

The poor in the Psalms and in Tsepo Tshola's song Indlala: African liberationist remarks

**Author:**V. Ndikhokele N. Mtshiselwa¹**Affiliation:**¹Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies, University of South Africa, South Africa**Corresponding author:**Ndikho Mtshiselwa,
mtshivnn@unisa.ac.za**Dates:**

Received: 30 Aug. 2015

Accepted: 17 Mar. 2016

Published: 31 Aug. 2016

How to cite this article:Mtshiselwa, V.N.N., 2016, 'The poor in the Psalms and in Tsepo Tshola's song *Indlala*: African liberationist remarks', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72(1), a3173. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i1.3173>**Copyright:**© 2016. The Authors.
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This article sets out to investigate how an African liberationist paradigm could be used in South Africa as a theoretical framework that shapes an inquiry into the issue of poverty in the Book of Psalms. The poor in the Davidic collections of psalms (cf. Ps 10; 23, 72; 109) will therefore be examined within the South African context in order to probe the liberating possibilities that the psalms could offer to poor black South Africans, and most importantly when the text is read in dialogue with Tsepo Tshola's liberationist song *Indlala* [Starvation]. Firstly, this article discusses an African liberationist paradigm with the view to anchor the reading of psalms within a theoretical framework. Secondly, within that framework, this article uses the song *Indlala* as a hermeneutical tool to unlock the reality of poverty in South Africa. Thirdly, guided by an African liberationist framework the article teases out the categories and voices of the poor in the psalms. In the end, this article argues that the reading of poor in the Psalms, particularly with an African liberationist lens could have liberating implications for poor black South Africans.

Introduction

The discourse of the poor in the Psalms has stimulated a variety of scholarly conversations in Old Testament studies. Persuaded by the normative status enjoyed by the Hebrew Bible (HB) in present day South Africa, this article sets out to uncover the liberating possibilities that the Book of Psalms could offer the poor black South Africans. The possibility that the situation of poverty in the psalms bears striking similarity to the South African context prompts the contextual reading of the psalms. On the hermeneutical level, this paper will use an African liberationist framework to argue that, if approached from an African liberationist perspective, the discourse of the poor in the psalms can contribute positively to the poverty alleviation discourse in South Africa. Based on the literature on Psalms and the South African context, the discussion will follow the outline below:

- theoretical framework
- Tsepo Tshola's song *Indlala*
- categories and voices of the poor in Psalms.

Theoretical framework – An African liberationist paradigm

With respect to the liberationist dimension of an African liberationist approach to the Davidic collections of psalms, I partly draw on Mosala's 'black biblical hermeneutics of liberation'. Even though he is well aware of their Euro-American origins, Mosala, in his 1987 thesis, uses the historical-critical methods with a view to identify and locate the variant voices and interests of the class sectors in ancient Israel (1987:x, 38–47). Mosala's black biblical hermeneutics of liberation is linked to the black theology of liberation, a theology that reveals how God tends to intervene decisively against forms of oppression and exploitation in favour of the poor (Mosala 1996:21; cf. Mgojo 1977:28). This intervention is often expressed as the preferential option for the poor (cf. Hopkins 2002:54). The black theology of liberation thus calls for solidarity with the oppressed people in the margins of society (Cone 1989:151–152, 1992:21, 53; Tshaka 2014:1, 2).

Mosala's black biblical hermeneutic of liberation (1987:xi) is guided by historical materialism, a framework which is associated with Karl Marx. Not only does the framework give priority to social relations specifically in terms of class, race, and gender both in the biblical text and the modern context, it equally advances the interests of the poor (Mosala 1997:57–58). However, it does not seem that Marxism is entirely innocent, as it does not completely oppose capitalism. Rather, Marxism is a theory that is also set to take over power with the aim of centralising it within the leadership of the proletariats (Degenaar 1982:27).

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In line with sociopolitical discourses and within the context of biblical studies, Mosala bases his black biblical hermeneutic of liberation on Marxism, even though he is well aware of the view that Marxism is a theoretical framework which is captive to *Europeanness* and has been shunned by postcolonial biblical criticism (Boer 1998:24–48; cf. Mosala 2006:134–135; West 1981:256). However, it must be noted that Marxist theory has offered biblical studies a valuable tool, particularly with regard to the understanding of the historical mode of production which enables us to locate our exegetical work within the sociohistorical systems in the world of the text's production (cf. West 2011:513–514, 529).

Although the African liberationist approach draws on Mosala's liberationist framework, it also departs from his theory and method (cf. Mtshiselwa 2015a). West's study (2014:1–10) shows that a cultural form of biblical hermeneutics draws to mind the presence and importance of cultural resources to the contextual readers of the HB. Such resources may shed light to the fusion of socio-economic analysis to the African liberationist reading of both the ancient text and the modern contexts. Building on De Wit's work (2004:481), West (2014:3) argues that intercultural hermeneutics reminds contextual hermeneutics of the presence of other local contexts within which a socially engaged exegete could read the HB. No doubt, an African liberationist reading of poverty in the psalms that draws on Mosala's liberationist approach would benefit from cultural resources which stand in continuity with postcolonial biblical studies. These cultural resources include indigenous narratives, idioms, and proverbs as well as liberation songs. In a culture where the Bible is appropriated in a variety of musical genres, it is fitting to use Tsepo Tshola's song *Indlala* [Starvation] as a hermeneutical lens to read the psalms on poverty in the Davidic collection. Put differently, in continuity with the trend of using visual and performing arts to read the HB, the liberative song *Indlala* will be examined and used to demonstrate the overall influence of popular music on the interpretation of the HB. The aim is to engage with the issue of poverty both in the biblical and South African contexts in order to determine the liberating possibilities contained in Psalm 23 for poor South Africans.

Tsepo Tshola's song *Indlala* and poverty in South Africa

In 2002, Tsepo Tshola released an album titled 'A new dawn' which includes the song *Indlala*. Eight years after the dawn of democracy in post-apartheid South Africa, Tshola called for the redress of poverty that is experienced by the working-class people and the poor. Worthy of note is the distinction between the songwriter and the performing artist, namely, Tsepo Tshola and the black South Africans who presently sing along with Tshola. Noteworthy, the use of a plural verb by individuals is not shocking in Africa. Based on the Ubuntu philosophy which insists that *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* [a person is a person through [and with] other persons], Tshola uses plural verbs to express his individual solidarity with the poor black South Africans. The fact that Tshola is

both the songwriter and performing artist suggests that he is not extremely poor, but is merely articulating the voice(s) of the poor. However, the economic status of Tshola is outside the interest of this article. The lyrics of the song *Indlala* are outlined in the table below.

From a poetic, analytical and ideological point of view, some remarks need to be made about the preceding song.

Verse line 1 '*Silele singalele* [we are sleeping, but not asleep]' alludes to the frustration of black people in South Africa. The use of Zulu language and the reference to money for 'taxi' in verse line 26 confirm that the frustrated black people are the poor and the working class. Although the focus of this article is not on the issue of racism *per se*, the reference to 'taxi'

TABLE 1: *Indlala* (Starvation).

Lyrics [translation mine]	Verse line	Stanza
<i>Silele singalele</i> [We are sleeping, but not asleep]	1	1
<i>Abantwana bayakhala ekhaya</i> [Children are crying at home]	2	
<i>Yindlala</i> , [because of starvation]	3	
<i>Silele singalele</i> [We are sleeping, but not asleep]	4	
<i>Asinamali</i> [<i>Silele singalele</i>] [We do not have money (We are sleeping, but not asleep)]	5	2
<i>Siyahlupheka</i> [<i>Silele singalele</i>] [We are poor (we are sleeping, but not asleep)]	6	
<i>Sokwenza njani?</i> [<i>Silele singalele</i>] [What are we going to do? (we are sleeping, but not asleep)]	7	
<i>Yindlala</i> [<i>Silele singalele</i>] [because of starvation (We are sleeping, but not asleep)]	8	
<i>Silele singalele</i> [We are sleeping, but not asleep]	9	3
<i>abantwana bayakhala ekhaya</i> [Children are crying at home]	10	
<i>Yindlala</i> , [because of starvation]	11	
<i>Silele singalele</i> [We are sleeping, but not asleep]	12	
I'm gonna talk to Mbeki [<i>Safa yintlupheko</i> (We are dying of poverty)]	13	4
I'm gonna talk to Mandela [<i>Izingane ziphelile</i> (The children are finished)]	14	
I'm gonna talk to Buthelezi [<i>Safa yintlupheko</i> (We are dying of poverty)]	15	
Somebody, help me [<i>Izingane ziphelile</i> (The children are finished)]	16	
Oppenheimer, can you hear me? [<i>Safa yintlupheko</i> (We are dying of poverty)]	17	5
Ramaphosa, can you hear me? [<i>Izingane ziphelile</i> (The children are finished)]	18	
Zuma, can you help me? [<i>Safa yintlupheko</i> (We are dying of poverty)]	19	
Somebody, help me [<i>Izingane ziphelile</i> (The children are finished)]	20	
We've got no money; we are living in poverty	21	6
The wolf is knocking on our door	22	
[<i>Safa yintlupheko</i> (We are dying of poverty)] We've got no money for the doctor	23	7
[<i>Izingane ziphelile</i> (The children are finished)] We've got no money for the water	24	
[<i>Safa yintlupheko</i> (We are dying of poverty)] We've got no money for the power	25	
[<i>Izingane ziphelile</i> (The children are finished)] We've got no money for the taxi†	26	
<i>Silele singalele</i> [We are sleeping, but not asleep]	27	8
<i>Abantwana bayakhala ekhaya</i> [Children are crying at home]	28	
<i>Yindlala</i> , [because of starvation]	29	
<i>Silele singalele</i> [We are sleeping, but not asleep]	30	

†In South Africa, the term 'taxi' refers to the mini-bus used for public transportation especially by the black working class people.

exhibits the racial dimension of the issue of poverty in South Africa. Based on the afore-mentioned, Mosala's (1997:57–58) liberationist trajectory, an allusion to a 'taxi' problematises the social relations, particularly in terms of race. Thus, it comes as no surprise that from a black theological point of view the issue of poverty is a disturbing concern as it adversely affects the black people as compared to their white counterpart. The reality of poverty in South Africa leads the songwriter and performing artist of the song, Tshola, to have sleepless nights. Many black South Africans who today are singing along with Tshola are frustrated, mainly because of their experience of poverty. Reports show that:

the poorest 40% of households on average received an income of less than R650 per person per month, whilst the poorest 20% of households earned less than R325 per person per month. (Stats SA 2012:13)

Verse line 2 of the song *Indlala* presupposes that Tshola is away from home. This is supposed by the statement *Abantwana bayakhala ekhaya* [Children are crying at home]. In the context where black South Africans leave their rural homelands to pursue economic survival in the cities, the content of verse line 2 would therefore not come as a surprise. As Mosala (1991:40) excellently perceived, the colonial and apartheid systems in South Africa 'dispossessed the African of their land and created out of them a wage class with nothing but their labour power to sell'. The latter systems forced black people to work in the mines and on farms as slaves. Subsequently, many children of black South Africans cried at their homeland and dare I say that they still do, whilst their fathers are selling their labour in the cities of South Africa. Although Tshola and the black South Africans who today relate with the song, labour outside their domain, their children at their homelands remain poor. In this case, employment does not guarantee economic survival or food security. On the reality of poverty among children, the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF 2014) reports that:

The 2012 Child Gauge indicates that 60.5% of all South African children [defined as persons younger than 18 years] resided in poor households [the poverty line used was R575 per person per month]. In absolute terms this translates to just over eleven million children [out of 18.5 million] living in poverty. (p. 43)

The latter report shows that poverty adversely affects many children in South Africa who also suffer from the HIV and/or AIDS pandemic and malnutrition among other adverse conditions (SAHRC & UNICEF 2014:56–57). Furthermore, the repeated causal statement *yindlala* [because of starvation] throughout the song alludes to the issue of food security. For Tshola, the persistent starvation of the poor, especially of those who reside in rural areas, discredits any possible claims to food security in South Africa. Additionally, verse lines 23–26 reveal the impact of poverty on issues of health and service delivery, namely, basic needs of water and electricity. Based on the song *Indlala* as well as on the evidence provided by Stats SA we can thus surmise that the poor in South Africa continue to lack means of livelihood.

The reference to poor young people as well as to the statement, *asinamali* [we do not have money] in verse line 5 draws to mind the #FeesMustFall campaign. In 2015 and 2016, many a young person in South Africa participated in the #FeesMustFall campaign in which the #FreeQualityTertiaryEducation was demanded. The slogan *#Asinamali* became the rationale for the protest. The impact of poverty in South Africa is illustrated by the recent protests for #FreeQualityTertiaryEducation. The issue of free education is one that has been demanded by black South Africans as early as 1955. The Freedom Charter which was adopted at the Congress of the People on 26 June 1955 stipulates that 'Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children; higher education and technical training shall be opened to all by means of state allowances and scholarships awarded on the basis of merit' (South African Congress Alliance 1955:3). Sixty years later and 22 years into democracy, many a young person continues to experience poverty, specifically in terms of not having money. Poverty reduces the likelihood of attaining education. Because the protests for free education have been a concern for black people since 1955, it stands to reason that the issue of the illiteracy of young people and unequal access to education institutions could be considered as partly a legacy of colonialism and apartheid. On that point, the slogan *#asinamali* and the call for #FreeQualityTertiaryEducation stand as a protest against white supremacy which, as Cornel West (1982:48) argued, is the mechanism that prohibits the intellectual capacity of black people to generate and produce knowledge.

The claim *Asinamali* in verse line 5 also suggests that poverty is a persistent reality for the black South Africans who do not own means of economic production. With respect to the economy of South Africa, Klein (2007:204) argues that political freedom was attained at the cost of economic bondage or constriction. She states that in the transition, the government of the so-called transitional countries including South Africa is 'given the key to the house, but not the combination to the safe'. In other words, the African National Congress (ANC) élites received political liberation while the NP élites and white oligarchs remained in control of the economy of the country. The poor and working-class people who have no money would thus find Tshola's song intriguing. However, the point that not all black South Africans identify with the statement, *Asinamali* [We do not have money] is indisputable. The rise and self-enrichment of the ANC élites seem to be evident in the economic initiative called Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), to which we now turn.

Mbeki's view that the white economic oligarchs had access to and influenced the formulation of the ANC government's economic policy through the BEE resonates with that of Bond. The fact that the white oligarchs use black faces to gain access to the new government and often pay black South African political élites in the form of shares in their companies sheds light on the inappropriateness of the BEE (Bond 2000:28). Unlike Mbeki however, Bond explicitly mentions the ANC members who were given shares in NAIL and their

political connections. These include Cyril Ramaphosa (one of the ANC representatives in the negotiations), Nthato Motlana (Soweto civic activist and Nelson Mandela's physician), and Dikgang Moseneke (Pan Africanist Congress leader) who benefited from the BEE (Bond 2000:31–32).

Another instance of how the ANC élites benefited from the BEE is shown by the link between Ramaphosa and Lonmin (cf. Mtshiselwa 2015a:116). According to Steyn (2012:1), Lonmin extended a \$304 million loan to Ramaphosa's Shanduka Group to establish its BEE status, and because of the need for Lonmin to have a BEE partner in order to retain its mining licence, Ramaphosa one of the ANC élites benefited from the BEE.¹ He enjoyed that benefit without sharing his wealth with the poor. Thus, one can conclude that the ANC élites seem to find it difficult to share their wealth with the poor ordinary South Africans who have no political connection that could enable them to acquire productive assets.

Verse lines 17 and 18 of the song *Indlala* links Oppenheimer with Ramaphosa in order to trigger a thought about the Convention for Democratic South Africa (CODESA) negotiations. Klein (2007:208) also points out that the ANC élites represented by Mandela and Mbeki (who are both mentioned in the song *Indlala*) reportedly submitted the ANC's economic program to Harry Oppenheimer for approval, claiming there was no slogan connecting the government to Marxist ideology (Marais 2001:122; Wells 1994:6). This point also shows that the capitalist and imperialist tendency of the apartheid government to use white oligarchs such as Oppenheimer, the former chairperson of Anglo American and De Beers, to advance their aims continued. The aim was to secure economic power and control. Unfortunately, as Tshola and the poor black South Africans who now sing along with Tshola suggest, the security of economic power and control by black élites and white economic oligarchs left many black people not only in the periphery, but also in the grip of starvation.

The statement 'The wolf is knocking on our door' in stanza 6 appears to have been borrowed from a well-known European fairy tale titled *Little Red Riding Hood* (Perrault 1697). The tale is about a little girl who was sent to her grandmother to deliver a cake but met a wolf on the way. The wolf presented himself to the little girl as caring but his wicked intention was to eat her. Later, the wolf knocked at the door of the grandmother's house, pretending to be the little girl, swallowed the grandmother and occupied her house. On arrival at the house, the little girl was also tricked and swallowed by the wolf. As the wolf became comfortable in the house that did not belong to him, the huntsman defeated the wolf while he was asleep and cut open his stomach thereby saving both the little girl and her grandmother. The point of the fairy tale is that the stranger deceived generations of people and having deceived them, took over their property. Later, the huntsman liberated both generations [that is, the

grandmother and granddaughter] and subsequently restored their lives and property. It is not surprising that Tshola alludes to the fairy tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* because the indigenous people of South Africa were deceived by the settlers who used the Bible to confiscate their land and colonise them. As Modise and Mtshiselwa (2013:359–378) have argued, the loss of land and colonisation led to the poverty of many black people in South Africa. Thus, Tshola must have had in mind the experience of injustice when singing about the wolf that is knocking on the door. Furthermore, in stanza 6, Tshola made a call to the 'huntmen' – embodied in the figures of Oppenheimer, Ramaphosa, and Zuma – to liberate the poor.

The rhetorical question that is posed by Tshola in verse line 17–18 on whether Oppenheimer and Ramaphosa hear the cry of the poor suggests that Tshola is not confident that these economic and political élites would offer liberation to the poor. Contrary to this lack of confidence exhibited in verse lines 17–18, Tshola places the confidence on Mbeki, Mandela and Buthelezi (verse lines 13–15), as well as in Zuma (verse line 19). However, the cry 'Somebody, help me [*Izingane ziphelile* (The children are finished)]' which is uttered twice (verse line 16 and 20) in the song, extends the call for the liberation of the poor to any South African. Thus, one may reasonably argue that the song does not express firm confidence in all the economic and political figures mentioned above. Rather, it repeatedly calls for somebody to help liberate the poor and the working-class people of South Africa. Because this study sets out to probe the liberating possibilities of the psalms for poor black South Africans, it is helpful to conduct a contextual reading of the texts under consideration.

Categories and voices of the poor in Psalms

Enthused by the black theology of liberation which caricatures a deity who tends to intervene decisively against forms of oppression and exploitation in favour of the poor, and particularly drawing on Mosala (1996:21), my interest therefore lies at investigating both the categories and voices of the poor in the Psalter. As mentioned earlier, this article uses an African liberationist paradigm as a theoretical framework to probe the theme of poverty in Psalms 10; 23, 72; 109.

Categories of the poor in Psalms

There is reasonable consensus that the Book of Psalms was produced in various phases, namely the early pre-exilic phase, the later pre-exilic phase, the exilic phase, and the postexilic phase (Gerstenberger 1988:29; Jonker 2004:110; Mtshiselwa 2015b:708). Thus, the point that a few Davidic collections (Ps 3–41, 51–72, 108–110, 138–145) were added to the Psalter during the exile makes sense (cf. Gerstenberger 1988:29). The categories of the poor in the exilic and postexilic periods that are reflected in the texts under investigation include (1) the hungry, (2) the poor children and orphans and (3) the oppressed.

1. See <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-12-07-00-lonmin-unlucky-in-bee-love>.

The hungry

As Scheffler (2015:3) observed, the category of the hungry is noticeable in Ps 10:8, 10, 14; 23:1; 72; 109:6–19. Psalm 23 uses the verb רָקַח [be in need] to refer to hunger. In the postexilic texts the preceding verb is used to portray a situation of hunger or starvation. For instance, Ezekiel 4:17 states, 'Lacking bread and water, they will look at one another in dismay, and waste away under their punishment' (cf. Mtshiselwa 2015b:710; Nihan 2013:415–417).² The issue of hunger – the need for food – was thus a problem in postexilic Yehud which led to dismay. Verse line 7 *Sokwenza njani?* [*Silele singalele*] (What are we going to do? [We are sleeping, but not asleep]) in the song *Indlala* resonates with the post-exilic context in which the marginalised Jews were in dismay.

Interestingly, in Deuteronomy 28:48, the verb רָקַח [be in need] is attached to the absolute common noun כֹּל [everything] while כֹּל רָקַח is also rendered as 'dire poverty'.³ In the song *Indlala*, the statements *Safa yintlupheko* [We are dying of poverty] and *Izingane ziphelile* [The children are finished] in stanza 4 suggest a situation of 'dire poverty'. It becomes clear therefore that the suggestion of starvation which is contained in the verb רָקַח [be in need] validates the supposition that the poor who read Psalm 23:1 in the late exilic and postexilic context experienced poverty. The exilic text, 1 Samuel 2:8 portrays Yahweh (YHWH) as one who alleviates poverty (cf. Ps 113:7; Hutton 2009:141–142; Mtshiselwa 2015b:711). It is remarkable that 1 Samuel 2:8 depicts YHWH as not only redeeming the poor from poverty, but also elevating the poor to a position of political power as princes. In this instance, an economic condition is linked to a political situation. It is thus not surprising that Tshola also links his concern about poverty to political figures such as Mbeki, Mandela, and Zuma to show that the economic condition of poverty requires political intervention. In other words, in both the South African context and the setting of Psalm 23, the alleviation of poverty is linked to the psalmist's elevation to a position of political power. Often, when such a link occurs, it is also presupposed that there is economic exploitation of the poor by the economic and political élites. I am thus reminded of Tshola's questions: 'Oppenheimer can you hear me (verse line 17)?, and Ramaphosa can you hear me (verse line 18)? It is doubtful that the élites who identified with the Levitical singer(s) in the green pastures were concerned about the cries of the poor in Babylonia and post-exilic Yehud. Given the likelihood of economic exploitation of the poor by the economic and political élites, it is no wonder that the Jewish exiles in Babylon were exploited economically particularly in the sense that they served as sources of cheap labour (Smith 1989:38–41; Smith-Christopher 2002:71–73; Mtshiselwa 2015b:711; cf. Is 52:5; Jer 51:6–7; Lm 3:1–9; Ps 137).

The poor children and orphans

The concern about the impact of poverty on the lives of children in the song, *Indlala* lends an interest at probing the

2. In this instance, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) is consulted for a clearer translation of the text in question.

3. The New International Version (NIV) translation of the Bible is used here.

poverty of children in the Davidic collections of psalms. In Psalm 10, not only do the actions of the wicked men adversely affect the poor in general, but specifically bear the negative impact on the orphans (cf. v.14). Because the preceding concern about the orphans is in the context of a psalm that articulates how YHWH cares for the poor, as Scheffler (2015:4) excellently perceived, a black theologian would be sympathetic to the text which exhibits solidarity with the poor orphan. Key to the black theology of liberation and the African liberationist paradigm is the intervention that is often expressed as the preferential option for the poor (cf. Hopkins 2002:54; Mgojo 1977:28; Mosala 1996:21). The preferential option for the poor children in Psalm 10 would therefore be welcomed within an African liberationist framework. If read from an African liberationist perspective which foregrounds the idea of justice for the oppressed, Scheffler's view that Psalm 10 portrays YHWH as seeking and doing justice for the orphans and the oppressed becomes attractive. No doubt, the poverty of orphaned children is therefore a justice issue which required the intervention of YHWH (cf. Ps 10).

Psalm 72 presents the children of the poor as a category of people who suffer the most in situations of poverty (Scheffler 2015:5). By teasing out the poverty of both the parents and children in verse 4, the psalmist presents poverty as generational. The poor are located in at least two generations. In this case the poor children in Psalm 72:4 inherit the poverty of their parents. The latter point resonates with the caricature of poverty in the song *Indlala*, because both the parents and children who are back at home are poor. Because the liberationist deity – YHWH – is in solidarity with the poor, it stands to reason that not only does Psalm 72 reveal the situation of poverty, but equally offers a solution. Psalm 72 thus articulates the responsibility of the king, that is, a political figure which is in a position of authority. On the preceding point Scheffler (2015) remarks:

That justice should be done to the poor is prescribed in the Torah (e.g. Ex. 23:2–3, 6; Dt. 27:17), and in Psalm 72 the responsibility of the king in this regard is spelt out. Through the king, the God of justice and compassion cares for the poor. (p. 5)

Based on the preceding remark, Psalm 72 offers a solution to the situation of poverty that is experienced by both the parents and their children by suggesting that kings should care for the poor. The call on the political élites to address the issue of poverty experienced by children in particular is intriguing to an African liberationist reader of the psalms. The latter holds true because the song *Indlala*, which serves here as a hermeneutical lens to read the biblical texts equally, presents a situation where the political élites are called to address the issue of poverty that lends the cry of the children. Ramaphosa and Zuma are called to alleviate the poverty of the children which is inherited from the parents. For Mosala (1991:40), the situation of poverty is inherited from the colonial and apartheid systems in South Africa under which many a black person was oppressed.

The oppressed

Of significance is the point that the situation of poverty in Psalm 72 is presented alongside the issue of oppression, injustice, and violence (cf. vv.13–14). Various forms of injustice were perpetrated in the late exilic and postexilic period, ranging from the exploitation of the poor through heavy taxation, the creation of situations of indebtedness for the poor, and the confiscation of the land owned by the poor to slavery. It comes as no surprise therefore that both Psalm 72 and Nehemiah 5 exhibit attempts at addressing the issue of oppression and exploitation of the poor. With respect to the exploitation of the poor, McNutt (1999) remarks:

Regardless of who owned the majority of the land, the economic well-being of the local population in Persian-period Judah seems to have declined progressively over time, with the development of a high degree of poverty, particularly in rural areas, resulting in some cases in an inability to pay off debts, and consequently the necessity of selling off land to the more wealthy. This was likely caused in part by the Persian government's depletion of the rural economy through heavy taxation, and in part by the fact that the taxes had to support the local élites as well as the empire. (pp. 196–197)

McNutt's view is confirmed by Nehemiah (5:10–12) which refutes the exploitation of the poor in terms of the system of heavy taxation as well as the issues of indebtedness, land use, and slavery. The passage also attests to the injustice experienced by the poor Judeans in post-exilic Yehud (cf. Scheffler 2015:8). When referring to the narrative of the Judeans who were in the margins of the society, Brueggemann (2003) says:

they continue to arise 'from below', forcing their ways into the normative world and into the canonical recital, declaring that the legitimated recital is partly false because it is partial. (p. 50)

It becomes critical therefore that an African liberationist reader of the HB should uncover the stories of injustice as well as the voices of the poor in Davidic collections of psalms.

Voices of the poor

Scheffler (2011:192, 2015:7) has strongly argued that nowhere in the psalms on poverty are the direct voices of the poor presented and heard because the composers were of an elite class (cf. Lombaard 2012:227). The point made in the preceding argument is this: because the composers of the psalms were educated élites who could not have been extremely poor, the voice(s) on poverty were therefore expressed on behalf of the poor and not by a poor person. In addition, Scheffler (2011:202, 2015:7) claims that the elite composer of Ps 109, in particular, pleaded the case of the poor for his own interest, that is, to personally gain YHWH's favour. Although I am sympathetic to the view that many psalms were written by educated élites who were not extremely poor, I am however less sure about the suppliant being not poor and needy in Psalm 109. Unlike Scheffler, I would not completely rule out the possibility of the suppliant being poor and needy.

In verse 1, the suppliant states that he has been treated 'extremely unjustly' (cf. Scheffler 2011:200). Not only is the suppliant treated unjustly and accused by his enemy, he is also made to experience material need (Scheffler 2011:201). A cardinal question to ask then is: who caused the material need of the suppliant? An immediate response would be: his enemies. However, such a response would need to be subjected to examination. Worthy of note is Scheffler's (2011) point on the evident irony in Psalm 109:

An Intriguing irony reveals itself in this psalm. The suppliant regards himself as poor and needy in order to lay claim to God's favour as the one caring for the poor, but then he immediately wishes that his enemy should be poor and that his enemy's innocent children should die of hunger. (p. 202)

The irony reveals that the suppliant wishes his enemies to experience what he has experienced. No doubt, Scheffler (2011:203) supports the view that it is probable that the enemies have done the suppliant injustice. It becomes clear that the enemies caused the suppliant to experience injustice. Psalm 109:17 suggests that the suppliant has an idea of 'revenge' in mind. That is, the text insinuates that what the enemy has done should 'come on him'. Put in a reverse order, that which should happen to the enemies is exactly what the enemies have done to the suppliant. In that case, the imprecation against the enemy in verses 6–20 would be suggestive of the situation of the supplication. If the imprecation against the enemy is his just reward, as Scheffler (2011:201) decisively argued, the view that the imprecation against the enemy mirrors the experience of the suppliant would therefore make sense. The imprecation articulated in Psalm 109 which mirrors the situation of the suppliant includes loss of the court case (6–7); loss of employment (8); fatherlessness of the children of the enemy (9); loss of property; and poverty of the children of the enemy (10–11). On that point, the possibility of the suppliant being poor and needy cannot be completely ruled out. The view that the voice(s) on poverty in Psalm 109 were therefore expressed on behalf of the poor and not by a poor person is thus inconclusive. At the time when the suppliant expressed his voice in Ps 109, he was no longer moneyed, but a poor literate man. Also, it is probable that the Judeans who confidently and comfortably sung or recited Psalm 109 were those who were poor. Thus, it is important to stress the point that Psalm 109 exhibits the voices of the poor that are expressed by the poor.

The liberationist trajectory in African biblical hermeneutics teases out the importance of identifying, embracing and articulating the voices of the poor in the reading of the HB. In his reading of the Bible, West advocates for the reading of the ancient text, not on behalf of the 'ordinary' readers, but with the 'ordinary' readers. To this end, he says that the 'ordinary readers of the Bible have always hovered on the edges of academic biblical studies, but within biblical liberation hermeneutics they have found a more central and integral place' (West 2014:1). The preceding statement, and more importantly, the location of the ordinary readers in biblical hermeneutics leads me to be affirmative of the way the voices

of the poor were expressed by a poor man in Psalm 109, instead of on behalf of the poor. I am also affirmative of the point that the poor Judeans, who later sung or recited the psalm, probably identified with the situation of the supplicant and in turn expressed their call for justice.

Conclusion

This article has drawn on and simultaneously departed from Mosala's black biblical hermeneutic of liberation in order to determine the liberating possibilities that the Book of Psalms could offer to poor black South Africans. Thus, in a culture where the HB is being appropriated through a variety of musical genres, Tshola's song *Indlala* is used as a hermeneutical lens to argue that if re-read from an African liberationist perspective, the discourse of poverty in the Davidic collections of psalms can contribute positively to poverty alleviation discourse in South Africa. Based on the interaction between the African jazz song, *Indlala* and biblical texts, this article submits that the psalms contain liberating implications for the poor in South Africa, namely, the articulation of the voices of the poor challenges the poor black South Africans to be vocal about their poverty.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

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