like texts as texts equivalent to the biblical psalms in quality, structure and content. I analyzed Pedi psalm-like songs searching for the African ethical values inherent in them. I also compared the Pedi psalm-like songs and the biblical psalms; searching for the similarities and differences; thus asserting the relevance of the psalms to the contemporary African peoples. This bi-disciplinary approach between music and theology is a growing trend in African musicology and African theology. Inevitably, some of what I say is based on my own experience.

A INTRODUCTION

For many years, scholarly research on psalms has concentrated mainly on the psalms as documented in the Bible and their parallels in the ancient Near East. Scholarly works have centered on the nature, function, use, structure and the origin of these psalms. So far, however, it appears that biblical scholars have given little attention to the psalm-like texts in African culture(s). They seem to be unaware of their ex-

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istence and ignorant of their purpose and function. Yet, there are, and have been, many psalm-like songs in African culture. Still, there remains a need for in-depth research on the nature, forms, uses, roles and contexts of these texts in African cultures, and a comparison between them and Old Testament psalms. Above all, there is a need to bring the knowledge of the African psalm-like texts to researchers and scholars of theology. This would be a contribution towards the wealth and value of indigenous knowledge systems in Africa, and specifically the *Pedi* culture in South Africa.

This article is based on the following research hypothesis:

African (Pedi) psalm-like texts contribute to the communal experience and worship of Pedi Africans in ways that are both similar and different when compared with the role of biblical psalms in their ancient Israelite context(s). While specifics of structure and content may differ, both traditions mediate religious experience of believers and enhance their worship of the divine.

This research is primarily a **literature study**, primarily based on oral traditions and, secondly, on literature. In order to situate the study theoretically and generate the conceptual framework, secondary data was consulted and assessed. Secondary evidence included written sources like books, journals and similar articles, MA and PhD theses, etc. This research is underpinned by enculturation hermeneutics' emphasis and reappraisal of indigenous cultural systems (Adamo 2001:45; Ukpong 2002:18)². While enculturation is nuanced variously in different parts of the Third World, Fabella (2003:105) is of the opinion that it addresses the following concerns: first, culture is seen as comprehensive,

² Enculturation hermeneutics takes its cue from the methodology of Third World theology (Torres and Fabella 1987:269-271).

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taking into account the tension between the influences of modernity and Westernization on the peoples' culture as well as the traditional ways of life; second, as a dialogical process, enculturation takes into account the anti-life components in both the local culture and the biblical accounts (e.g. its patriarchal orientation), which must be critiqued and transformed. In this sense, Fabella (2003:105) insists that enculturation is liberative. Third, in our age enculturation is mainly the responsibility of the local community and religious communities/leaders, not of expatriate missionaries or of local experts alone. Fourth, enculturation is an on-going process since culture is dynamic and continually evolves. Fifth, enculturation cannot be so local that religious faith is no longer recognizable by others within the communion of churches in general. Sixth, it is believed that divine intervention or involvement has an essential role in the work of enculturation³. By commencing with biblical texts the researcher has chosen to move from a well-researched study field to one with a shorter research history.

Comparative perspectives

Since the book of Psalms in the Old Testament has not been subjected to a comparative evaluation with *Pedi* psalm-like songs, the prime objectives of this study were to provide a descriptive assessment of the Old Testament psalms' Thanksgiving and Lament and *Pedi* psalm-like songs of Thanksgiving and Lament; their religious function(s); and to find similarities and differences in their nature,

³ Fabella (2003:105) continues to say that in Africa emphasis is given to cultural values such as relationship with ancestors, rites of passage, and traditional healing services. According to him Africans focus on the Africanization of Christianity rather than on the Christianization of Africa, while recognizing that not all aspects of African culture are in consonance with the Christian gospel.

content and functions by comparing these two literary traditions with each other. However, it was not only the aim to document the oral heritage of *Pedi* psalm-like texts but also to analyse them and determine the religious function(s) of their literary genre. With these introductory ideas in mind, it is now appropriate to discuss the findings of the research.

B. OLD TESTAMENT PSALMS

1. Overview

Arguments for the classification and function of biblical psalms have been stated by many commentators such as (Mowinckel, 1962; Murphy, 1963; Eissfeldt, 1965; Eaton, 1967; Childs, 1976; Kraus, 1979; Wilson, 1979; Gunkel, 1985; Stuhlmüller, 1989; Day, 1990; Seybold, 1990; McCann, 1993; Pleins, 1993; Kuntz, 1994; Whybray, 1995; Crenshaw, 2001; Gerstenberger, 2001 and Brueggemann, 2002). In particular, Herman Gunkel has pioneered the classification of the psalms into different forms, types or genres (*Gattungen*), and tried to determine their life setting (*Sitz im Leben*) in ancient Israel.

There are several kinds of psalm-types and each has its own functions. Hymns of praise seem to focus on Israel's Exodus from Egypt, her possession of the land of Canaan, and God's care of and gifts to his people. There are also Thanksgiving songs. They seem to be acts of recollection, of consolidation, and of new formations of wholeness when the shepherd is with the flock. Another form is Laments. They can be distinguished as being either communal or individual and functioned as prayers of complaints. Laments are the dominant psalm type in number. They reflect experiences in the depths of loneliness, frustration and fearfulness.

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Generally, various types of Old Testament psalms express worship in one way or the other; whether it is praise or lament, or anything in between these two poles. They are meant as messages for the local cultural community. In addition to expressing praise and joy, both are associated with such varied moods as consolation and thanksgiving. In the psalms the basis for music making is usually dependent on the members of the clan or group who share the common habitat, and who have common local traditions, and common beliefs and values. The addressee in the biblical psalms is most often God Himself and sometimes it is people. They reflect individuals' joys and sorrows between birth and death, their toil and celebration, sleeping and waking, sickness and recovery, losses, anxieties, confidences and temptations to despair. To achieve the purpose of this study, thanksgiving songs and laments are examined.

C OLD TESTAMENT THANKSGIVING SONGS AND LAMENT PSALMS

1 Introduction

Thanksgiving songs and Lament psalms formed the basis of the investigation. The realization of protection through prayer is confirmed through thanksgiving. Thereby a petitioner acknowledges salvation from God. In such instances the catastrophe may have passed or was showing signs of relenting. Given the certainty of answered prayer the psalmists burst forth in thanksgiving (Pss 28:6-9, 64:11; 77:10-20; 140:12, 13). Thanksgiving is expressed by confidence arising from the declaration of God's promise to intervene in debilitating situations. God's word is the basis of such spontaneous outbursts. Other circumstances warrant this response, for example, after recalling the past acts of Yahweh (Ps 77:10-12).

Lament psalms are dominated by descriptions of distress and disaster. In most cases, the adversarial perpetrator instigates suffering upon the individual, land people and king. Consequently, the supplicant responds by praying to God for protection and deliverance. Danger is portrayed broadly and, in most psalms, the enemy is depicted metaphorically. Evidently, a number of laments came into being against the backdrop of impending danger or during crisis.

2 Thanksgiving songs

Thanksgiving songs may be distinguished between individual and communal thanksgiving psalms (Gunkel 1926:475). In defining what a Thanksgiving psalm is, Longman (1988:31) stresses the fact that a Thanksgiving psalm is most easily identified by a restatement of the lament, which is now answered. There is a close connection between hymns and thanksgivings and a typical thanksgiving begins in a similar way to a hymn of praise. According to Anderson (1983:111) "...community songs of Thanksgiving are relatively few in number, and even these come to being hymns".

In his distinction between a hymn and a Thanksgiving song Westermann (1980:71ff; 81ff; 1981:97) prefers "descriptive praise" instead of "hymn" and "declarative"⁵ or "narrative praise" for the community's songs of Thanksgiving⁶. Craven (1992:10) argues that communal thanksgiving psalms "present most vividly the perennial dialogue between God and human beings." He insists⁷ that the psalms as we read,

⁵ Declarative praises are also described as individual songs of Thanksgiving, or private hymns of thanksgiving (Anderson 1972:35). These praises presuppose laments and they are man's response to God's gracious intervention.

⁶ Kuntz (1994:89) is of the opinion that the former celebrates the deity's attributes and creative power while the latter responds to specific acts of divine deliverance.

⁷ Brueggemann (2002:50) regards songs of Thanksgiving as belonging to

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study and pray them today, record only one-half of the conversation. Most often community songs of Thanksgiving express the sentiments of members of the community in dialogue with God.

Gerstenberger (1988:15) points out that Thanksgiving psalms consist, *inter alia*, of the following elements: invitation to give thanks or to praise Yahweh⁸, account of trouble and salvation⁹, praises of Yahweh, acknowledgement of God's saving work¹⁰, blessings over participants in the ceremony¹¹ and exhortation¹². Mowinckel (1957:14) continually asserts that the Thanksgiving psalm begins ordinarily with a general expression of the worshipper's intention to thank and praise God or with a general statement of His praise worthiness; then follows the record about the worshipper's experiences, his distress and his salvation. Contributions made by Mowinckel (1957:14) and Gerstenberger (1988:15) have sparked further debate on the Thanksgiving songs. For example, Brueggemann (1995:15) has shown that these psalms move from petition and plea to praise. Mowinckel (1962:132-135) surmises, quite realistically, that the Thanksgiving psalms are often richly varied. Sometimes it involves confession of sin, (for example, Ps 32), at other times a religious problem, which becomes the main topic. Here fundamental emotion and gratitude find many expres-

the personal sphere. The counterpart in the public domain is the hymn. In general, this is a sound division. He (Brueggemann 2002:51) has shown that these psalms do suggest that on occasion the whole community had given thanks.

⁸ Pss 30:2, 5; 34:2-4; 118:1-4.

⁹ Pss 18:4-20; 32:3-5; 40:2-4; 41:5-10; 116:3-4; 118:10-14.

¹⁰ Pss 18:47-49; 30:2-4; 12-1; 40:6; 92:5-6; 118:14, 28-29; 130:2; 138:1-2, Isa 12:1.

¹¹ Pss 22:27; 40:5; 41:2; 118:8-9.

¹² Pss 32:8-9; 34:10; 12-15; 40:5; 118:8-9.

sions. But the personal element features in a special way¹³. These psalms seem to have been the particular favourites of the “wise.” Smith (1984:14) considers the individual songs of Thanksgiving as expressions of the payment of those vows. He observes that the form of the individual song of Thanksgiving usually includes an introduction, like “I will give thanks to the Lord.” (Ps 30:1), “I love the Lord,” (Pss 18:1; 116:1), a narration of past troubles, prayer and deliverance, and the announcement of a thank offering or a confession of praise.

Mowinckel (1962:32-43) effectively narrowed down the variety of life situations proposed by Gunkel. He sets the majority of the psalms in the context of a particular interpretation of Israel’s cultic life. His work also demonstrates that the occasions for a thank offering with a psalm of Thanksgiving were just as numerous as the dangers and tribulations and difficulties of life (Mowinckel 1962:54-55). Psalms of Thanksgiving affirm mostly that God hears the worshippers’ prayer (Pleins 1993:60). Pleins (1993:63) singles out the notion that the community psalms of Thanksgiving place a special emphasis on God’s provision of food for the world. Brueggemann (1988:145-146) pointed out that the individual songs of Thanksgiving offer a third way (besides disorientation and orientation) in which Israel goes back behind hymns to the concrete sphere of pain. He emphasizes that these are songs in which individuals and community tell of actual troubles that have been resolved. For Hayes, through Thanksgiving songs God is praised for his action of salvation which has changed the life and fate of the one praying (Hayes 1976:10). In sum, the prime functions of Thanksgiving songs are to respond to the experience of God’s grace

¹³ According to Mowinckel (1962:132-135) many of the psalms have been composed for use in situations which are so humanly common and familiar, for example, in times of illness. Hence, we can take for granted that many of the professional temple-singers have also had similar experiences.

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and power, to exalt God as redeemer, provider and sustainer, as well as to bear witness to everything that God has done in the lives of the believers.

3 Lament Songs

Laments can be distinguished as either communal or individual. They are prayers of complaint (Craven 1992:26-27). Forty percent of the prayers of the Psalter belong to this type. Laments reflect experiences in the depths of loneliness, frustration and fearfulness. The attitude that Yahweh is ready to hear the protestations of the dissatisfied is coupled with the practice of unrestrained complaint. Psalmists are confident that, if God will intervene, distress would be alleviated.

The conviction in these prayers is that the world of the individual or the community is out of order. In many cases, the disequilibrium is charged to God who has failed the psalmists, or to enemies who have triumphed unfairly. Usually the psalmist claims innocence. The individual laments are not always negative. Most of them have a note of praise and a confession of trust in God. Seybold (1990:116)¹⁴ classifies the following 36 psalms as laments of the individual (Pss 3; 5; 7; 13; 17; 22; 25; 26; 27; 28; 35; 38; 39; 41; 42; 43; 51; 54; 55; 56; 57; 59; 61; 63; 64; 69; 71; 86; 88; 102; 109; 130; 140; 141; 143). Day (1990:33) regards Psalms 12; 44; 60; 74; 79; 80; 83; 85; 90; 94; 126 and 137 as communal laments¹⁵. The conclusions of Smith (1984:14), based on the community lament, are most relevant for our present study.

¹⁴ Seybold (1990:120) further mentioned that the (36) lament psalms belong together according to his classification in a polar relationship. In their polarity they show what it is to be completely human.

¹⁵ Westermann (1989:22) proposes that the communal lament psalms are a collection from the post-exilic period when Israel was a mere province inside an empire.

Smith thus aptly points out that the structure¹⁶ of the community lament is essentially the same as that of the individual lament. He indicates that the community lament begins with an invocation and a cry for help. In his view, reasons for the lament grow out of defeat in battle (Ps 44:9-10), the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple (Pss 74:4-7; 79:1-3), or a feeling that God has rejected his people without a cause (Ps 44:17-22).

Anderson (1972:39) indicates that communal laments are less numerous than the individual songs of lamentation. He points out that the following psalms are often reckoned as communal laments (Pss 64; 74; 79; 80; 83; 85; 90; 124; 126; 137 and 144). Seybold (1990:115) classifies ten psalms as laments of the community (Pss 44; 60; 74; 79; 80; 83; 85; 89; 90; 137). According to him, these are prayers of the people, in a time of tribulation. Longman (1988:27) argues that besides mood, individual laments are also united by a similar structure. He sums up his argument on the function of individual lament psalms to introduce the seven elements¹⁷ which are associated with a lament, though not strictly in the order listed here. They include: an invocation; plea to God for help; complaints; confession of sin or an as-

¹⁶ Smith (1984:14) notes that one feature of community laments that is not often present in the individual laments is the appeal to the past. He is of the opinion that some of the community laments end in vows to praise God if He will hear their prayers and restore their fortunes (Pss 79:13; 80; 83; 90; 123; 129; 137).

¹⁷ Rarely will all seven elements actually occur together, but a number of them will appear in each lament (Longman 1988:27). In his investigation of psalms, Longman (1988:26) holds that the lament is the psalmist's cry when in great distress. He has nowhere to turn but to God. We discover three types of complaints as we read through the laments: First, the psalmist may be troubled by his own thoughts and actions. Second, he may complain about the actions of others against him (the "enemies"). Third, he may be frustrated by God Himself. Longman (1988:28) concludes that "since a lament predominantly reflects a downcast mood, it is surprising to note that all laments include some expression of trust in God."

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sertion of innocence; confidence in God's response; and a hymn or blessing. Lament psalms were created in certain great crises in the life of the individual and the nation. These psalms were composed by skilled poets for the use of other people less able to clothe their experiences in a poetical language (Anderson 1972:30). Brueggemann (2002:41)¹⁸ claims that communal lament psalms are not so numerous in the Psalter, yet they are important for the nurturing of responsible faith. In particular, Brueggemann's (2002:47) view of the communal lament psalms is that most frequently the psalms stay with the experience to bring the speech to a second decisive move, from disorientation to a new orientation. He sees laments as expression of disorientation.

The above arguments bring another problem to the fore, namely, the people's relationship with God. Pleins's (1993:33) arguments regarding the community laments provide an illustration of the statement concerning the people's relationship with God. His main thesis¹⁹ is that, although many of the community laments reflect disarray and despair, in several texts this conflictual atmosphere serves to focus

¹⁸ Brueggemann (2002:41) in fact tried to convey the message that the psalms regularly bear witness to the surprising gift of new life just when none had been expected. Westermann (1981) however, has argued that the full form of the complaint psalm is the most basic rhetorical pattern in Israel's faith. Although he did not go on to say this explicitly, he is of the opinion that the full form constitutes a dramatic whole that moves from wretchedness to joy (Brueggemann 2002:48).

¹⁹ In support of the above information, Pleins (1993:26-27) emphasized that in the individual laments, the questions directed at God can rather be pointed such as: "has God forgotten how to show pity?" (Ps 77:10a), or "If you keep track of people's sins, Lord, who will survive?" (Ps 130:3). Questions like these speak to the harsh reality of human suffering in the face of divine indifference. He also mentioned that throughout the individual laments there is a compelling theological and human response to the reality of personal suffering and social injustice, a response that arises from inside situations of hurt and hopelessness, injustice and oppression.

the community's ongoing dialogue with God. This relationship is thought of in generational terms, like "God, we have heard with our own ears, our ancestors have told us, You acted in their day, in former times" (Ps 44:2). For Craven (1992:43) communal laments show that the psalmists verbalize their anger and resentment with no reservations. They express their bitterness and vindictiveness in the promise that once their own righteousness and God's justice are proven, they will praise Him for deliverance and sovereignty.

From the above considerations, there is much evidence to suggest that laments are connected to a specific cause, a threat to the people or an individual. The following related remark by Anderson needs attention:

"... in the individual laments, however, we can never be sure what the trouble is, for the psalmists resort to picturesque language to describe the human condition."(Anderson 1983:83)

The notion that the psalms of lament are pain put into words of joy remains enveloped in an uncertainty for Seybold (1990:112). It seems that laments have a regular structure, but they never become stereotyped. I tend to see major parts addressing God, lamenting, confessing confidence, petitioning, and a vowing to praise. Craven (1992:22), however, offers a different opinion. He presumes that laments are prayers of complaint about crisis situations involving personal enemies, sickness, military affairs, concern for the sanctuary, friends who no longer are friends, problems with God's inaccessibility, or other distressing situations. He further notes that laments bespeak the knowledge that the individual or the community is not in control, and that God is an agent of powerful change. Craven (1992:28-29) notes that in laments, honest complaint coupled with complete trust in God seem to effect relief for the psalmists. It is

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worthwhile to mention here Stuhlmüller's (1989:107-108) view on acknowledging how the largest number of psalms fit into the category of individual laments. Stuhlmüller has suggested that the division between communal and personal laments is somewhat arbitrary. She assumes that individuals may have composed the psalms not only to express and sustain their personal sorrow in God's presence, but also to share their sorrow with other Israelites on days of mourning. Crenshaw (2001:16)²⁰ endorses this observation by stating that the majority of laments give the impression of having been composed for use by a single individual, but exceptions such as psalm 60 lend a communal dimension to the voice of distress.

The lament is one of the basic forms of psalmic expression. Most other psalm forms are derived from responses to the lament, a viewpoint which is shared by Brueggemann (1995:18). Brueggemann (2002:39) emphasizes that it is the function of personal laments to enable, require, legitimate and complete the rejection of the old orientation. Brueggemann has shown that the lament psalms express the basic range of faith in God, ranging from deep alienation to profound trust, confidence and gratitude. Laments belong rather to healing ceremonies within the circle of the family (Miller 1986:6). Miller motivates his observation by citing an example that a person who may be threatened by any of a wide range of troubles goes to a ritual expert within the family or clan, someone trained in the ritual but not a priest, participates in a healing rite involving both words and actions, and gets rid of the threat or trouble. In Miller's view, laments were more like family or group therapy than prayer and worship in the church. He further mentions that lament psalms

²⁰ Crenshaw (2001:81) is convinced that the original circumstances evoking the laments were later generalized to make the prayers more universal.

are an indication of the fact that individuals live their lives “above all in the small world of the primary group” rather than in the larger, albeit secondary one, when viewed from a sociological perspective of the community (Miller 1986:7).. Miller supports his position by noting that it gives the worshipping community a compelling vocabulary for confronting a God who oversees social dislocation and tragedy. Given these functions of the lament it is obvious that the context of the petition can be derived from the nature of the complaint, for it urges simply that the distress should be dealt with.

D PEDI PSALM-LIKE SONGS

1. Introduction

Music as an effective medium for social intervention is well-known in the *Pedi* culture. The rallying as well as cohesive potential of music is exploited to bring people together for different purposes. It also spurs members of a group towards achieving a corporate objective in a community. Music as a direct agency for social intervention is further recognized as a censure free medium among the *Pedi*. It helps to express and expose corporate truth, communal or personal views, agitations as well as aspirations. The study describes and discusses two types and specific genres of *Pedi* psalm-like songs. These include the following: Thanksgiving songs and Lament songs.

2. Thanksgiving songs

Singing is by far the most prevalent mode of musical expression among the African people. Although there exists genres of “instrumental music”, no such genre completely excludes song (Chernoff 1979:37; Oehrle and Emeka 2003:39). Many formal and informal activities are marked by singing, whether or not the occasion is designated a “musical occasion”. Although there is a certain amount of private,

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solo singing, the *Pedi* people regard singing as essentially a group activity, an opportunity to express their “communal ethos”. In the *Pedi* culture social and ethical values are communicated through Thanksgiving songs, while the content is largely dictated by current concerns and the way people approach them. Musical cultures and societies in Africa are guided by complex sets of moral and ethical values and beliefs that are historical and cultural. Values are lived (normatively), perceived (in ourselves and others) and exhibited (as in a way of living, dress, or music), according to Mans (2005:16). *Pedi* Thanksgiving songs provide an opportunity for people to express their interpretations of society.

The use of Thanksgiving songs in the *Pedi* culture helps the narrator to hold the listeners’ attention, and adds another dimension to the story. The narrator therefore dramatizes the ‘story’ through musical techniques. Kebede (1987:7) writes that ‘responsorial’ is a common style of singing amongst the sub-Saharan African cultures. It is a pattern of call and response that involves two or more singers, a solo or group response to the lead singer imitatively, duplicative or otherwise. Kebede defines ‘antiphony’ or ‘antiphonal singing’ as the call and response form that involves two independent groups that respond to one another, or two performers from each group responding to each other. In *Pedi* Thanksgiving songs there are these forms of call and response patterns. The kind of group versus group call and response singing defined by Kebede as antiphony does exist in *Pedi* performance practice.

Like in other cultures *Pedi* musicians perform prophetically by foretelling the future consequences of certain actions taken by men and women in the society. The musicians, in their foresight, investigate, evaluate, probe and foretell future events in the *Pedi* society. In the *Pedi* culture there are

fixtures at appropriate times of the year for religious festivals dedicated to the ancestors (*badimo*). There are also other annual religious rites of mass purgation, regeneration and thanksgiving. These rites involve a particular clan or the entire community as a body corporate participant even though the process may select key celebrants and officials. Thanksgiving songs are used to conduct the religious aspects, which constitute the core event of the festival theme. The social celebration, which mandates the entire group to participate actively in the festive programmes, secures the successful outcome of the core event. This entails feasting and secular musical arts performances. Clan songs are found in many societies (Kofie 1994:33). Kofie further mentions that even lineages sometimes have specific songs with regard to their own social grouping. MacGaffey (2002:12) confirms that music is thought to enable communication with the dead.

The *Pedi* community observes the practice of feeding or venerating the ancestors. The head of the clan performs this rite of communion. The purpose is to invoke and share communion with ancestors that are emotionally close to the living, and whose intangible interventions are known to impact on the psyche and life fortunes of selected, and sometimes collective, living progeny. Such a communion, in the form of symbolic feeding, regenerates the energies of the ancestral spirits for effective performance of their roles in ensuring favourable fates and accomplishments for the living. Ancestors are meant to protect, strengthen and bless their offspring, but they are not omnipotent (Nurnberger 2007:154). For every success ancestors' veneration is to be conducted as a signal of appreciation, acknowledgement, respect and honour to them. They are recognized as strong affective presences in the hierarchy of the affective supernatural essences (Nzewi 2007:129). They play palpable

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metaphysical supporting roles in the psychical wellness of the *Pedi* individual and community. Furthermore, they constitute cohesive forces in the affairs of family and compound units, lineage groups and the community at large. Ancestor veneration of the *Pedi* is based on the belief that the dead can influence the living but not vice versa (Mamagabe Michael Tjabadi, personal communication July 23, 2003). Ancestors have therefore to be respected, honoured and obeyed. They have to be thanked for their blessings, and have to be fed through sacrifices (Mbiti 1969:81; Staples 1981:68). The *Pedi* acknowledge whatever gift or fortune is received from the ancestors. Without any acknowledgement the ancestors have the power to withdraw their gifts or fortune. In addition, *Pedi* people believe that the spirits of departed ancestors have considerable power both for good and evil. Spirits of departed ancestors may cause all kinds of misfortunes if they are offended by any action of a living relative.

In such a case the offender must make a sacrificial offering to appease the ancestral spirit. It is not unusual at a burial ceremony for a family representative to talk to the corpse, to persuade the spirit not to trouble the family or village (Rader 1991:25). In our modern time such messages are normally conveyed through sympathy cards. Ancestor veneration is a widespread phenomenon among the *Pedi* people (Phibion 2003:148). In Africa lament gives birth to an ancestral spirit, because without death there would be no ancestors (Porter 2001:156). Ancestors play an important role in the lives of the *Pedi*. Ancestral spirits are generally believed to be benevolent and concerned about the welfare of their descendants. However, when offended, they can kill and maim their own protégés. Therefore, people always seek to maintain the closest possible relationship with these divinities. This

includes heeding their requests and instructions. Expression of appreciation and thanksgiving through song is evident in the *Pedi* society. Appreciation is indeed an important part of the tribe's act in general. Music serves as an adjunct to religion, and is used for happy and sad purposes, for expressing ideals and emotions, and romantically, for describing scenery (Kofie 1994:99). In improvised verses and pre-composed songs, the *Pedi* single out those members of the community noteworthy for their accomplishments: *matona* (headmen) and other political figures and their descendants. They also include wealthy members of the community who are actively involved in the community development of the *Pedi* people. The *Pedi* society employs Thanksgiving songs to rally warriors, tuning up their morale, and generating public sentiments or moral support as well as pleasing their ancestors. At some festivals which have primary political orientation, Thanksgiving songs are sung to celebrate and commemorate the founding of a community.

Thanksgiving songs are sung to *thank, please and praise ancestors* after having responded positively towards the community's requests. Similar rituals take place in thanksgiving after harvest, a very festive occasion, especially if the harvest has been a good one (Bourdillon 1976:303). In some chiefdoms the thanksgiving ceremony occurs after a particularly good harvest and includes feasting on the meat of oxen killed by the chief for the occasion. If the spirit guardians have failed to provide a good harvest the previous year, they are not so lavishly honoured and the celebrations cease.

In African culture music is used to praise worthy people, good deeds and achievements (Nzewi 2005:156). To attain this aim imagination of prominent leaders is an essential necessity. To the *Pedi* mind ancestors are humans who have acquired additional powers after death. Ancestors play a

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very important role in a person's life. They are protectors of society and can destroy it as a means of punishment. Ancestors control moral behaviour because they are the moral agents. No serious misbehaviour or anti-life attitude escapes their gaze. They are authority figures who maintain the norms of social action, but cause trouble when these norms are not obeyed (Magesa 1997:48). Men seek to obtain their blessing or to avert their anger by bringing offerings. Therefore they thank the ancestors to *keep a happy relationship*.

3 Lament Songs

Pedi laments are songs with a focus on a distinct, special range of topics. It includes: a) extolling the sex-specific subsistence skills of those who have passed on; b) lamenting death by drowning, accident, or ill health; and c) commemorating notable events and incidents in the *Pedi* community. Tchebwa (2005:15) observes that music and history are mutually supportive through a complete vision of the events that give rhythm to the life and to the journey of a people. Significant events in a person's life may be woven into a memorial or Lament song. The crux of the argument rests on the African traditional worldview as one in which people recognize and experience many dangers and threats of life, even if they smile, sing and dance (Mbiti 1987:156). Life is seen as a struggle in the face of these threats, which are both physical and spiritual in nature. In the *Pedi* society illnesses are believed to be caused by witchcraft. Ndemera et al (1985:33) states that in actual life, feelings of jealousy are more likely to grow when people see one another regularly and know one another's affairs. The family spirit (*modimo*) normally protects all family members from harm, but if one of them transgresses, particularly by omitting a religious ritual, the spirit becomes annoyed and punishes the family by causing an illness or the death of one or more of its mem-

bers (Ndemera, et al 1985:31). Kofie (1994:41) and Soko (2003:3-1) agree with Ndemere et al (1985:31) when they note that disease and misfortune are supposed to come as punishment from the ancestors who are believed to be very powerful. Ancestors are more powerful than any living being, and can bring about the death of a lineage member.

Most of the *Pedi* Lament songs deal with some sort of trouble like adversity, experiences of enmity, oppression and wickedness. Particularities of the situation of the supplicants are often difficult to discern. What is going on? Who are the enemies? Why are they hostile to the supplicant? What have they done that is bad? What is happening to the supplicant that is regularly described in extreme terms? Complaint and accusation are directed to ancestors as well as towards enemies, and sometimes towards the lamenter himself. Ancestors play a crucial role with regard to life and death. Sorrow features in many *Pedi* songs are caused either by sentiments of lost love, desertion and poverty, or by the women's vocal quality, which reflects strained emotion. The phrasing of *Pedi* Lament songs is determined on the basis of its melodic sequence, the repetition of note and rhythmic sequences, pauses for breath or short breaks, and by shorter notes marking the end of phrases²¹. In *Pedi* Lament songs sentences end with a falling intonation. *Pedi* laments normally end in the plea and confidence that ancestors will cause the enemy to flee and be put to shame. Newell (1976:87) states that the relationship between ancestor worship and society is complex: ancestor worship reflects the society, is determined by it, and at the same time shapes it.

²¹ Among the *Pedi* dirges and laments are accompanied with body rhythms (clapping and stamping), and not with instruments. Dynamic movements, gestures and textual and musical extemporizations are integral parts of dirges and laments.

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Despair and helplessness are the underpinnings of *Pedi* funeral songs. Mourning can cause illness, and disruption in patterns of sleeping, eating and socializing. During a funeral ceremony, which usually lasts for one or two days, the manifestations of grief take a variety of forms. Mourners may cry, and utter expressions of pain and sorrow. Both in Christianity and African cultural heritage, the death of an individual causes great concern to the community of which he has been a member. "This is especially so if the deceased had favourable relations with the members of the community" (Mbiti 1972:535). In African tradition, the death of an elderly popular individual is felt to be a great loss to the community (Mbiti 1972:535). Mourning is symbolized by black clothing. Moreover, for months, mourners may live a life of seclusion, and abandon all outward manifestations of joy. Such manifestations include listening to or performing what is regarded as *Pedi* traditional funeral songs.

Burying the dead, for example, is an important social occasion in the life of the *Pedi* society. While the wailing and the dirges furnish a socially patterned outlet for grief, the Lament songs form the most dramatic part of the setting of display and celebration, which surrounds the occasion. Death rites are held to celebrate and mourn the passage to the afterlife. Music at funerals and most other occasions is there for whole making. African events consistently resort to music²² (Uzoigwe and Tracey 2003:82). In Africa the death of any member of a community, particularly a prominent or accomplished member, attracts the rendition of music and in some cases dirges in honour of the deceased (Onyeji 2004:92).

²² Along similar lines it is worthwhile to mention here Owomoyela's (1979:15) view that in traditional African community singing accompanied important periods or turning points in the life of an individual, such as childhood, marriage and death.

Sometimes such music is created and performed by the adult women of the community. The *Pedi* community has ancestral veneration as part of their indigenous religion. This ritual activity is universally known as '*go phasa*' ('to venerate'). The head of the tribe or family, with the assistance of traditional healers, normally takes the lead in conducting this ritual. Sekhukhune (1988:48) writes that "*badimo*" ('ancestors') are believed to be omnipresent and as a result they are worshipped everywhere but preferably where the dead are buried or in a brackish spot known as '*sebatlabadimo*'. Sekhukhune describes '*sebatlabadimo*' as a place that is believed to be prepared by the departed themselves. The act of '*go phasa*' is generally multi-purposeful. Among the *Pedi* people it is executed for the purpose of asking for rain in times of drought and famine, curing, and alleviating pain from any epidemic. Lament songs generally focus on *bewailing the beloved*, recognition of the ancestors, avoiding the power of witchcraft as well as *creating a good relationship* between the living and the living dead.

D COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT

This article may be considered as a pioneer investigation because preliminary research has revealed that there is no investigation that has employed a comparison between Old Testament psalms and *Pedi* psalm-like songs. The clearest differences and similarities between the biblical psalms and *Pedi* psalm-like songs relate to religious experience. A comparison between Old Testament psalms and *Pedi* psalm-like songs of Thanksgiving and Lament yielded the following significant similarities and differences:

i) Thanksgiving

In both Old Testament psalms and *Pedi* psalm-like songs of Thanksgiving there are a division between individual and communal thanksgiving. However, Old Testament psalms

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emphasize the individuals' response to God's acts in the presence of their religious community (e.g. Pss 22; 40; 41 and 118). *Pedi* songs of Thanksgiving (e.g. *kgoparara*) on the other hand pronounce communal aspects. Responsorial devices are detectable in selected psalms as well as in *Pedi* psalm-like songs. *Pedi* psalm-like songs are often done in a responsorial manner between the leader and the participants, especially during communal rites singing. Old Testament Thanksgiving songs serve the purpose of acknowledging God's response in the presence of the religious community. There is a double direction in speech, namely to God and to the community. Thus, God's saving work is made known privately and congregationally.

A comparison of Thanksgiving songs in both Old Testament psalms and *Pedi* psalm-like songs yielded a significant difference: Old Testament worshippers acknowledge God's redeeming work while the *Pedi* people show appreciation and confidence in ancestors, as mediators to the Supreme Being/God. A marked distinction between Old Testament psalms and *Pedi* thanksgiving is noted. Whereas Biblical Psalmists direct all their thanksgiving to God, *Pedi* people on the contrary address their ancestors. The *Pedi's* communal thanksgiving occasions such as harvest celebrations are accompanied by rituals and feasting.

ii) Lamenting

The similarity between Old Testament laments and *Pedi* Lament songs is intriguing. Both traditions contain elements of complaint. Old Testament laments are directed towards God about whatever personal or communal crisis they are praying for. *Pedi* laments however are directed towards ancestors about misfortunes as well as towards enemies, and sometimes towards the lamenter himself (e.g. *Pedi* funeral

song *madi a manaba*: blood of the adversaries/enemies). Old Testament and *Pedi* laments alike are characterized by honesty, pain, vindictiveness, despair and helplessness. Both the Biblical Psalmists and *Pedi* people utilize laments for reorientation from situations of despair. Ancient Israelites as well as *Pedi* people approach their deity through lament in pursuing rectification. Laments reach a climax as victims complain against God in the Biblical psalms or towards ancestors among the *Pedi*. Nevertheless, just as the Biblical Psalmists have trust in the ability of God to intervene, so do the *Pedi* in their ancestors. They trust their ancestors to mediate deliverance and upliftment of distress with God/Supreme Being. Suffering is universal to people of different societies and historical periods. Since suffering is universal the use of laments under dire situations occurs in both traditions.

It appears that a ritual expert may have exercised therapeutic functions in Israel during catastrophes. However, among the *Pedi* people there is no evidence of such function. Other differences arise from the prevalence of witchcraft in *Pedi* society. This practice is either suppressed or non-existent in Israel. The Israelite faith got rid of magical practices and rituals. Besides complaining to God, *Pedi* people, unlike Biblical Psalmists, may direct their laments towards ancestors and other people. A clear distinction between them pertains to the presence of ancestors and witches in the *Pedi's* religious practices.

E CONCLUSION

From this study, it appears that: i) *Pedi* psalm-like songs originated in the twentieth century while Biblical psalms were written 2000-3000 years ago; ii) psalms are almost completely in written texts while *Pedi* songs are still very much oral; iii) the *Pedi* psalm-like songs are more general, secular

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and cultural (e.g. thanksgiving, lament of death of parents) versus the Old Testament psalms which are purely religious. Biblical psalms say very little about phases of life and laments are not so much about death of somebody as about divine silence or punishment; iv) Old Testament psalms are more about themes linked to prayer and instruction in the relationship with God while *Pedi* songs focus more on associated problems but are not so much solely concerned with the deity; v) Old Testament psalms have been in textual format much longer than the *Pedi* texts and more textual edition, redaction and canonization has occurred than with regard to *Pedi* songs.

This article has been an attempt to compare Old Testament psalms with *Pedi* psalm-like songs of Thanksgiving and Lament. In both the culture of ancient Israel and that of the modern-day *Pedi* people the medium of song plays a significant role in expressing personal and communal views on how life affects those born into it. Based on a descriptive and comparative assessment of the Laments and Thanksgiving songs in the Old Testament Psalter vis-à-vis *Pedi* psalm-like songs, it may be concluded that there exist significant similarities and differences between the songs of the two cultures with regard to many aspects of the texts.

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