
THE BODY IN POVERTY – PSALM 22

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ABSTRACT

The bodily suffering in this psalm can be related to a socio-economic situation of poverty. In addition, it is also closely linked to an experience of distance from God and the community of belonging with its terrible emotional consequences. Although the direction of causality is unclear it would seem that the body breaks down when the solitary self feels alienated from God and from corporate belonging. The description of bodily parts in this psalm therefore contains various layers of meaning beyond the physical, including simultaneously the psychological, social, and spiritual.

INTRODUCTION

This study will focus on the first lamentation part (verses 1–22) of Psalm 22 in order to show to what extent the body is the issue or problem in a psalm which could have been a reaction to or product of poverty.

After an initial overview of the psalm, specific body parts mentioned will be focused on. In addition, the numerous images of animals as reinterpretations of the human body will be high-lighted. Then the way speech is connected to bodily suffering will be looked at. The last three sections will deal with the psychological, spiritual and socio-economic layers of meaning behind the concrete body-parts mentioned in this prayer.

Apart from Dörte Bester (2007:*passim*) who consistently regards the psalm in her work as dealing with the plight of poverty, André LaCocque (1998:194, 197, 201, 203) goes even further by identifying the late- and post-exilic socio-historical context of an underprivileged class in a deeply divided society where feelings are expressed with great intensity (1998:197). He therefore does not regard the “poor” as only

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metaphorical, although realises that the physical and spiritual dimensions of poverty are linked. The mention of קהל רב (a great congregation) in verse 26 is for him not the whole of Israel, but a separate meeting of the poor (1998:201ff.). Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger (1993:150–151) and Hans-Joachim Kraus (2003:188ff.), however, view the group as the whole community. Frank Crüsemann (1989:143), on the other hand, does not believe that there is always a social situation behind poverty in an individual lament psalm. These commentators show that there is support that the psalm can be about poverty.

As context to this research interest is the understanding that poverty is usually considered as a serious shortage of material possessions. Ownership can, however, also be seen as an extension of the body (cf. Seymour Fisher 1974:34, 83). The body therefore holds the primary position in both the physical and economic dimensions of poverty.

AN OVERVIEW OF PSALM 22

Psalm 22 has like many other psalms many references to the body, stretching from head (ראש) in verse 8 to feet (רגלי) in verse 17, just as it also has an overview from birth in verses 10–11 to death in several verses but especially in verse 30 and even beyond to the future generations mentioned in verses 31–32.

In the first 22 verses, either the body or animals are alternately mentioned several times within a context of suffering creating a background atmosphere of sadism. That an extreme experience (Seybold 2003:204) is expressed so often with references to the body, even when they are exaggerations, is psychologically noteworthy. Animals seem to be simply “bodies”, either the psalmist’s own “worm-body” or the cruel bodies that threaten or attack the poet’s body. This high frequency of both bodily parts and animals also occurs in Job and Psalm 54, both of which are about suffering. In Ps 22 body parts are mentioned twice as often as animals, the body 20 times explicitly and animals 9 times, including those with a metaphorical sense.

The cause of the suffering is unknown; it could be due to some form of hostility, exploitation, or neglect, but the fact that the author mentions the body so often implies that the body is affected by it. In Christianity this psalm has become particularly important because the first verse contains what tradition posits as one of the seven utterances of Jesus on the cross. In verse 17, mention of hands and feet (יָדַי וְרַגְלָי, and my hands and my feet) in pain reminds one of Jesus on the cross, and verse 19, which speaks about the clothes of the suffering one, has also been projected onto Jesus, whose garments were divided amongst those who persecuted Him. Parts of this psalm – all from the first lament section – are quoted ten times in the four Gospels (Hans-Ruedi Weber 1989:133). This reference to Jesus has been one application of this individual lamentation, but others are also possible. Marianne Grohmann (2007:68) also confirms that “sich seine Bedeutung nicht ein für allemal fixieren lässt. Er enthält semantische Leerstellen, die im Lauf der Rezeptionsgeschichte immer wieder neu gefüllt werden können.”

That it can just as well be about poverty which is being suffered (especially if one regards many of the descriptions as metaphors) is apparent in that when the psalmist's opponents look at his body they realise the class to which he belongs. But there are more direct references to the author's poverty, such as verse 21 (according to BHS), in which the breath or the self or perhaps even the body is regarded as the only “possession” left. In verse 18 the body of the poor person is also referred to as emaciated, that is, it is either starving due to a lack of nutrition or it is sick and perhaps lacking medical care. All of this adds to the explicit words for “poor”, עֲנִיּוֹת עָנִי in verse 25 and נְיָיִם in verse 27, in this psalm (*vide supra*).

SPECIFIC BODY PARTS

Sixteen of the 20 body parts as well as all nine animals are mentioned in the first lamentation part of this prayer-poem. This suggests that the suffering seems to be concrete and physically experienced. In the “positive” second part of the psalm, only one body part of God (the face, as metaphor), the heart of the poor, and two references

to seed are used to express favourable experiences. That does not mean that all the references to the body in the first more “depressed” part of the psalm are negative: the womb-breast pair of the mother in verses 10 and 11 is a typical signature of blessing in the Hebrew Bible, e.g., Gen 49:25. That the supplicant somehow re-experiences something of the emotional security in his fantasies about his mother is expressed by the alliteration of the m-sound of the prefixes which occur at and therefore link the end of the first and the beginning of the second hemistiches in each of the verses 10 and 11: מִבְּטֶן מִבְּטֶן and מִרְחֵם בְּטֶן respectively (Grohmann 2007:53), and so also put the trust in the mother’s womb in the centre. It is as if the sound resonating in the inner centre of the body of the supplicant provides some form of brief comfort. These two verses are also at the centre of the first part of this psalm and seem to remind one of a positive past precedent for hope about the future, just as in Ps 71:5 and 6 where the womb serves as an anchor, similar to the symbol of the rock in verse 3 of that psalm.

Attention is explicitly drawn to the body parts of the following entities: human beings, animals, and the seed of Jacob.

Human beings

1. The mouths and heads of the despisers expressing body-language, miming, and gesturing in verse 8: יִפְטִירוּ בְּשֵׁפָה יְגִיעוּ רֹאשׁ (they shoot out the lip, they shake the head);
2. the mother of the sufferer (three times her womb and once her breasts, with which God could to be equated in verses 10 and 11, if God is not identified with the midwife, as many have it [e.g. Grohmann 2007:62, although she also opens up the link between God and the mother: 2007:67]), and
3. most of the body references refer to the psalmist’s bones:
 - in verse 15: עֲצָמוֹתַי (my bones), heart (לִבִּי, my heart), innermost parts (מְעֵי, my innermost parts);
 - in verse 16, throat (if כֹּחִי [my strength] in verse 16 is emended to חֲזִי [my throat] or if יִנְפֹשׁ in verse 21 is considered as the throat which allows breathing and ingestion, the very basics for life), tongue (וּלְשׁוֹנִי, and my tongue); jaws (מְלִקוֹחָי, some translations have “my gums” or “my palate”, i.e. moving upwards from the chest-

area);

- in verse 17, hands and feet (יָדַי וְרַגְלָי, and my feet and my hands);
- in verse 18, again bones (עַצְמוֹתַי, my bones), as if they form the “framework” of this section about the sufferer’s body parts in verses 15 to 18; and
- in verse 21, breath or life (נַפְשִׁי, my breath) as if to summarise all the preceding body-parts of the once human-being.

The majority of the body parts of the supplicant are internal and therefore invisible. Their focus would consequently be on the psychosomatic experiences located in these organs.

Animals

The body-parts of three animals are then discussed:

1. the mouth (פִּיָּהֶם, their mouth) of the lion in verse 14;
2. the “hand” or paw (מִיָּד, from the hand, that is, the power) of the dog in verse 21; and
3. the mouth (פִּי, from the mouth) of the lion and the horns (וּמִקְרָנָיו, and from the horns of) of the wild oxen in verse 22.²

This latter instance reminds one of the figurative use of horns as a symbol for the outstanding strength of a person, as in Deut 33:17: וְקִרְנָיו רֵאִים קִרְנָיו (and his horns are the horns of a wild-ox) in the context of majesty. The word רֵאִים in Deut 33:17, found in the plural רַמִּים in Ps 22:22, sounds like the various derivatives of the verb רָם (exalt), which often occur with this animal body part, e.g., 1 Sam 2:1, 10; Lam 2:17; Pss 75:11; 89:18, 25; 92:11; 112:9. Whenever an animal is mentioned in these verses it is always the wild-ox, never the ram. In this sense it comes close to its two uses, the one positive as divine refuge as in Ps 18:3 and even theophanic rays in Hab 3:4, and the other negative as arrogance as in Ps 75:5 and especially verse 6 where it is related and compared to a haughty neck. That this image might have at least unconscious phallic associations with penetration and virility should not be discredited. This victim might feel “castrated” in the suffering described or this symbol might serve as a promise for the “seed” mentioned twice at the end of this psalm.

² The symbolism and emotional connotations of these animals could be explored in a subsequent study.

These instances suggest the interpersonal and social but also the transcendental connotations connected to this animal body part. This might explain it being mentioned as an adumbration just before the breakthrough in the consciousness of the supplicant about the saving nature of God in the very next verse, thus introducing the “*Stimmungsumschwung*” (Janowski 2003:76f.), the change of mood, in this psalm.

The seed of Jacob

The seed of Jacob is referred to in verse 24, and again seed is mentioned in verse 31; the face of God is referred to in verse 25 (cf. also לְפָנֶיךָ [before You] in verse 28 which could be emendated to לְפָנָיו [before Him] as in verse 30) and, last but not least, the hearts of the poor, referring to the core as the most important body part, are mentioned in verse 27. After the body-parts of the speaker, those of animals are also frequent.

That body parts sometimes symbolise a characteristic in a metaphoric or metonymic way is clear from the fact that this is the only instance in the Hebrew Bible where יָד (hand) is linked to an animal in verse 21 and there most probably stands for the violence of the dog as it is also used in Prov 18:21 to describe a violent tongue: לְשׁוֹן בַּיָּד (with the “hand” of the tongue). This specific symbolism is therefore also different from the meaning of “hands” (יָדַי, my hands) in verse 17 where it might refer to the abilities and movement (including flight [Bester 2007:226–227]) of the body of the supplicant which the dogs are restraining. Grohmann (2007:57) summarises the relation between the literal and the figurative senses as “Genauso wie in Ps 22,10–11 geht auch in Ps 22, 15–16 wörtliche unmittelbar in metaphorische Sprache über und umgekehrt”.

If Bester’s distinction between the masculine and the feminine plural is valid (Bester 2007:180), the feminine plural עַצְמוֹתַי (my bones) in verses 15 and 18 would refer to single bones without flesh rather than to a collection, a skeleton, as base structure which the masculine plural would denote. The bones have therefore been stripped of flesh as “clothing” (cf. Job 10:11; 33:21) which prefigures the explicit and literal disrobing in the very next verse.

Bester (2007:230) has found that “counting” (אֶחָדָּךְ [I count] in verse 18) in the Hebrew Bible always has a distanced and unemotional feel to it, thus implying the

dissociated stance of the supplicant to the body as a “*Fremdkörper*”, a psychological attitude which comes about as a defence in extreme suffering. This objectification of the body resonates with and shows that the condescending stance of the oppressors has been internalised by the victim.

The collapse of the skeleton in verse 15 also means that the very physical and inner structure and base of the body is at stake in this suffering. Just as two-dimensional “flat” water and the heart melting like wax lose their shape, so the body in totality does when the skeleton loses its form. Incidentally, this loss of body and identity boundaries ironically and surprisingly prepares this beggar for the fusion with the community where this loss is compensated for by the extended body of the collective in verses 23 to 27. Bones hold the body together and play a very important role in the Hebrew Bible, already in the creation narrative of Gen 2:21ff., where the woman is made from a rib, a bone, or in Job 10:11 and Ps 139:15. With flesh it indicates kinship, as in Gen 2:23, which seems to be lost in this lonely and lowly state. Bones suggest the stable essence and can also be used figuratively in this sense, e.g., בְּעֶצְמֵם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה (on the self-same day) in Gen 7:13. The positive aspect about the bones in Ps 22 is that they can still be counted and have therefore not been crushed as in Isa 38:13 or Lam 3:4. As that to which someone or something is reduced they are nevertheless spared by God in Ps 34:21, where none are broken; they can even rejoice in Ps 51:10, and in Ps 35:10 the bones speak about God’s deeds. That bones preserve a person’s identity which somehow survives in the grave is suggested by the criminalisation when they are destroyed in Amos 2:1, as if this would imply a further, a second, death. That is, however, beyond the reach of this psalm.

The verb וַיִּתְפָּרְדוּ (and [my bones] are out of joint, separated) in verse 15 occurs only with reference to body parts in Job 41:9 וְלֹא יִתְפָּרְדוּ (and they are not sundered) and therefore in the opposite sense of not being separated to suggest the firmness and strength of Leviathan’s scales. That the same verb occurs in Ps 92:10 and Job 4:11 in parallel to dying (יִאֲבָדוּ and אֲבָד respectively) insinuates the bottom-line tone of this verse. This verb has a synonym in פָּזַר (scattered) in Ps 53:6 and נִפְזְרוּ (they are scattered) in Ps 141:7 where bones are scattered at death.

In addition, contrary to the embryo in Job 10:11 being “clothed” with skin and flesh, so the body of the sufferer is disrobed in verse 19 where the clothes are separated not only from the complainant but also from each other and almost “commercialised” as if at an auction. Casting lots suggests that the perpetrators are either warriors or thieves, as they are clearly not relatives who are sharing an inheritance.

In this way the last appearance, the *persona*, expressed by clothes is broken down and traded. The intimate identity of the bones in the womb, which are only visible to God according to Ps 139:15, are now exposed to the whole world, which merely grins at it, thus reducing it to shame, a theme which runs through this suffering experience.

The evil eyes of the despisers are ever-present in verses 8 and 18, even if they are not explicitly mentioned. In contrast, God’s benevolent eyes and seeing are implied in verse 9, and expressed through the synecdoche of God’s face by litotes in verse 25. The shaming stare of the despisers is opposed to the affirming and healing look of God who delights in the supplicant despite the suffering. Those who gloat look *down*. This body language communicates their position of power as if they were God of whom nothing like this is ironically said. With their degrading looks they have started to uncover, to undress, the sufferer.

The heart in verse 15 is mentioned 853 times in the Hebrew Bible, more than any other body part and so stands at the centre of human existence. That the physical and social condition has penetrated to the depth of the supplicant is clear from the last part of the same verse: *בְּתוֹךְ מְצִי* (into my innermost parts). Grohmann (2007:57–58) believes that *מְצִי* in this verse has connotations of the womb, as it sometimes appears in parallelism to *בֶּטֶן* (sometimes “womb”) elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, e.g., in Gen 25:23, Ps 71:6, and Isa 49:1, and only once in parallelism with *מִחֶרֶץ* (always “womb”), viz. in Jer 31:19, or when it is specified as pre-genitive to *אִמִּי* (my mother) as referring to the womb, as in Ps 71:6. She strengthens this possibility by pointing out that *מִמֶּנִּי* (is melting) in verse 15 has a parallel in Ps 58:9 where a melting snail forms the image of a miscarried foetus and therefore opens up the possibility that this psalm could also be about a miscarriage. If *מְצִי* somehow stands here for *מִחֶרֶץ* (womb), then it would be

parallel to the other most often mentioned inner organ in the human body in the Hebrew Bible, the heart (לֵב; Schroer and Staubli 2005:58), in the previous hemistich.

The verb in verse 8 where the enemies יִפְטִירוּ (shoot out) their lip (רֶשֶׁתָּהּ) reminds one of the noun פֶּטֶר רִחֵם (that which [breaks] [opens] the womb) in the birth-process, as in Ezek 20:26. Here it would have to be further associated with the evil people who give birth to trouble as in Job 15:35. The mouth of the slanderers therefore function indirectly here as a womb from which evil is born.

Ears are implied by the numerous aural references: not only the whole psalm as a prayer but more explicitly crying versus silence in verses 2, 3 and 6, mocking in verse 8 as more than just gesticulation (cf. also Bester 2007:125) and verse 9, the roaring lion in verse 14, and God's hearing in verse 25.

Eating has a negative connotation when it refers to the insatiable lion in verses 14 and 22 and the preying dogs in verse 17, but a positive one in verse 27 when the poor can eat and be satisfied. It seems there is a discrepancy in the distribution of eating: some overeat while others are grateful just to have their stomachs filled.

The bodily structures of those suffering collapse because their life issues from the body and only a dry waste-land fragment, a potsherd in verse 16, and clothes in verse 19 are left. Just as the body disintegrates, the last remnant of poverty is also divided by the rich. The heart as the solid centre of the body softens and the body first becomes fluid flowing away in verse 15 and is then reduced to the (last?) breath in (cf. also וְנַפְשׁוֹ [and his life] in what seems to be an addition to) verse 30 threatened by the cut-throat sword in verse 21, leaving the tongue (וּלְשׁוֹנִי, and my tongue) and the throat or palate (מִלְקוֹחִי, my palate) dry in verse 16.

The body is transformed from the one extreme where it dissolves into watery substances in verse 15, perhaps in tears, to the other where its energy (כֹּחִי, my strength) first dries up figuratively and then literally in the mouth before the last moisture even seems to evaporate in dry dust-like remnants left in verse 16. עָפָר can also mean building rubble or waste, which would then portray the body through the metaphor of a building, as both Freud (1929:128f. and 1986:85, 225) and Jung (1984:116) have recognised. Bester (2007:212) regards מִן עָפָר (and to the dust of

death) as the environment which would imply that more than the body is now mooted. The desiccation of plants as figurative images and of body-parts as literal descriptions often feature as signs of either perishability or of God's judgement, just as in the case of melting hearts (*vide infra*; Bester 2007:204–205). One can, of course, ask the psychological question, if this “forsaking” life-energy – as it is in Ps 38:11 – is not the same as what the supplicant experiences as God: many people equate – some might claim “confuse” – God with the good in their lives which they personify as some divine presence, even in their bodily experiences. Bester adds that this power can also refer to that from the Spirit of God, as in Mic 3:8, or to material ability as in Job 6:22, the latter bringing it closer to the theme of poverty in this study.³ As the tongue is primarily an organ of speech in the Psalms (Bester 2007:206), its drying up and cleaving to the throat suggests that the speech action is being impaired and that the physical trauma is now reduced even to voicelessness as it is in Ezek 3:26, Job 29:10, and Ps 137:6. This then reminds one of שִׁמְטָה (silence) in verse 3. Even when it is negated there, the association would be taken up by the unconscious where no distinction is made between positive and negative. A further implication is that God can no longer be celebrated by a dying body as is explicitly stated in Ps 115:17.

That מִלְקוֹחַי (my jaws, i.e., my gums, or even throat) in verse 16 is added to this experience suggests that eating and/or taste is/are complicated or even made impossible. When the body has deteriorated to that level, life also becomes tasteless on a figurative, emotional level. Instead of the dysfunction of these body parts the condition could also refer to terrible thirst, as it does in Lam 4:4 where famine is the background. This would therefore imply an economic rather than a pathological condition, although a lack of saliva could also be the result of psychological shock or even trauma. As such terrible thirst is sometimes pictured in a divine judgement situation, as in Hos 2:5 and Isa 50:2; the supplicant may experience the suffering as a punishment from God, where the typical blaming of the victim in poverty is usually internalised. This thirst can therefore be interpreted as either the result of an illness,

³ It is not clear how Bester (2007:202 and n.546) distinguishes between what she calls “*physische Stärke*” (physical strength) and “*Lebenskraft*” (life-energy), and why she claims that the first only applies in Ps 33:16 and that Ps 71:9 represents the latter.

hinted at by the serious lack of energy, or as the cause for this lack of energy. In either case, the *hop'al* form of מִדְּרָקָה suggests that the victim is a passive object in this experience.

In Job 10:10 the opposite process is described where God creates him by moving from the flowing “milk” (probably the sperm) to curdling him into “cheese”, the solid foetus. Psalm 22 therefore describes the inversion of that creative and divine process. Bester (2007:194–195) shows that wax and water occur together as well in Mic 1:3f and Ps 97:5, both describing theophanic judgements. This makes one wonder if the terrible experiences in the body are not also interpreted as manifestations of God, even if fever is assumed as the fire behind the melting as and flowing from the patient’s internal body events. Although Bester (2007:164 n. 362) discredits any possibility that these images could be those stemming from intense fever, there is nothing which stops them from being so.

As these bodily experiences are painful the revelations of God are also negatively coloured as the first verse of this psalm already announces. In Deut 1:28 a melting heart is a metaphor for anxiety and fear and could as typical emotions also flow from this physical condition subjectively described in this testimony where a serious loss of control over the body dominates. A melting heart also reminds one of a heart “poured out”, as it occurs in Ps 64:9 where a call to surrender is made which might include similar cries for help as are found in Ps 22. This would then be opposed to a hardened heart, as in Ps 95:8, or to a heart of stone, as in Ezek 11:19. This humble heart resonates with the shame confessed elsewhere in this psalm and perhaps even with the secondary meaning of עָנָוִים in verse 27 (*vide infra*).

Although much less probable, the feeling of melting down might also refer to sweating, such as a homeless person might endure if exposed to terrible heat in an environment where shade is scarce and even a luxury, causing the more fortunate and stronger ones to drive this sweating one away.

The body is flattened, reduced to liquid which then dries up as poured-out water easily evaporates, and so life-energy, normally held by the solids of the body, escapes from the body. That two opposites, water and dryness, are used (both with passive

verbs), could be a merism to mean that the total loss of life – from A to Z – is suggested.

The harshness of death, adumbrated by the דָּמָיָה (silence, here only indirectly; Bester 2007:110) in verse 3, תּוֹלְעָה (worm) in verse 7 (Bester 2007:121), the threat of death in the wide open mouth of the lion in verse 14, the “liquidation” of the crying and perhaps fainting one and the disjointed bones in verse 15, confirmed in verse 18, and the association of silence in death in verse 16 and casting its shadow over the sufferer, reaches a peak in its being explicitly mentioned in the middle of the psalm, in verse 16, but is later softened to be only a sleep. Like someone at the grave who has a bird’s eye-view from the womb in verses 10 and 11, the poet cries from the tension between these two polarities.

Although Gillmayr-Bucher (2004:312) regards verses 15–16 as figurative of misery without linking it to physical suffering as such, she recognises this cluster as the only one where the whole body as an image is in focus through this enumerating process of different body parts. Even when one accepts “metaphorical exaggeration” (Hayes 1976:109), the question of why the body is constantly used as imagery would still remain.

When the body is at peace, one is not aware of it. That is why the body is virtually silent in the second part of the psalm and why the name of God can be mentioned almost at the end of the first part already in verse 20. It is as if a comfortable body is felt as the presence of God. This feature is observed by Bester (2007:267) in the rest of the Psalter as well where the body is mainly mentioned as images of distress, in some kind of “poverty”.

ANIMALS AS OTHER BODIES

The animals mentioned in this psalm start off with the weak worm, an unclean creature, in verse 7, specified as the opposite of being human but also over against the strong bulls of Bashan in verse 13, the ravening lion in verse 14 to return in verse 22, the scavenging dogs feeding on the possible left-overs as in verse 17 which come back

as powerful (מַיִד-קָלֵב) in verse 21 before the dangerous wild oxen finally deliver the last threat in verse 22. The coming-and-going of these predators may reflect the pain which is often experienced as waves of suffering.

The introduction of the dog, an unclean animal, shows the deterioration in the mind of the poet who previously mentioned animals which were not specifically negatively connoted (Bester 2007:221), apart from the worm. Here the reference is, however, to the poet and not to the opponents. These two unclean animals are also echoed by שָׂקַץ (detest) in verse 25, a verb which always has reference to cultic impurity.

The gaping פִּי אַרְיֵה (mouth of the lion) in verse 22 penetrating all protective boundaries as suggested by כַּמַּיִם נִשְׁפָּכְתִּי (I am poured out like water) in verse 15 is already foreshadowed by the חֶרֶב (sword), the criminality and exploitation endemic in this society. These animals show to what extent the suffering person has dehumanised his social sphere: when one does not feel like a human being anymore, it is probably impossible to recognise others as humans and others are internalised as nothing more than animals as they often appear in dreams as well. On the other hand, these strong though cruel animals could also be bodies which the “worm” idealises and envies and so become part of the vengeful ego-ideal who can assert itself again.

SPEECH AND THE BODY

Where the loud mouths of the despisers open the list, the quiet heart of the poor has the last say.

Similar to the view of Scarry (1988:24) who notes how speech and the body seem to exclude each other, speech is here reduced to the body. When the body is broken, language is useless. The body and language are split from each other, for instance, in torture: the more the prisoner becomes an enormous body without a voice, the more the voice of the torturer becomes an enormous voice without a body. שִׁעָרִי (my cry) in verse 2 is resonated or even overpowered by the שֹׁאֵן (roaring) lion in verse 14. The screams are not only the body’s attempt to stretch and bridge the gap of silence and

absence in order to reach God, but also compensate for and attempt to animate the dying body.

This is also clear where the cries of the suffering supplicant almost seem to compensate for the dissipating body. These cries of protest and petition are, however, like the last air pressed from a compressed, oppressed, and depressed body-self as the elliptic utterance in verses 7 and 17b suggest: only a telegraphic, verbless nominal sentence where comparison is abbreviated in metaphors. This fragmentary style and the rapid change in perspective reflect the increasing panic which is mounting in this desperate voice which then defends itself by dissociating distancing in the next verse.

PSYCHOLOGICAL REGRESSION

The images of cruel animals as interpretative fantasies about the body in pain might just as well be products of paranoia in a situation of crisis or even trauma. The victim's own aggression about the injustice is projected onto those who are seen to be more fortunate, as if they were the perpetrators. Hidden underneath this defence mechanism is envy of those who have privileges seen to be withheld from the suffering one. The voice of protest is, in addition, somatised as illness as the only and last language left for the voiceless and nameless.

On the other hand, it is not only the aggression of the persecuted themselves but also that of their opponents and oppressors which the former have internalised and have both turned against themselves and also recognised in their persecutors.

The suffering supplicant is searching for a stable base in this regressive process of losing ground and knows it must be with God, symbolised by dramatic and dynamic birth images of the womb and extended to the breasts of the mother in the synthetic parallelism of verse 10 and the synonymous parallelism of verse 11 at the beginning of this earthly life (Grohmann 2007:55; cf. also Gillmayr-Bucher 2004:304 n. 8). Birth functions like a special monument to the relationship with God.

The regression is also clear from the virtual preoccupation with the body in the first part of the psalm, so typical of the infant for whom love should be bodily, to be

appreciated as such. There is still no, or very little, dissociation from or sublimation of the body.

PROXIMITY-INTIMACY VERSUS DISTANCE-SEPARATION

The experience of the presence of God is a theme which runs throughout the psalm. When God feels absent, what trouble (referred to in verse 12) can be closer than the body in distress? Alone, without God or human support, the supplicant-I is drawn into the prison of the shrinking body where the self is almost also suffocated (cf. Reilich 2013:103) and the body is reduced to cries.

Alienation from God (verses 2, 12, and 20 make this explicit in this psalm) and from “co-citizens” is, in the Jewish culture of the Hebrew Bible, expressed by impurity status, but here the shame which the lower class has to deal with is expressed in verses 6, 7, and 8. The division (יְהַלְקֶנּוּ) of the last “second skin”, the clothes, in verse 19 indirectly hints at the persona, the public appearance and place in society, of the poor, which is also exposed and ripped apart in their public humiliation (cf. Davis 1992:98) similar to and perhaps even including rape.

Bester (2007:232) points out that clothing and food are the two most important conditions for living in Gen 28:20 and Exod 20:25f. It is therefore significant that the lack of both are mentioned in the adjacent verses, 18 and 19, to express the peak of deprivation which even someone in a contemporary prison would not have to endure. Amos 2:16 shows that clothes could be abandoned in flight, that is, a part of identity and the extended body surrendered to the enemy. In that sense transgressing and breaking down the boundaries of the body continues the process started in verse 15, preceded even earlier in verse 7 with the attacks on the “psychic skin” of the ego. This disruption of the integrity of the body paradoxically isolates it from society where ironically only clearly demarcated bodies have a place.

If the Marxian idea that ideology forms the superstructure (i.e., the rationalisation but also the cover-up) to a more basic material and therefore relational network, then the exclusion of the ill from the privileged places and positions implies an economic

difference, amongst other differences, between these two “classes”. Although Yahweh was seen as the God who wants to heal (e.g., Exod 15:26 and Isa 30:26; Weber 1989:40, 96), the holiness code connected uncleanness very often to “exceptional” bodily states (Weber 1989:102f.), typical of the lower ranks of a socio-religious hierarchy. The holy presence of God required that this be reflected in the physical condition of those who try to imitate this God. The boundaries set up had to serve as immunity measures, not only physically, of course, but also psychologically and spiritually. This is also suggested by the many idiomatic expressions using the body as metaphor to relate emotional, ethical and religious conditions, such as a “pure heart” (Ps 24:4). Therefore this holiness also had a healing effect.

Feeling ignored by God and despised by the upper classes the poor are gripped in a dilemma of utter loneliness forcing them to regress to the body which is also broken down. In this sense body-image is not only a mirror of relationships but paradoxically also of the last resort an individual has left (Bester 2007:249). In the unconscious, the distant God may even be disguised as the predators visualised in this psalm, just as the crying infant demonises the absent mother, who might otherwise be its goddess of love.

When there is again a higher consciousness of God in the second part of the psalm, the body of the supplicant and therefore the supplicant him- or herself seem to have disappeared into the background. Although God has been directly addressed right through the psalm, the first person dominates in the first part, amounting to a total of 41 references as against only 6 in the second part, the last ones already in verse 26. Freud (referred to in Krueger 2002:30) already spoke of the ego as being in the first place a body-ego. Together with the virtual disappearance of the body of the supplicant, one can speak of a kind of transpersonal or transegoic state of the supplicant in the second part. From a strong focus on the self and on bodily suffering in the first part, there is a clear shift to God who is experienced at the centre in the second. The body and the self have been transcended, even when they must still be present. Despite that God is in the second part mostly testified to in the third person

(only verses 23 and 26 use the second person in the second part), there is an intimacy with God due to the “presence” of God in the consciousness of the speaker.

Although there is no proof that physical health has been restored, the choice of the word *נִשְׁלַח* (here: pay or fulfil), in verse 26 where it concerns the supplicant’s vows might have been influenced unconsciously by connotations of health and well-being suggested by its cognate form, *נִשְׁלַח*.

POVERTY VERSUS WEALTH

That the body reflects and is reflected by the social structure and its relationships is already well known following the work of the British anthropologist, Mary Douglas, almost half a century ago. Just as the body is experienced as broken down, so the society which allows, no, gloats over, this is a broken society where the members are not cooperating “corporately”. A country where the fortunate enjoy, pretend not to understand, or even just ignore the suffering of some compatriots, is a sick society. There is no cohesion in this collective body which can keep it together and it will eventually fall apart just as the bodies of its victims have been falling apart. The inclusive unity and integration of all its participating parts is as crucial for the body as for the society in which this body lives. The body is a microcosmic monad of society.

Karl Marx has well described the capitalist system and its inevitable poverty as due to the unfair distribution of economic resources due to broken relationships. Poverty is a disguised form of aggression and the body mirrors this by expressing aggression against the individual person who has internalised it as well. Bad relationships underlie poverty and the suffering which the body must endure.

Health issues are closely linked to the economic and social relations in a community. Research studies have found that health risks are linked to poverty even before birth, often mediated by the educational level of the parents (Brannon and Feist 2004:4, 47). Poor people suffer from two consequences in terms of health: they often suffer from poorer physical security, poorer nutrition, poorer mental health, poorer protection from drugs (with poverty the best predictor for smoking among young

adults [Brannon & Feist 2004:355]), and poorer education, but, secondly, they are also less likely to seek medical care due to economic restraints. Ethnic minority and age may also be contributing factors which mediate poverty (Brannon and Feist 2004:60, 328). This pattern of causality becomes a vicious cycle when attention to health plunges the patient into even deeper poverty leading to even worse stress and health conditions in the long run and leading to a complex multifactorial network which may be difficult to change (Karren et al. 2002:55, 95–97, 657f.). Development projects across the world often reinforce inequalities by unconsciously privileging the already privileged groups such as leaders and men when promoting health improvement: those with access to transport are looked after first while women often have to take care of those left behind, and have to postpone their own medical attention (Kelly and van der Riet 2001:176–177).

In Ps 22 there are only two explicit indications that poverty is at least part of the problem. In verse 25, i.e., in the second more positive part of the poem, עָנִיּוֹת עָנִי (the affliction of the poor) has connotations of lowliness, humility, weakness, and neediness. These characteristics may go beyond poverty, but definitely refer to those who suffer in society and who call for צְדִקְתּוֹ (his righteousness) in verse 32. Two verses later, in verse 27, עֲנָוִים, one of the four most important lexemes for poverty in the Hebrew Bible, confirms this concern with the plight of those in the lower class or classes (Weber 1989:113). Weber (1989:114) compares these two instances which derive from the same verb, [עָנָה] (be bowed down or crushed or depressed), where the first “possibly ... stands primarily for the material poverty of those who are crushed by oppression, illness or misfortune while [the second] emphasises more the inner attitude of humility before God of those who are brought low; often, however, the two words are used synonymously”. Weber (1989:115) also critiques the majority of translations which emphasise more this second, theological meaning by rendering it with “meek” or “humble” and he adds that “[a] good way to enter into the ‘anawim’ spirituality is to pray and meditate on Psalm 22”.

The majority of the psalms mentioning the עֲנָוִים are attributed to David, who, like Moses in Num 12:3 and the Messiah in Zech 9:9, is romanticised as עֲנָוִים (Weber

1989:116), perhaps as a hint to remain hopeful. The begging cry in the prayers of lamentation of those who suffer in their bodies is also a critique against the social injustice of poverty which these figures represent.

The new society which this psalm envisages does not seem to exclude the wealthy as the poor have been excluded by them: כָּל-דֶּשְׁנֵי-אֶרֶץ (all the fat ones of the earth) will also celebrate in the universalising turn starting in verse 28.

OPEN CONCLUSION

The exact background of Ps 22 remains open to numerous possibilities, as there is no clear context supplied by the text or by historical-criticism. It therefore allows – and perhaps even invites – the reader’s projections to become the context. A particular combination of possibilities where bodily suffering due to poverty is expressed in this psalm, is, however, easy to imagine. Even when some of these bodily expressions may be metaphors for psycho-social suffering, they still stress the importance of the body as foundational imagery. Various layers of meaning of body references in the psalm beyond the physical have been highlighted to show that the body is central in poverty.

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