


# Hair matters: The psychoanalytical significance of the virtual absence of hair in the Book of Job in an African context

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Compared with other biblical books that are named after its main protagonist, Job mentions many (at least 72) body parts. Yet hair is explicitly referred to only once, even when it plays a relatively significant role in other books in the Hebrew Bible. This virtual absence of hair in the book can at first glance be explained by the shaving of Job's 'head' as early as 1:20, using a different verb, גז, from the one in Leviticus 13:33 and 14:8.9, גלה, where the context is that of נַפְתָּח, wrongly translated as 'leprosy', but probably referring to the same skin problem from which Job is suffering. This connection to the skin is important, because the two body parts seem to be almost mutually exclusive, as also suggested by 1:21 immediately after the aforementioned shaving, where Job considers himself to be essentially נָרַם [naked]. This means that hair has, amongst other functions, also a clothing-like role in the book of Job. Three questions will hence be explored: how 'absence' is to be psychoanalytically interpreted and more specifically, what consequences all of this has on the virtual absence of hair in the Book of Job and, finally, what relevance this absence has for the South African context.

**Contribution:** Applying a psychoanalytical perspective to both the body and to absence, the biblical text is contextualised on a broader horizon than what the purely historical-critical approach can render. The additional African context widens the relevance of the ancient book even further.

**Keywords:** Book of Job; hair; absence; psychoanalytic; body image; African context.

## Introduction

Hair-dressers are well known to be the best amateur psychologists and counsellors. Under their caring hands, with their listening ears and wise words, one can really let one's hair down. The effect of the 'therapy' is reflected in the facial change of appearance and the transformation of feelings.

It might therefore be more than coincidental that the first thing Job does after fate confronts him is to shave his head to express a profound change in his life. That probably says more than his famous formula about nakedness in the next verse, which is simply a progression of the process that began with shaving.

The title of this study is not only meant as a pun on #BlackLivesMatter, wishing to extend it to include #BlackBodiesMatter, but also a hint to numerous business names in the hairdressing industry and furthermore to various book-titles all dealing with black people's hair issues (e.g. Banks 2000; Dawson, Karl & Paluchette 2019; Hargro 2011).

The hypothesis of this study is that the virtual silence about hair in the book of Job speaks ironically, in an eloquent way, about the psychoanalytical significance of this conspicuously missing body part. To analyse something which is not in the text may seem like hair-splitting, but from a psychoanalytical perspective, the unsaid as unconscious is more important than the conscious formulated in speech. Apart from that, hair in the Hebrew Bible has not drawn the attention which it gets in ordinary life, having been limited to mainly three recent studies dealing directly with it (Bailey 2014; Bollinger 2018; Niditch 2008 [who devotes two chapters to absent hair in the Hebrew Bible]).

As methodology, a brief exploration of psychoanalytical meanings of hair with examples from the Hebrew Bible will lead to the interpretation of absence as a hermeneutical horizon before applying

both those lenses to the 'resounding' silence about hair relating specifically to shaving, hair, nakedness and skin in the book of Job. Finally, the book of Job will be offered as mirror to check if the cross-cultural reflection fits the current African context.

A psychoanalytical approach focusses on the link between literature and the psyche, with special emphasis on the unconscious underlying conscious speech (Surprenant 2006:200). A close reading of the text is therefore crucial. Nothing in the text is to be regarded as coincidental.

Studying hair in the Bible is relevant for the subjective body image in the South African context, where skin and hair, amongst others, are sites of psychic conflict.

## Psychoanalytical and cultural meanings of hair: Examples from the Hebrew Bible

Schroer and Staubli (1998:107) claimed that hair is such an important theme and even a political issue in the Hebrew Bible that no fewer than 13 terms exist to deal with different dimensions of hair. Bailey (2014:121) has drawn up an even longer list with 18 keywords related to hair, finding only one (instead of two) in the book of Job. That it has some religious value is evident from Leviticus 13:40–44, where a prospective priest has to check the condition of someone's hair, and from Leviticus 21:5 and Ezekiel 44:20, where the prophet's own hairstyle is regulated as distinct from the shaven Egyptian and Mesopotamian priests (Bailey 2014:80, 115). Amongst the secondary gender features, hair (and its disposition) is the most important sexual body part. Schroer and Staubli (1998:109) emphasised that hair always has a positive value, from pubic hair mentioned in Ezekiel 16:7 to the grey hair of old age in Proverbs 16:31. According to 2 Samuel 14:25–26, Absalom's heavy hair was part of his masculine bodily perfection and that his death is linked to his hair, which is significantly not mentioned in 2 Samuel 18:9, may be because of a disguised form of envy and schadenfreude and justified by a suspicion of male vanity (cf. Macwilliam 2009:280–281).

Hair is so crucial for personal recognition that, according to Genesis 27:16, 22–23, Jacob deceives his father Isaac, tricking him with the tactile by pretending to have the hairy animal-like skin of his brother Esau on his hands and on the nape of his neck, covering those body parts with goat-hide and so hiding his true identity. Esau, whose name might even mean 'hairy' (Bartlett 1977:26), was already at birth distinguished as exceptional by having hair like an adult, according to Genesis 25:25. If the meaning of the tribe name Edom, of which Esau became the progenitor, is taken into account, Esau's hair might well have been red (Attridge, Meeks & Bassler 2006:40).

Hair is a body part that is emotionally highly cathected, according to psychoanalytical findings and theory. It is the

first body-part unconsciously noticed by another person (Berg 1951:3), which is also why it plays a role when crossing a psychic and social threshold. Therefore, it not only has many and sometimes varying psychic, social and cultural meanings, but also a resemblance to the skin as Janus-door between exclusion and inclusion. In that sense, it therefore has a powerful link to the ego as well.

Like the skin, it also inevitably forms part of the persona and is most often clustered with four of the five sensory orifices in the face. Even its absence is conspicuous and is layered with multiple meanings.

Hair, especially as a reminder of youth, is also a sexual symbol (Freud 1942:52, 54); in fact, it is one so potent that it needs to be hidden like the genitals in certain religious traditions, making it a target for fetishism. There seems to be an ambiguity in this regard, in that hair is a symbol of both virility and femininity, both phallic and a sign of feminine seduction.

Losing one's hair, not only in old age, suggests a psychic castration (Freud 1991:5, 2008:362, 371; cf. e.g. Delilah psychically emasculating Samson by having his hair cut in Judges 16:19), suggested by sexual anxieties (cf. e.g. Coriat 1914:*passim*). There is therefore often a nexus between shaving and humiliating punishment, as in 2 Samuel 10:4–5 where David's envoys are mocked and shamed. Something similar but opposite happens when a married woman is accused of adultery even when no witnesses can confirm it, according to Numbers 5:18, if her hair be loosened (פרע) in public. In Deuteronomy 21:12, however, shaving a woman captured in war seems to be a rite of passage to facilitate her psychic and social transformation in mourning, as a way of cleansing and transitioning to a new culture and husband (cf. Bailey 2014:115).

When hair is shaven for religious reasons or because of mourning, it is a form of sublimated self-mutilation<sup>2</sup> (Menninger 1935:460). As a mourning rite imitating the neighbouring Arabs (Schroer & Staubli 1998:107), it is explicitly prohibited<sup>3</sup> for priests to mark distinction and identity in Leviticus 19:27–28, 21:5 and Deuteronomy 14:1 (cf. Jr 9:25), where rounding beard-edges and shaving the temples<sup>4</sup> are grouped with cuttings in the flesh,<sup>5</sup> the latter of which are simply mentioned as apparently acceptable skin-cuts in Jeremiah 16:6, 41:5 and 48:37. At the same time it is also a sublimation, a symbol of self-castration, as self-sacrifice belongs to identification with the dead. Underlying it could be its unsublimated and pathological form, namely trichotillomania, as a psychological (not physical!) disorder.

1.The meaning of the verb is problematic and could also be rendered as 'get rid of' as in Job 15:4. In Judges 5:2, however, it does seem to mean 'let loose' or 'let grow' (*vide infra*).

2.Olyan (1998:613, n. 5) critiques this notion as culturally bound.

3.It is significant that Olyan (1998) does not comment on such a prohibition.

4.Bailey (2014:115) mooted the possibility of idolatrous associations.

5.One cannot assume that this is a kind of tattoo.

The high priest in Israel was, however, not even allowed to dishevel his hair to mourn the death of his parents, according to Leviticus 21:10, thus showing that his dedication to God was superior to that to his family.

## Hermeneutics of silence

Just as the idioms using body parts metaphorically speak about unconscious body images and body attitudes (Schmidt 2011:*passim*; cf. also Mauron 1963:*passim*), so the silences that form the background of a text sometimes speak about what is avoided as defence against what is too painful to process. What remains unsaid in psychoanalysis is taken very seriously (Irigaray 1977:73). This is, of course, apart from what is simply irrelevant and therefore not mentioned, as it is practically impossible to say everything, as this would asymptotically approach the infinite. The said is always a choice (Irigaray 1985:186) and therefore involves prioritising. The deeper reasons for the unsaid are otherwise very diverse: repression, suppression, contemplation, ineffability and inexpressibility (Brandenburg 2008:104). Cultures also differ about what can remain unsaid, linking it to the axiomatic, what is regarded as self-evident for insiders (Giddens 1974:72; Hall & Hall 1990:vii–viii).

The question can therefore be raised: why has hair not been mentioned (more than once) explicitly in a book which mentions more than 70 other body parts and when hair is actually such a significant body part in the rest of the Hebrew Bible? These gaps are intolerable to the recipient of a text and interpretation is precisely filling these lacunae, often providing a new context to the text.

Just as the protagonist, Job, is said in 1:8 and 2:3 to be singular in his devotion and therefore does not fit in and needs to be somehow sacrificed, so the *hapax legomenon*-hair in 4:15 is – as excess (*à la* Bataille 1967:*passim*) – to be discarded and excluded, perhaps precisely because of its power.

Niditch (2008:23) found hairiness to be a sign of the Israelite warrior and that a lack thereof was indicative of weakness, embodied in the Philistines and Egyptians who preferred shaving and wigs (Bailey 2014:113). Yet, ironically, absent hair also metaphorises the victory of the weak over the strong as exemplified by the Esau–Jacob narrative. Different from the regulations of hair in the body politic requiring shaving because of stigmatised illness, such as outlined in Leviticus 13–14, is giving it up as a voluntary ‘sacrifice’<sup>6</sup> when it is a religious gesture, signifying surrendering to God. Yet the inverse is also true according to Judges 5:2 (probably the oldest chapter in the Hebrew Bible), where voluntarily letting hair grow is indicative of offering oneself to God. If hair as exemplified by Samson, born as a Nazirite, and later the Nazirites’ temporary vow in the post-exilic, priestly purity-tradition democratising sacred status even for wealthy women is a sign of a special relationship to God, then shaving

6. It is important that this should not be taken literally. According to Bailey (2014:103–104, 112 [although contradicting it on 2014:113]) there is no evidence of hair sacrifice in the Ancient Near East, despite Milgrom’s (1990:356) view.

it somehow resembles illness, which prevents Job from being close to the Divine, as Schellenberg (2016:114) has pointed out. Bailey (2014:116–117) claimed that the length of hair could indicate the length of the vow, unless it was still at the beginning of the period, when only the dishevelled hair as sign of selflessness was a giveaway, and unless the devotee was a woman, who usually had her hair long irrespective of her vow. The wildness of the Nazirite’s hair is reminiscent of the unpruned vines during a sabbatical year, according to Leviticus 25:2. Bailey (2014:113) cautions, however, that this connection should not be understood as if hair had some magical power.

Bailey (2014:113ff) summarised the significance of hair in the Hebrew Bible, where it could signal something aesthetic or dedicatory, whereas its absence was suggestive of mourning or other transitional process.

## Hair in the Book of Job

The absence of hair in the Book of Job is not only logically linked to shaving but also to a sense of nakedness, where the bare skin, being crucial in understanding the book (Van der Zwan 2017:*passim*), is also problematised in the narrative with psychoanalytic implications.

### Shaving

According to Olyan (1998:612) shaving facilitates the mourner’s transition to a polluted separation. Unlike other ritual manipulations of the body such as circumcision, however, shaving only changes the appearance of the body temporarily to mark a reversible social status during a liminal psychic process with permanent effects. It is nevertheless more than just a personal ritual and always has implications for power relations with others (Stavrakopoulou 2013:541).

It is significant that the Hebrew word שֵׁעָרָה [hair] is not used in 1:20 when Job shaves אֶת-רֹאשׁוֹ [his head]. It is as if the word is not to be said. Together with the disappearance of hair in this verse, the word is likewise absent, although the reality of hair has been so painfully present that it has to be suppressed through shaving, getting rid of it. Its absence is like a deathly silence in the wake of the death of Job’s children.

Different from the D- and T-stem verbs, גָּלַח (shave [off]), used in Leviticus 13:33 regulating about an itch affliction (not all regarded as צָרְעָתָה) and 14:8,<sup>7,8</sup> where the context is that of the unclean state of צָרְעָתָה, (wrongly translated as ‘leprosy’, but probably referring to the same skin problem from which Job is suffering), is the verb גָּזַח [shear, not shave] in 1:20. Here Job’s skin disease has not yet started, but his shaving is his

7. Here אֶת-כָּל-שֵׁעָרוֹ [all his hair], but in the next verse it is even more detailed and emphasised: אֶת-כָּל-שֵׁעָרוֹ, אֶת-רֹאשׁוֹ וְאֶת-זָקְנוֹ וְאֶת-גְּבַת עֵינָיו, וְאֶת-כָּל-שֵׁעָרוֹ [all his hair off his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair]. The sense is one of medical obsession rather than a change in social appearance, as seems to be the case in Job 1:20.

8. Here both שֵׁעָרָה [hair] and זָקָן [beard] are explicitly mentioned. This is also the case elsewhere in both these chapters. The difference in verbs used may be because of the distinction between a more ‘medical’ and a religious setting in Leviticus and the book of Job, respectively. That silence about one of these nouns is not part of the mourning trope, if that is the case in Job 1:20, is clear from Isaiah 15:2, for instance.

emotional response to the tragic death of his children and perhaps the loss of his property.

This verb גזו [shear] in 1:20 is linguistically linked to the noun גו [wool, fleece] in 31:20 (*vide infra*). This link is significant because the majority of other instances (Gn 31:19, 38:12.13; Dt 15:19; 1 Sm 15:2, 4, 7, 11; 2 Sm 13:23, 24; Is 53:7) in the Hebrew Bible where this verb is used concern the shearing of sheep. It is only in Jeremiah 7:29, Micah 1:16 and Nahum 1:12 where it concerns a human being, in the former two instances more specifically suggesting lamentation and in the latter case a reference to destruction. In all the instances of ritual lamentation or mourning, that is, Isaiah 15:2, 22:12, Jeremiah 16:6, 41:5, 47:5, 48:37, Ezekiel 7:18 and Amos 8:10, which Clines (1989:135) mentions, this verb is never used. Many of these texts do not even mention the word שעה [hair] as if to avoid it, but describe the bodily state already after shaving as קרח [make]/[be] bald) or קרחה [baldness], a word, which does not appear in the book of Job either, despite both this book and these two words being closely linked to mourning and lamentation. In Micah 1:16, it is said of a נשר [vulture<sup>9</sup>], which God mentions in Job 39:27 but then not related to its baldness. Another word, גרע [withdraw, diminish, shave], which sometimes appears as past participle connected to זקן [beard, not found in the book of Job either<sup>10</sup>] in these texts is found in the book of Job but not in the sense of ‘shaving’.

The question therefore arises whether the author chose this verb because Job’s shaving has a certain identification with sheep or if the author was a shepherd of some kind and so this word came into his mind first. Another question is whether Job’s shaving actually leads to baldness, because the word is not explicitly used, or whether it merely shortened his hair.

The association with animals is also found in the Song of Songs, where the beautiful hair of the young woman is compared in 4:1 and 6:5 with a flock of goats,<sup>11</sup> probably not only because of their undulating movement over the hills but also because of their blackness referred to in 1:5 where the goat-skin (Lacocque 2006:167) tents of the Ishmaelite tribe of קדר (Qedar, with these three consonants as a verb meaning ‘being dark’) is compared with her skin.<sup>12</sup> In Song 7:6, she has dyed it purple, priding herself on the theatre stage of erotic love. Her hair is so important that it is one of only two body parts mentioned in all three *ausûf* (descriptions) in the verses already referred to. Likewise of importance is the hair of the young man whose hair-locks are as black as a raven according to 5:1. Hair somehow reminds the reader of the beautiful animalistic side of being human.

Returning to the book of Job brings another parallel between 1:20–21 and 31:20 to mind, in that blessing is mentioned in

9.The bearded vulture does not appear.

10.Even when Job can be presumed to have been an זקן (old, associated through the same consonants with the Hebrew word for ‘beard’) wise man, if 12:20, 32:4.9 and 42:17 can be hints in this regard.

11.One wonders why שיערה [she-goat] would not have been a better poetic comparison with שערך [your hair].

12.For the negative connotations and the context of suffering which are, however, attached to this connection (cf. Van der Zwan 2020:545).

both. Although Clines (2006:679) points out that הלצים [loins] in 31:20 includes the genitals in Hebrew, he makes no further inference that this could be a species of oath, promise or prayer from the beneficiary’s side to the benefactor’s offspring, which would be an approximation to the blessing said at the time of birth, mentioned in 1:21. Instead, Clines simply interprets it as gratitude from the beneficiary for the warmth provided by the fleece to this part of the body. The loins (as in Am 8:10<sup>13</sup>) as ultimate region of fertility and life are also the part covered by sackcloth during the mourning rite, which is probably also the case in 1:20, even when neither this body part nor this piece of clothing is explicitly mentioned there, but later explicitly stated in 16:15 (*vide infra*). Furthermore, in both cases hair (or wool in 31:20) is juxtaposed – but in the reversed order – with nakedness: מְקַלֵּי לְבוּשׁ וְאֵין כְּסוּתָהּ... [naked...and naked] in 1:21 and מְקַלֵּי לְבוּשׁ וְאֵין כְּסוּתָהּ... [in want of clothing, or no covering...] in 31:19, repeating and therefore emphasising nakedness in both instances. This suggests that identifying empathy with ‘the poor’ might be hovering in the background of the ceremony in the first chapter. Even though these juxtapositions in both verses seem to be more than coincidental, it is not clear what their precise significance would be.

There are some gaps in the understanding of the text, which probably concern cultural issues that would have been self-evident to the original recipients of the text, especially if they shared the same context as the author of the book of Job. One can ask, for instance, what exactly happened to the hair coming from Job’s head. Would it be thrown onto a dumping site, where Job himself is perhaps sitting according to 2:8? This is the case in Jeremiah 7:29 where it is explicitly stated. Furthermore, one expects it to be burnt as happens to the Nazirite<sup>14</sup>’s polluted hair<sup>15</sup> in the fire of the peace-offering as a form of purification ritual after his consecration is fulfilled, according to the ritual text of Numbers 6:18. This is also the case in the complicated ritual in Ezekiel 5:2, 4. If these instances deal with a similar rite, one expects it to function as part of a trope, including the shaving in the book of Job as well. Significant is that Olyan (1998:616) mentions Job 1:20 only once as an example of a shaving ritual without further elaboration, as he does with several other biblical texts, as if this instance in the book of Job does not fully qualify as a true model.

That Job shaves his head, probably like Elisha in 2 Kings 2:23, means that he is not a priest in Israelite culture, even when he sacrifices for his children.

## Hair

The only time when the Hebrew word שעה [hair] is used, as a *hapax legomenon* inside the book of Job and as one of the noun’s six feminine forms in the Hebrew Bible, is by Eliphaz

13.Also in Jeremiah 48:37 but then with another word for ‘loins’: מְתַנִּים.

14.Incidentally, as Job is exceptionally devout, the hairy hero Samson is also singular because he is the only Nazirite named and narrated about in the Hebrew Bible.

15.וְנִטְּוָה רֹאשׁוֹ בְּיָדוֹ [and he defiles his consecrated head] in Numbers 6:9b.



in 4:15 about his hair-raising anxiety during a possible nightmare, referring to his body hair<sup>16</sup> rather than his facial hair. The masculine form occurs more frequently in the Hebrew Bible and is focused in Leviticus 13–14, where it is evidently closely linked to the skin problems dealt with therein. This is the opposite circumstance to that occurring in the book of Job, where the focus on the skin seems to exclude hair. Otherwise, the book of Genesis also contains several explicit references to hair, including the adjective שער [hairy]. The related forms, שעיר [he-goat, buck] and שעירה [she-goat] are also focused on in Leviticus where in chapter 16 it has demonic<sup>17</sup> connotations, apart from in the book of Numbers.

Hair's psychosocial function in the rest of the Hebrew Bible, viz. exhibiting strength, suggests what is internally happening to Job when he takes action by ridding himself of it and what is happening when it is not mentioned again. One can therefore ask whether Job's hair has been growing back again, especially when the time of mourning is over. That nothing is mentioned in this regard in the epilogue does not necessarily mean that it is not important.

The nouns גר [fleece] in 31:20 (*vide supra*) and רעמה (quivering [mane], a *hapax legomenon*) in 39:19 probably imply the animal equivalents of human hair as sheep's wool and the mane of a (perhaps godlike [Habel 1985:547]) horse, respectively, both with idealised connotations, as hair would be considered for humans elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Even when it stems from his sheep, Job in 31:20 is once again the one who is acting and hereby warming the needy wanderer. Indirectly, Job is sacrificing (again as in 1:5) by giving up 'his' hair as in the first chapter to cover the cold suffered by the needy in his final speech in chapter 31.

Clines (2011:160–161, 240, 1129) interprets the quivering mane<sup>18</sup> of the horse being clothing for its neck as symbolic of its strength like thunder (the other meaning of the three-consonant Hebrew root), just as Samson's hair was the source of his strength according to Judges 16:17. God seems to rehabilitate hair here as symbol of strength and life in the ideal model, which the horse offers to Job.

Shaving and nakedness are related in classical Hebrew in that תער [razor] and ערה [being naked] are etymologically related. Whether this connection would have been made in the Hebrew mind, even on an unconscious level, can only be surmised.

## Nakedness

In contrast to the praise of nudity in the words of the Song of Songs, boasting about beautiful bodies, nakedness in the book of Job is about shame and exposure to the cruelty of culture and nature.

16. בְּשָׂרִי [of my flesh].

17. One could critique Schroer and Staubli (1998:111) for sensing a divine connotation when hair portrays wild, untamable life-energy, because hair is never attributed to God in the Hebrew Bible.

18. Clines (1989:213) translates כפיר in 4:10 as 'maned lion'.

Job's possible gesture of ridding himself of clothes in 1:20 is turned around in 9:31 where his clothes, in a personified way, are portrayed as disgusted by him and distance themselves from him. He is therefore sensitised to and recognises the nakedness of the nomad and the needy in 31:19. These bodily and emotional experiences might also be the cause of his psychic projection onto his clothes when the uncontrollably high temperature becomes unbearable in 37:17 to him, unless it refers to fever.

Nakedness (ערום) is actually explicitly mentioned a few times in the book of Job, viz., where Eliphaz verbalises it in 22:6 in a hyperbolic way in that Job would have robbed the naked of their clothes and in 24:7, 10 where Job turns this around, blaming wicked exploiters for the nakedness of the poor and the orphans. According to 12:17, 19, God leads counsellors and priests away שׁוֹלֵל [barefoot, stripped]. In 27:16–17, the wealthy wicked will ultimately lose their wardrobes to the innocent. Before God, even death and the netherworld are naked according to 26:6.

Preceding, and coupled with, Job's shaving his head is his rending of his mantle (וַיִּקְרַע אֶת-מְעִלוֹ) in the same verse, 1:20, symbolically not actively anticipating but in retrospect reactively recognising and confirming what has been, and still is, existentially happening to him. Even if this does not leave him literally naked, the rags give a sense of it as sublimation for the sake of social courtesy, although Bogue (2021) maintained that the likelihood is rather the opposite, because he emphasises the removal of clothes (not hair) as an unconscious technique to master trauma.

Perhaps as empathic identification with the victim but perhaps also with the human condition, the three friends copy Job's behaviour in 2:12: וַיִּקְרְעוּ אִישׁ מְעִלוֹ [and they rent everyone his mantle]. However, they do not shave their heads<sup>19</sup> as Job has done but add something symbolic which is not said about Job: וַיִּזְרְקוּ עָפָר עַל-רִאשֵׁיהֶם הַשָּׁמַיְמָה [and they threw dust upon their heads toward heaven], perhaps in another way also emulating Job who is already sitting in ashes according to 2:8. Dust and ashes frame the book as they appear again in 42:6b: עַל-עָפָר וְאָפָר (([seeing I am] dust and ashes). Ultimately the 'covering' of dust is recognised as the real inner substance of Job and therefore of humanity, denuded and reduced to its real essence of virtual nothingness. Trauma as confrontation at the boundaries of the body divests and exposes the true nakedness of Job. According to Vall (1995:334), the dead were not buried naked as Job seems to suggest in 1:21, so the tendency to nudity in the book of Job is indicative of a psychic regression to the womb serving as a kind of former skin (cf. Pelham 2012:158), where the naked foetus does not yet have hair. In 10:11 Job 'remembers' how he was clothed in the womb with עוֹר וּבָשָׂר [skin and flesh], in this unexpected sequence, as if he actually means the opposite, when decomposing and moving backward to the inner core

19. It is significant that the person suspected of צרעת is in Leviticus 13:45 required to let his hair loose or grown or uncombed, depending on different translations, whilst covering his beard and wearing torn clothes. The connection between torn clothes and shaving is therefore not fixed and would have different meanings depending on the situation.

of his body, the bones, away from the periphery where the hair used to be. Peeling back one layer after the other is also suggested by Heckl's (2010:261) understanding of 2:4 as a parallel, where the first עור is about clothing being the last possession to be exchanged for Job's life, not as these words are often understood as belonging within a context of trade where one cloth is bartered for another.

Clothing in the book of Job is therefore limited and unconventional: the torn mantle in 1:20, the שחיין רע [sore boils] covering his body from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head in 2:7, his flesh clothed with עפר (אגוש) [worms and clods of dust] in 7:5, the worms perhaps even unconsciously resembling his hair, but both worms and dust are definitely reminders of death, with sackcloth being the leftover remnant of his clothing תפר [sewn onto] his גלד [skin, a *hapax legomenon*, perhaps with a special meaning in this context] in 16:15 as symbol of mourning and as displacing hair as symbol of life,<sup>20</sup> and the covering or mask on the face of the adulterer in 24:15. In this minimalistic bodily state, there is no place for the luxury of hair. God, who clothes nature according to 38:9, 14, however, reverses this direction in 38:3, repeated in 40:7, by appealing to Job to gird his loins and so become קבב [like a man]. Job, emasculated by his traumas, is called back to masculinity, being shown by the Behemoth's מתנים [loins] in 40:16 and פתקי [its thighs or penis] in the next verse as an ideal model. Low (2011:*passim*) draws attention to the gendered value of this expression, אור-נא הלציר [gird your loins], and one can imagine that it implies the regrowth of his hair as a symbol of virility. Perhaps responding to Job's words in 27:16–17 or in 19:9 that God הקשית (stripped) him of his honour, now God invites or challenges him to adorn himself with beauty and dignity in 40:10; even the leviathan is also presented for its exceptional לבוש [garment] in 41:5, another ideal model for Job with his torn skin.

The delayering of Job's identity, existence and body is somehow signalled by the word קעוד [literally 'around'] in 2:4 and proceeds from him initially leaving the womb where his body was woven together like a textile according to 10:11, to losing his extended body in his possessions and children supposedly many years later, to his anticipatory ritual disrobing and shaving, before finally regressing from his skin and flesh to deep down into his bones (cf. 19:20.26). His hair and skin merely form the outer site somewhere in the middle of this process where the trauma is inscribed for the world to be seen and read. Parallel to this material and bodily downsizing is his exclusion when he is being divested of his social 'clothing', his growing sense of loneliness and loss of identity and ultimately his vision of God begins to go into eclipse.

## Skin

Job is probably not an Israelite or a Jew, but perhaps a 'Southerner' from the kingdom of Edom (perhaps related to Esau, *vide supra*) as indicated in Lamentations 4:21 or even

20. Even when Bailey (2014:15) contests that hair is the seat of life, one could still consider it as a symbol of life.

further in southern Arabia, particularly Dhofar, the alleged home of the original Arabs (Bury & Mansur 1911:*passim*). His disease is visible on his skin, and one generally suspects him to have leprosy, although the issues about hair in Leviticus 13–14 (*vide supra*) do not play a visible role because of this cultural difference. The main characteristic of his skin, however, is that it is horrible to look at and to live in.

The continuing process of his bodily, social and psychic flaying:

[L]eads to disembodiment or excarnation in 19:26 where נקפו (they have struck off, stripped) him of his skin, a state which may even be idealised: this progressive undressing will eventually open his eyes to God. (Van der Zwan 2017:6; cf. also the rest of this publication)

The visible body, where hair and skin are so prominent, is a major factor constituting the subjective body image, which is ultimately based on the body and its experiences, hence directly determining the ego (Freud 2010:253–255), also in its social form. Hair in the Bible and its virtual absence in the book of Job are therefore relevant for the personal and collective body image, with its resulting impact on the sense of self in the South African context, where a transition to new identity remains in the making.

## 'Unwele Olude': Job in Africa

The familiar wish for long hair on someone's birthday in isiZulu somehow comes as a surprise as hair is still notoriously invested with shame amongst many black Africans (Mbilishaka et al. 2020:*passim*). However, the fact that hair has been selected from the whole body in this wish and therefore prioritised above all the other body parts, including the skin with all its racial meanings, signifies that it has a special symbolic value for Africans.

Traditionally, however, hair as embodied symbol had a holy character in Zulu culture, as some of the precolonial traces left in the second-largest African Independent Church in South Africa, the Shembe or Nazareth Baptist Church, show that the elder men have an *isicoco*, a headring made of their own hair, whilst married women have a basket-like *isicholo* and all female members are instructed to let their hair grow (Chakravarty 2014:115).

The birthday wish is also reminiscent of the Rastafarian dreadlocks, following the Nazirites, whose locks inspire dread and awe because of their believed divine powers. In this way, the Rastafarians in South Africa, quite visible thanks to their hairstyle (cf. Chawane 2014:228), anchor themselves in the Hebrew Bible and feel themselves specifically guided by Leviticus 21:5 (cf. also Nm 6:5, Jdg 13:5, 7). In Nigeria, dreadlocks are, however, mostly associated both with criminality and with worldly musicians (Olalere 2021:28), therefore linking the two groups in the unconscious.

The stereotypical portrayal of Jesus with long chestnut-coloured hair, often confusing his origin as a Nazarene with a

Nazirite (Olalere 2021:11), is painfully alienating to Africans, as is shown by *Ebony* magazine March 1969's picture of a kinky-haired Christ (Yamauchi 1996:397).

From the 53 years that the author spent as a white European immigrant in South Africa, I have two different images in my memory regarding the hair of black people. During my childhood in the Apartheid period, most men and women had their heads shaved, the women hiding it with a head wrap. We as ignorant outsiders assumed that this was either a practical consideration or an issue of shame about their curly hair. Little did we, as the privileged and naïve upper class, realise that it could even be an unconscious sign of mourning because of the life-long trauma which black people were suffering. We were blind to the first observation by our own unconsciousness of the (absent) hair on the body of the 'other' (*vide supra*). Shaving hair as symbolic castration had most probably been internalised by the victims of this suppressive social system where black hair was invested and infested with colonial and racist prejudices.

This profoundly widespread subjection changed in the post-Apartheid time to black people of both genders growing and experimenting with their hair, yet often imitating idealised and admired western styles. Just as the book of Job is silent about his hair growing back, even as God rehabilitated him from his adversities, so the relative 'absence' of African hair yet needs time to be outgrown. According to a study amongst South African university students as recently as 2016, the lowest scores for beauty were given to African natural and African braided natural hair when the students were shown 20 photos of different Afro-textured hair styles, the highest scores nevertheless continuing to be given to European and Asian styles (Oyedemi 2016:546). That outcome shows that the African body as a totality is not yet unambiguously celebrated everywhere in Africa. Africans continue to wear the identity imposed through collective projection which has been the mask of the masters, instead of an extension and showcasing of their own bodies. They, the generality of the African population, have not yet realised or admitted that the emperor (Andersen 1987:*passim*) is naked.

God therefore calls them, like Job in 40:10, to adorn themselves with their own beauty and to usurp their erstwhile dominant phallic power in their native warrior charisma again.

Just as the skin is a controversial issue not only in the (in) famous Song of Songs 1:5–6, but much more so in the book of Job where it is the site of his bodily, psychological and social illness, hair is problematised by its conspicuous and unexpected absence in the book of Job when it is rendered invisible right at the start in the first chapter.

By reclaiming the bodily crown of dignity, pride and identity which is expressed through individuation and difference, not imitation of the other who is envied, yet admired, black Africans can arrive at the last chapter of the book of Job,

where his adversities are turned around and compensated for in double measure.

The Kiswahili proverb '*akili ni nywele, kila mtu ana zake*' (hair is like brains, each person has their own) rightfully appeals to the acceptance of this diversity.

## Conclusion

The conspicuous absence of hair in a book abounding with the mention of so many body parts compared to other biblical books is psychoanalytically significant in that hair is unconsciously symbolic of life, virility and femininity as they are celebrated in the erotic book of Song of Songs. These experiences are far and few in a book mourning death, and Job pre-empts the superego's delayering of his body and existence by asserting his ego in shaving himself yet symbolically humbling himself, socially identifying with the poor and surrendering to God. Eventually, however, God rehabilitates hair as symbol of life and strength in the mane of the horse as an ideal model for Job.

Something of the universal relevance of this Joban situation as regards the social and psychological significance of hair is shown in South Africa, where black hair was formerly virtually absent during the traumatic time of Apartheid but has regrown to be celebrated as suggestive of singular strength and identity in a world of diversity.

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