

“Friends becoming foes”: a case of social rejection in Psalm 31¹

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ABSTRACT

“Friends becoming foes”: a case of social rejection in Psalm 31

The supplicant of Psalm 31 bemoans the fact that his neighbours and companions treat him like an outcast. What is even more disturbing is the fact that one would expect this from the enemies, as is the case in so many laments. The friends and family who were supposed to provide the necessary support in times of affliction, however, deserted the psalmist. The line between friend and foe became blurred. The plaintiff faces rejection on two fronts: attacked by his enemies and ostracised by his friends. Through the marginalisation the poet no longer features as a member of the social group that embodies his identity. Instead of being in the centre, he now operates on the periphery, thus bearing the full brunt of social rejection in ancient Israel. This form of rejection is tantamount to life on the “outskirts” of society. Focusing on the notion of spatiality, this paper aims at illustrating that the image-schema of centre-periphery underlies the behaviour of the companions in Psalm 31. The neighbours and companions reside in the centre (important and honourable), whereas the psalmist exists on the periphery (unimportant and disgraced).

1 INTRODUCTION

References to the enemies abound in the biblical Hebrew Psalms of Lamentation, bearing testimony to their role as antagonists in these poems (cf. Dhanaraj 1992). Since the identity of the foes has been the topic of various discussions (cf. Mowinckel 1962; Keel 1969; Gottwald 1985; Kraus 2003b), this exploration will not revive the scholarly debate. Suffice it to say that different metaphors are used to describe their demeanour as the ones constantly attacking the psalmist and trying to bring about the downfall of the righteous (cf. Riede 2000). The plaintiff has no other choice but to implore the deity to intervene and save him. Whereas one would expect the

1 This is a revised version of a paper read at the SASNES conference in Pietermaritzburg, 19-23 September 2005.

adversaries to act in this way, a somewhat disturbing phenomenon reveals itself in this whole scenario. The neighbours, friends and family on whom the psalmist relies for help and protection in times of affliction now act like the enemies. Members of the same social setting are turning their backs on one of their own. For the supplicant the line between friend and foe has become blurred. Keel (1969:147) is of the opinion that “je treuloser die Freunde nach Ansicht des Beters sind und je starker sie in Lager der Feinde überwechseln, um so schwieriger wird es natürlich, das Treiben der treulosen Freunde und Nächsten von dem der Feinde zu unterscheiden”. It is argued that the situation in Psalm 31 is a case in point. In this individual lament, the supplicant bemoans the fact that his neighbours and companions consider him an outcast. The inner circle abandons the psalmist and avoids any contact with him. He has become like the living dead so to speak. The embattled plaintiff faces aggression on two fronts. On the one hand, he is being attacked by his enemies and on the other hand rejected by his neighbours and companions. The poet is no longer considered as a member of the social group. Instead of being in the centre, that is, part of the group, he now operates on the periphery. Rejection thus equals living on the “outskirts” of society. In the light of the aforementioned, the current investigation endeavours to explicate the link between the aspects of social rejection, kinship and social death. Furthermore, the paper will demonstrate that the image schema of *centre-periphery* underlies the utterances of the supplicant in verses 12-13. It should be noted that this contribution is not intent on theologising, but to examine Psalm 31 within an image-schematic framework. In addition, it will be shown that such a schema affords the reader insight into the actions of the neighbours and companions.

2 TEXT AND TRANSLATION

1 For the musical director, a Psalm of David.

2a In you, O Lord, I have sought refuge,

2b do not let me be ashamed for ever,

2c deliver me in your righteousness.

3a Incline your ear to me,

3b rescue me quickly²,

2 One Hebrew manuscript has יהוה (“O Lord”) at the end of this colon. Craigie (1983:258), in restoring יהוה, claims that the omission in the MT was probably a result of partial haplography. This translation retains the MT (cf.

3c be a rock of refuge for me,
 3d a fortified house to save me.
 4a For you are my rock and my fortress,
 4b and for your name's sake³,
 4c lead me and guide me.
 5a Free me from the net,
 5b that they have hidden for me,
 5c for you are my refuge.
 6a Into your hand I commit my spirit,
 6b you have redeemed me, Yahweh, God of truth.
 7a I hate⁴ those who keep vain idols,
 7b but I trust in Yahweh.
 8a I will exult and rejoice in your loving-kindness,
 8b because you have seen my affliction,
 8c you knew about the distress of my soul⁵.
 9a And you have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy,
 9b you have made my feet to stand in a broad place.
 10a Have mercy on me Yahweh, for I have trouble,
 10b my eyes are wasted with grief⁶,
 10c my soul and my body⁷.
 11a For my life is spent in worrying,
 11b and my years in groaning.

Dahood 1966:185, Rogerson & McKay 1977:136, Weber 2001:153, Mandolfo 2002:69, Kraus 2003a:391).

3 One Hebrew manuscript and the Syriac version have יהוה (cf. Kraus 2003a:391).

4 Whereas the MT has the first person singular, the LXX and the Syriac version read the verb as second person singular masculine (“you hate”) (cf. Schmidt 1934:57, Ridderbos 1955, Nömmik 1999:214, Kraus 2003:392). As far as the reference to the person is concerned, there is no reason to interpret the next colon as a contrast to the previous one. The psalmist is referring to himself in both instances. The MT makes good sense and should be retained (cf. Weiser 1959:184, Dahood 1966:187, Van Uchelen 1979:205, Craigie 1983:256, Seybold 1996:127, Mandolfo 2002:69).

5 The LXX renders this colon: “you have delivered my soul from distress”, which, according to Craigie (1983:258), is either a paraphrase of the MT, or presupposes a different text הוֹשַׁעַת מִצָּרֹת: “you have delivered me from distress”. Since this colon forms a parallelism with the preceding one, this translation adheres to the MT.

6 For other references to “tears”, cf. Pss. 6:6-7; 42:3; 80:4-6; 116:8-9.

7 This line is absent in a Hebrew manuscript and the BHS suggests that it should be deleted. The extent of the psalmist's grief is underscored by retaining this colon. Not just his eyes, but his entire being is wasted by grief.

11c My strength falters in my distress⁸,
 11d and my bones waste away.
 12a For all my adversaries, I have become a scorn,
 12b and to my neighbours, a calamity⁹,
 12c horror to my companions.
 12d Those who see me on the street, flee from me.
 13a I have been forgotten, like a dead one out of mind¹⁰
 13b I have become like a broken vessel.
 14a For I have heard the whispering of many,
 14b terror from all around¹¹.
 14c In their scheming together against me,
 14d they plotted to take my life.
 15a But I, I have trusted in you, Yahweh,
 15b I said: “You are my God”.
 16a My times are in your hand – deliver me,
 16b from the hand of my enemies and from my pursuers.
 17a Let your face shine upon your servant,
 17b save me in your loving-kindness.
 18a Yahweh, don’t let me be ashamed,
 18b for I have called on you,
 18c let the wicked be ashamed;
 18d let them go silent to Sheol.
 19a Let their lying lips be stilled,
 19b that speak arrogantly against the righteous,
 19c in pride and contempt¹².
 20a How abundant is your goodness¹³,

8 With Symmachus, this translation reads בעניי (“in my distress”), rather than בעויתי (“in my iniquity”) of the MT (cf. Schmidt 1934:57, Ridderbos 1955:258, Van der Ploeg 1973:201, Craigie 1983:257, Hossfeld & Zenger 1993:195, Mandolfo 2002:69, Kraus 2003:392).

9 מאד (“exceedingly”) hardly makes sense in the context of v. 12. Instead of omitting it as the Syriac version does, this translation opts for the following emendation: the *mem* of מאד is attached as enclitic to the preceding word, reading אד as איד (“calamity”) (cf. Craigie 1983:258, Dahood 1966:189).

10 מלב: literally, “from the heart”. Here the heart is seen as representative of rationality, hence the seat of memory, conveying the idea that the supplicant sees himself as someone cast into obscurity.

11 This line is omitted in the Syriac version.

12 Following the Syriac version, Kraus (2003a:392) omits ובו. Such an omission is, however, unnecessary, for ובו makes good sense when used together with בנאווה.

13 Some manuscripts and the LXX add יהוה to this line (cf. also Kraus 2003a:392).

20b which you have stored up for those who fear you,
 20c that you have done for those who seek refuge in you,
 20d in the sight of the sons of man.
 21a You will hide them in the shelter of your presence¹⁴,
 21b from the plots¹⁵ of men¹⁶.
 21c You will shelter them in a hut,
 21d from contentious tongues.
 22a Blessed be Yahweh,
 22b for He has revealed his loving-kindness to me,
 22c in a time of distress¹⁷.
 23a But I said in my anxiety,
 23b “I have been cut off¹⁸ from the sight of your eyes,”
 23c but you heard the voice of my supplication,
 23d when I cried to you.
 24a Love the Lord, all his saints.
 24b Yahweh guards the faithful,
 24c but requites the other,
 24d the one that acts arrogantly.
 25a Be strong and take heart,
 25b all you who are waiting on the Lord.

3 ANCIENT ISRAEL AS A DYADIC SOCIETY

To comprehend the psalmist’s agonizing experience of being rejected by his neighbours and companions, one has to examine the phenomenon of group life in early Israel. Whereas modern western society celebrates individualism, our biblical counterparts valued the group. According to Dille (2003:233), “identity in ancient Israel was primarily corporate than individualistic”. The group-oriented nature

14 The BHS suggests that, instead of פִּיךָ (“your face”), כַּנְפֶיךָ (“your wings”) should be read (cf. Ps.61:5). Although this is a possibility, פִּיךָ is retained and translated as “your presence”. The face of Yahweh denotes a salvific presence.

15 רכסִי from רכס (“bind”) is a *hapax legomenon* and in this context can be best translated as “plots”.

16 The noun אִישׁ is used collectively.

17 The MT reads: בעיר מצור (“in a besieged city”). Kraus (2003a:393) maintains that this rendering makes no sense in v. 22 and should therefore, on the basis of the BHS, be emended to בעת מצור (“in times of fortification”) (cf. also Weiser 1959:185, Craigie 1983:258, Lindström 1994:109). This translation opts for the other BHS proposal, namely בעת מצוק (“in times of distress”) which makes good sense in this context.

18 Most Hebrew manuscripts have נגזרתִי, which renders almost the same meaning, while two manuscripts read נגרשתי (“I have been driven away”).

of biblical communities is underscored by the remark of Malina (1993:67) “they regarded themselves in terms of the group in which they experienced themselves as inextricably embedded” (cf. also Keel 1969:39; Bechtel 1991:55; Janowski 2003:47). Ukpong (1995:8ff.) argues that “ ... the life of the individual human person ... finds meaning and explanation in terms of the structure of relationships within the human community ... The individual defines his/her identity by the community to which he/she belongs ...”. Since in, ancient Israel individuals were socialized to form part of the group, they relied on this social unit for their sense of identity, understanding of their roles, rights and privileges and the norms and values the group enacted upon (cf. Neyrey 1993:88). The group provides protection in exchange for loyalty and group solidarity (cf. Keel 1969:46; Malina 1993:84).

The Hebrew Bible portrays man as someone who does not exist as an isolated individual, but as a person who lives and operates within the constellations of society (cf. Janowski 2003:43,50). The dyadic person recognises the importance of the group, that is, the family, neighbours, friends and acquaintances, for his/her own daily existence. Without these social relations, it becomes almost impossible to live a meaningful life. Despite the advantages of such a social organisation, the group-orientation, however, has a corollary (Hanson 1996:20). In societies where the dyadic personality is emphasised, individual actions might have a positive or negative impact on the group as a whole. The biblical narrative of Achan (cf. Josh 7:1-26) serves as an example of how Yahweh punished the Israelites for the actions of one of their members. As a direct result of Achan’s greed (he took some of the devoted things), the Israelites were defeated by the men of Ai. This clearly illustrates that within a dyadic society, individual behaviour cannot be separated from the group because the actions of one member can add to the well-being of the social unit or bring about its downfall. Since the ancient Israelites emphasised corporate responsibility, every person had to act in accordance with the norms and rules, which ensured the survival of the group.

4 SOCIAL REJECTION AS KINSHIP VIOLATION

As a group-oriented society, early Israel was organized according to certain kinship structures¹⁹ (cf. Pedersen 1926, Bendor 1996, Cross 1998, Leeb 2000). The three important societal organisations were the **בית אב** (house of the father/family), the **משפחה** (clan) and the **שבט** (tribe). Although the word neighbours (**שכן**) and companions (**מידע**) used by the psalmist in v. 12 do not designate kinsmen in the strictest sense, I take for granted the fact that they refer to people belonging to the group of which the supplicant was a member (cf. Kings. 10:11; Job. 19:13-14; Prov. 4:7). According to Pedersen (1926:60) “the neighbour ... is the one with whom one lives in community, but there are many kinds of communities ... However, there are some of these which are intimate than others, such as the city community and the national community, but both are based on the community which is more intimate and living than all others, and from which all life springs: the strong community of the kindred”. Kinship terminology “provided the ... language for expressing legal, political, and religious institutions” (Cross 1998:3). The organic kin relations enabled individuals to engage in meaningful interaction with one another and to strengthen these bonds. The kinship system regulates social relation and conduct (Meggitt 1962:274). Moreover, it organises individuals in relation to one another in a “matrix of interconnected statuses whose correlative roles define the norms to which observed social behaviour more or less conforms” (Meggitt 1962:188).

Contrary to what one would expect, the kindred deserted the supplicant in his darkest hour and in so doing violated the kinship principles. In the ancient Israelite society, the kinsmen had to act within the social system as protectors and defenders of the interests of the kinship group (cf. Mullen 1995:706). They were obligated to uphold the welfare of a fellow member of the social group (Cross 1998:4). The responsibility towards the kindred is stipulated in the

19 The following exposition should not be seen as an attempt to provide a detailed discussion of the kinship system of ancient Israel. Instead, I would like to explore the link between kinship principles and social rejection by friends and family. For an in-depth analysis of the ancient Israelite kinship structure cf. Bendor (1996) and Lemche (1985).

law of Leviticus 19:13, 17-18²⁰ where Yahweh instructs the Israelites: “Do not defraud your neighbour or rob him. Do not hate your brother... Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself”. The fact that kinship relates to “amity means consensus in accepting the value of mutual support in maintaining a code of good conduct for the realisation of each person’s interest” (Fortes 1969:110).

Rooted in the concept of kinship was the principle of reciprocity. It implies that “one does for the other whatever the other’s situation calls for ... One likewise ought to be able to assume unreflectively that the other will do for one what is appropriate to one’s own situation” (Janzen 1995:58). This, however, does not happen in Psalm 31. An embattled individual is very disillusioned at the conduct of his neighbours and companions. Instead of being helped by his fellow kinsmen, the psalmist is left to fend for himself. Gone is the solidarity and loyalty so vital to the kin relation. The friends flee from the plaintiff; a thought that also recurs in Psalm 38:11 (12) “My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds, my neighbours stay far away”. The animosity of the friends towards the supplicant likewise occurs in Psalm 49:9 (10) “Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted his heel against me”. For the plaintiff it is definitely not a case of *a troubled shared is a troubled halved*.

In terms of the expected behaviour based on the kinship obligations and the current situation, one can surmise that the poet of Psalm 31 experiences a cognitive dissonance. The incomprehensibility of the response of a fellow kinsman reverberates in Psalm 55:12-14 “If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it, if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God”. Outside the Psalter, the hostility of the friends is also mentioned in the book of Job. After Bildad’s speech, Job replies: “... My kinsmen have gone away, my friends have forgotten me ... All my intimate friends detest me, those I love have turned against me” (Job 19:13-20; cf. also Job 12:4). The rejection by his family and

20 Except for those references relating to Psalm 31, all other biblical quotations are from the New International Version.

friends caused Job to be emotionally incapacitated in his time of need (cf. Bechtel 1991:73).

The notion expressed in the Psalms of lamentation also occurs in the Babylonian and Egyptian literature. In the *Ludlil bel nemeqi*, the righteous sufferer utters the following “To my vast family I became a loner, As I went through the streets, I was pointed at ... My brother became my foe, My friend became a malignant demon, My comrade would denounce me savagely, My best friend made my life an aspersion, An acquaintance would see me and make himself scarce (As translated by Foster 1997:487-488). In the Egyptian *Dispute between a Man and his Ba* the plaintiff bewails the disloyalty of those close to him “To whom shall I speak today? Brothers are mean, The friends of today do not love ... To whom shall I speak today? The criminal is one’s intimate, The brother with whom one dealt is a foe ... To whom shall one speak today? Brothers are mean, One goes to strangers for affection ...” (As translated by Lichtheim 1973:166-167). The disloyalty of family and friends adds *insult to injury*, because the plaintiff now has to rely on strangers for support. Under normal circumstances, he would not have approached outsiders for help. However, in an inversed world, he has to venture beyond the boundaries of the social group. What the abovementioned texts illustrate is that to forsake a fellow kinsman in times of affliction violates the kinship principles, and turns amity into non-amity.

5 SOCIAL REJECTION AS SOCIAL DEATH

The aforementioned discussion called attention to the importance of group life in ancient Israel and the role of the kinship structure as a cohesive element, a glue that binds society. Group affiliation and was important for the existence and survival of the individual. The kin system demarcated the boundary between life and death. Only within the community is life possible (van der Leeuw 1956:221, 270). “Wer as Glied der Gemeinschaft dem Beriech der Gemeinschaft zugehört, ist Mensch, ist Person, lebt, sei er biologisch tot oder Lebendig ... Wer außerhalb der Gemeinschaft und ihrem Bereich steht, ist un-Mensch, ist un-Person, lebt nicht, sei er biologisch tot oder Lebendig” so Hasenfratz (1983:128). The one living outside the realm of kinship becomes a *persona non grata*. Without the help of and allegiance to the kindred, a person thus is socially dead. A lack of companionship and the abandonment by the

fellow kinsmen equals death (cf. Hasenfratz 1983:135; Oeming 2000:102; Kraus 2003b:397). The words of the supplicant in v. 13 “I have been forgotten, like a dead one out of mind, I have become like a broken vessel” vividly portray the experience of social death in the Israelite society. Even though this is not a case of *out of sight is out of mind* (“those who see me on the street, flee from me”; cf. v. 12) the behaviour of the friends suggests that the supplicant does not belong to the social group. He descended into the abyss of obscurity and in the inner circle no one mentions his name. The image of a broken vessel intensifies the poet’s suffering (cf. also Jer. 22:28; 48:38). In ancient Israel vessels were “used for storage and transportation (of water, oil, grain, and olives) cooking, eating, drinking, and presenting offerings” (Bird 1985:1111). The multiple utilization of pottery in everyday life affords us insight into the psalmist’s employment of the metaphor of a broken vessel as a means of describing the current state of affairs. He has become a nonentity, isolated and of no value to the kin group. As a symbolic act through which the neighbours and companions drive the plaintiff out of the community, the social rejection almost borders on annihilation (cf. Pedersen 1926:55).

6 SOCIAL REJECTION AND A LOSS OF HONOUR

In a dyadic society, with its emphasis on the group, rejection by neighbours, friends and family was tantamount to the loss of honour. Even though there is no reference to the term כבוד (“honour”) in Psalm 31, the supplicant’s request “do not let me be put to shame forever” (אל אבושה לעולם) in v. 2 suggests a desire for honour to be restored. The conduct of both the enemies and the friends compel the psalmist to call on Yahweh for divine assistance (cf. Pss. 40:15; 70:3; 71:13; 109:29). The plaintiff appeals to his trust in and dependence upon the deity in order to avert shame (cf. Siebert 2002:163). Whereas certain scholars (cf. Peristiany 1966; Bechtel 1991; Malina 1993; Hanson 1995; Laniak 1998; Dille 2003) consider honour and shame to be core values of the ancient Israelite society, Stiebert (2002:166) claims that they (i.e. honour and shame) do not “emerge as a useful binary pairing for the purpose of examining human interactions in biblical literature” (cf. also Herzfeld 1980:339). However, it would be mistaken to reject altogether the notion that honour and shame are important values in communities where individual identity and recognition by the group are inextricably linked. As Laniak (1998:31) observes “Honor and

shame are the central values to which other values are subsidiary ... Hospitality, generosity, status, obedience, anger, accusation and revenge are the very behaviors and sentiments which are explicitly linked with the terms for honor and shame in the text”.

With regard to honour, Pitt-Riviers (1966:21) contends that “it is the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his *claim* to pride, but also the acknowledgment of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his *right* to pride”. It plays a vital role in the inclusion, integration and social control of members of a particular group (cf. Honecker 1999:1103). Honour is also related to status within a community such as early Israel. According to Pilch (1991:119) status “refers to a *position* in a social system which is evaluated in terms of *what* others perceive that position to be. Essentially, status defines who a person is: man, woman, farmer, shepherd, artisan, carpenter etc”. Status draws its “significance from appropriate formal recognition”, so Laniak (1998:22). Within a group-oriented society, honour as a person’s public reputation constituting his or her identity is complete when appropriately recognized (cf. Thielicke 1982:363; Laniak 1998:22; Simkins 2000:603). According to Honecker (1999:1104) honour “ist Ausdruck von Selbstachtung, von innerer sittlicher Würde, eines Ehrgefühls ...”. Being recognised as a member of a particular group thus implies a certain degree of honour, whereas expulsion from the community suggests a loss thereof.

To be put to shame signals the loss of this reputation and identity. (cf. Thielicke 1982:364; Klopfenstein 1991:486; Plevnik 1993:96). Shame equals dishonour and is sometimes aggravated by the derision of the enemies and even by members of the community who were the lowest in the social stratification (cf. Bechtel 1991:74). The taunts of young people and rogues, caused Job to lament “But now they mock me, men younger than I, whose fathers I would have disdained to put with my sheep dogs ... They were banished from their fellow men, shouted at as if they were thieves ... A base and nameless brood, they were driven out of the land ... And now their sons mock me in song; I have become a byword amongst them ... They detest me and keep their distance; they do not hesitate to spit in my face” (Job 30:1, 8-10). It is argued that in Psalm 31 shame can be regarded as a “state of humiliation, rather than a self-conscious, subjective emotion of personal shortcoming” (Stiebert 2002:162).

The poet's situation illustrates that the fear shame stimulates is that of contempt which leads to the fear of social rejection, abandonment, exclusion or the loss of status (cf. Bechtel 1991:50). The violation of kinship principles and inadequate expression of relational loyalties brought shame on the psalmist (cf. Laniak 1998:26). Shaming was effective because individuals were socially conditioned by the society during a process of socialization and enculturation to find their identity in the group, to be concerned with the opinion of fellow members and to pride themselves in the social and religious ideals of the community (Bechtel 1991:55). The one put to shame becomes marginalized, an outcast, existing outside the inner circle.

Shame is also associated with mocking and degradation (cf. 2 Chron. 30:10; Isa. 57:4; Jer. 20:7; Lam. 3:14) and considered appropriate punishment for the wicked. Given the link between shame and humiliation, the supplicant's request for divine intervention should come as no surprise. As Stiebert (2002:164) remarks "Where Yhwh's worshippers describe their dismal condition alongside expressions of supplication, the implication is that Yhwh should evaluate the situation as unjust and provide relief from shame for his obedient servants. He alone is depicted as capable of doing so". In the light of the above-mentioned, it becomes clear that honour and shame functioned effectively in ancient Israel because the society was predominantly group-oriented with less emphasis on the individual (cf. Bechtel 1991:55). As a conclusion to this section, it can be added that honour and shame are relational terms, in the sense that honour promotes group cohesion, whereas shame creates division between members and drives them apart. These values demarcate the imaginary boundary between the "insiders" and "outsiders", between members and non-members.

7 IMAGE SCHEMA OF CENTRE-PERIPHERY

Up to this point, the exploration accentuated the link between social rejection and the aspects of dyadism, kinship, social death and honour and shame. In the introduction, I hypothesized that the *centre-periphery* image-schema underlies the supplicant's desire for divine intervention and recognition by the neighbours and companions. A next step would be to illuminate this schema as it pertains to the situation in Psalm 31²¹. Suffice it to say that as

21 For a discussion on image-schemas, cf. Basson (2005:95-111).

meaningful dynamic patterns recurring in everyday action and thought, image-schemas allow people to mentally structure their experiences and perceptions (cf. Johnson 1987; Lakoff 1987; Gibbs & Colston 1995; Santibáñez 2002). The role of image-schemas is largely due to the realisation that a substantial portion of language is encoded in the mind in the form of spatial representations that are grounded in perception and action (cf. Woollard 2005:13). However, language does represent concepts without any spatial properties. The *centre-periphery* schema is inherently spatial in its organisation and gives primacy to the centre over the periphery. It consists of a boundary with entailments of inside and outside. The spatial basis provides a cognitive structure capable of grading perceptual and conceptual distance – orientating the further to the near, the unimportant to the important. In the *centre-periphery* schema, the centre is a concentration of the essential, acceptable and appropriate, whereas the insignificant and offensive is pushed to the periphery (cf. Santibáñez 2002:194-195; Liverani 1990:34).

People living on the periphery do not belong to the inner circle and are therefore considered inferior. Life on the periphery engenders a feeling of insecurity because the centre is associated with harmony, the periphery with chaos (cf. Liverani 1990:41). Given that every society has a centre, “membership in a society, in more than the ecological sense of being located in a bounded territory and of adapting to an environment affected or made up by other persons located in the same territory, is constituted by relationship to this central zone” (Shils 1975:4). The centre is the order of symbols, values and beliefs, which govern society. It is also a structure of activities, of roles and persons, within the network of institutions (Shils 1975:4). Applied to the situation in Psalm 31, the aforementioned ideas help to elucidate as to why being in the centre was of utmost importance for the individual in ancient Israel. In view of the fact that he became a horror and calamity to them, the neighbours and companions forced the psalmist to live on the periphery. He is so abhorrent that they flee at the sight of him. The utterance “Those who see me on the street, flee from me” (v. 12) emphasises the notion of spatiality inherent to the centre-periphery schema. The act of fleeing as a gesture of rejection creates an imaginary boundary that separates the supplicant from the group and exposes him to chaos. The prayer “do not let me be put to shame forever” (v. 2) underscores the fear of living on the periphery.

Whereas honour equals being in the centre, shame means rejection and marginalisation. Life on the periphery symbolizes exclusion from the rest of his social group. In the centre, there is life, on the periphery social death. The lament “I have been forgotten, like a dead one out of mind ...” bears witness to this.

8 CONCLUSION

This contribution endeavoured to illustrate the link between the behaviour of the neighbours and companions and the notion of social rejection in Psalm 31. The study highlighted the importance of group life and kin relations in ancient Israel. It was also shown that the abandonment of a fellow Israelite in times of affliction was in violation of the kinship principles. The investigation utilized the image-schema of *centre-periphery* as a means of illuminating the conceptual reality of the poet. The psalmist met with hostility when he turned to his fellow kinsmen for help. Through their actions, they ostracized him from the group. He complains that the neighbours and acquaintances pushed him towards the periphery. From the aforementioned it transpired that life away from the centre equals social death. The group represents the centre and any non-member exists on the periphery. Whereas individuals living within the boundaries of the group enjoy life in all its riches, people on the periphery experiences reality as *mundus inversus*.

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