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FROM TRAUMATIC TO NARRATIVE MEMORIES: THE RHETORICAL FUNCTION OF BIRTH METAPHORS IN MICAH 4-5

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/23099089/actat.Supp26.13>

ISSN 1015-8758 (Print)
ISSN 2309-9089 (Online)

Acta Theologica 2018 Suppl
26:221-236

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes that trauma hermeneutics and, in particular, greater theoretical reflection on the relationship between trauma and metaphor may help explain the birth metaphors in Micah 4:9-5:3, where the woman-in-labour metaphor has been transformed quite dramatically. In the context of Micah, which I propose could also be characterized as trauma literature, there is evidence of a movement from potentially debilitating traumatic memories, associated with the woman-in-labour metaphor, to memories that have been integrated into some kind of narrative framework and that may potentially be considered to be a sign of healing and recovery.

1. INTRODUCTION

One way to deal with the trauma of the past is to write about it. Biblical scholars interested in the hermeneutics of trauma have compellingly shown how much of the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible can be considered in terms of trauma literature. Individuals and communities, traumatized over a long period of time by a series of violent attacks by one military empire after another, were able to write their way out of the depths of despair, in which these traumatic events

had hurled them. In this regard, Stulman (2014:189) calls the prophetic literature disaster/survival literature, given the fact that

written prophecy ... serves as a mechanism to cope with communal disaster, re-order values, reconstruct meaning, and create new symbolic and social worlds in the aftermath of war and community dislocation.

Poetry and narrative serve as the medium to help the community survive and to imagine, in Stulman's (2014:183) words, "a world in and through and beyond the traumatic violence".

The intricate link between trauma and metaphor is one aspect of trauma hermeneutics that is particularly suited to prophetic literature's tendency to employ symbol and metaphor in order to put past traumatic events into words. In an interesting article on the use of metaphor in trauma narratives, literary critic Anker (2009:66) describes how "frozen metaphors of trauma" gradually change to "metaphors of healing" when creative variations on these metaphors are introduced in the process of gaining insight into, and integrating past experiences, whereby the traumatized individual may reconstitute him-/herself. Anker's point of reference is the novel *Fugitive pieces* by the Canadian novelist Anne Michaels. The novel outlines the painful journey of recovery by the main character, Jacob Beer, a Holocaust survivor, who, at the age of seven, while hiding in a kitchen cupboard, saw his parents killed and his sister Bella abducted by the Nazis. Anker (2009:58-65) shows how metaphors in this novel play a central role by, in the first instance, naming the trauma experienced by the protagonist, while, in the second instance, extracting the poison of the exceedingly painful memories of the past, and transforming these same metaphors of anguish and fear into symbols of healing and hope.

This distinction of (frozen) metaphors of trauma versus metaphors of healing offers a helpful means of one particular metaphor that, with some frequency in the prophetic literature, is used to capture the panic and anguish of the traumatic events associated with military invasion. In a number of texts in the book of Jeremiah, in particular (see, for example, Jer. 4:31; 6:24; 22:23; 30:6), and in Isaiah (see, for example, Isa. 13:8; 21:3), the cries of a woman in labour are used to capture the excruciating pain experienced by the Israelite warriors, other members of the beleaguered society and even the hostile nations, in some instances (Claassens 2013; 2014; Bergmann 2011:43-49, 53-54; 2007:655-657). As Bergmann (2007:651) describes the life-threatening nature of the crisis that the metaphor of a woman in labour assumes,

[t]heirs is a crisis so painful, so threatening, and so dangerous that it could realistically end in death. The people, whether soldiers or not, know themselves to be standing at the threshold of life and death ...
 [!]t conveys the painful knowledge that the potentially deadly crisis cannot be prevented, just as birth cannot be stopped.

However, in a number of texts, the creative utilization of the woman-in-labour metaphor also shows evidence of a community on its way to recovery. In a recent investigation on birth imagery in prophetic literature, as part of the expansive *Bible and women* project consisting of 81 volumes concurrently translated into four languages, I demonstrate how in texts such as Jeremiah 31:8, Isaiah 42:13-14, and Micah 4:9-5:3, the woman-in-labour metaphor, with its original connotations of excruciating pain and despair associated with military invasion, has been reframed in such a way as to express the hope for restoration and new life (Claassens, forthcoming).

This current article focuses on one of these texts, arguing that trauma hermeneutics and, in particular, greater theoretical reflection on the relationship between trauma and metaphor may help explain the birth metaphors in Micah 4:9-5:3, where the woman-in-labour metaphor has been transformed quite dramatically. In the context of Micah, which, I propose, could also be characterized as trauma literature, there is evidence of a movement from potentially debilitating traumatic memories, associated with the woman-in-labour metaphor, to memories that have been integrated into some kind of narrative framework and that may potentially be considered to be a sign of healing and recovery.

This article is dedicated to Prof. Fanie Snyman in the spirit of his passion for the Minor Prophets, and with great appreciation for his wise leadership in theological education in our South African context.

2. MICAH AS TRAUMA LITERATURE?

Stulman (2014:3) writes how much of the biblical literature emerged from Israel's traumatic past as ancient Israel found themselves repeatedly invaded and occupied by one empire after another. Indeed, as Stulman rightly points out, Israel's history from the 8th century onwards can be described as "a protracted history of war, exile, and diaspora".

This perspective is important when considering the question as to whether Micah can be viewed as trauma literature. In fact, there is a difference of opinion in terms of the socio-historical location of this book. Most recently, two commentaries on Micah, both of which appeared in 2015, situate this book in two different socio-historical locations. For

instance, O'Brien argues that Micah is, to a large extent, to be situated in the Persian period. She describes the context, in which Micah received its final form, as markedly impacted by the Persian empire of the day. This includes, among others, the heavy yoke of taxation that added to the economic difficulties associated with crop failures and poverty that made up the lived reality of this postexilic community back in Yehud (O'Brien 2015:xlix-liii). O'Brien (2015:42) imagines this community in duress as one "with members still scattered abroad, a society economically drained by support for war, and a Jerusalem without international standing".

Smith-Christopher (2015:8-18), on the other hand, places the bulk of the book of Micah in an 8th-century context, in which rural communities such as Micah's village of Moroshet resisted some of the oppressive policies of the centralized government of Jerusalem. All of this occurs against the backdrop of growing Assyrian imperial control that included, among others, violent military conquest by, for instance, Tiglath-Pileser who turned Israel and Judah into vassal states and, as a result, forcefully extracted resources from the provinces for their massive building projects. Moreover, Smith-Christopher suggests that Senacherib's violent destruction of cities such as Lachish in 701 BCE would conceivably have had quite an effect on the prophet, given the proximity to Micah's home town.

Even though Smith-Christopher propagates primarily an 8th-century context for Micah, he does acknowledge the impact of future empires on the long and conceivably complex development history of this prophetic book, leaving open the possibilities of later additions to Micah, with future contributors responding to new (traumatic) circumstances. Smith-Christopher (2015:7-8) notes, for instance, the role of the rising Neo-Babylonian forces and the effect of the military invasion on, and subsequent exile of the people of Judah. This was followed by the Persian empire, which, in recent years, has been shown to be no less forceful in the execution of its imperial policies. Smith-Christophe (2015:8) writes:

The point is simply this: irrespective of the very real differences between the political and ideological regimes from the eight century B.C.E. until and after Alexander's conquests from 333 till his death in 323 B.C.E., we must always attend to the stubborn similarities of ancient imperial designs toward power and control over wealth, territory, and human resources. On these matters, little difference appears in practice and results.

Actually, reading Micah as trauma literature offers a way to find common ground between the different social locations for Micah assumed by these two commentaries. Whether Micah, for the most part, constitutes literature

that emerges in order to make sense of Assyrian and subsequent Neo-Babylonian invasions, or comes from a later time under Persian imperial domination, as O'Brien would argue, Smith-Christopher (2015:44) is correct in stating that the notion of intergenerational or transgenerational trauma is a category that is fairly helpful when considering a hermeneutical framework for reading Micah. He remarks that

later additions to the book, especially if they were added by persons who were part of a community deeply influenced by the earlier writings of the book – may well continue to share quite similar ideas.

The fact that later communities, in their particular situation of duress, continued to be impacted and respond to earlier experiences of trauma by their parents' and grandparents' generation is helpful when seeking to understand how a metaphor such as the woman in labour is used and reused in new contexts as the community is seeking to respond and overcome both their traumatic present and their past.

3. TRAUMA AND METAPHOR

One aspect of trauma theory that may offer new insight into a metaphor such as the woman in labour used in a context of trauma concerns the distinction drawn between traumatic and narrative memories. According to Van der Kolk and Van der Hart (1995:167),

traumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language,

in order for some measure of healing to transpire. Neuroscientific research has documented some of the physiological effects of trauma that are responsible for the fact that individuals are unable to properly store traumatic memories that constantly return, in a fragmentary way, in the form of involuntary flashbacks and recurring dreams (Anker 2009:52). For instance, during a traumatic event, it appears that the connections between the left and the right hemispheres of the brain are reduced, thus preventing it from attaching emotions and feelings to traumatic events. In addition, brain imaging indicates that trauma also has an effect on the Broca area of the brain, in which feelings and experiences are translated into words (Anker 2009:51-52). These physiological effects of trauma on the brain's function explain why trauma victims find it so difficult to put what they have experienced into words.

A further key characteristic of traumatic memories is the way in which these intruding thoughts may trigger the original experience of being frozen, numb, and detached. Williams (2006:321-322) describes these as essential aspects of the body's self-defence mechanism (see also Anker 2009:52). Traumatic memories are thus often associated with this experience of helplessness and hopelessness that contributes to the fact that trauma victims remain trapped in a state of trauma, forever imprisoned in what O'Connor (2011:3-4) calls a "kind of half-life" – hence unable to start living any kind of meaningful life again.

A central aspect of moving beyond traumatic memories is the cultivation of what is called narrative memories. Narrative memories can be described as the outcome of a process that seeks to organize or reframe past traumatic experiences in some kind of meaningful narrative that brings order to the fragmented, disruptive experiences of past traumatic events. According to Van der Kolk and Van der Hart (1995:167), a person learns, through narrative memory, to remember the emotions and thoughts associated with trauma events simultaneously, and accordingly makes progress in putting these traumatic experiences into words, thus overcoming the physiological effects of trauma on the brain.

In this process, metaphors have been shown to play an important role in the formation of narrative memory, due to their ability "to re-establish the integrated working together of the two hemispheres of the brain after trauma" (Anker 2009:58). Metaphors are thought to be able to activate several areas of the brain simultaneously, thus assisting the brain to reintegrate emotion and cognition in reframing the traumatic events (Anker 2009:55). It is thus not surprising that trauma literature tends to include numerous examples of wordplay, puns, symbols, and multiple levels of meaning – something that is most evident in the book of Ezekiel, where the devastating destruction of the city and the temple is captured in the form of metaphors, symbolic actions, and rather bizarre visions (Garber 2014:349).

However, this process of moving beyond traumatic to narrative memories is often a complex and laborious one. Even in those instances in which one finds metaphors as a way of saying the unsayable, Anker (2009:56) remarks how trauma adversely affects this metaphorical process, in that a traumatized state tends to limit the range of images utilized, in order to describe a particular experience. This reduction in the language used can be attributed to an overwhelming sense of anxiety and may further contribute to a particular "fixed meaning of the experience" that is "frozen in unchanging relationships which surface in the repetition compulsion". In some of these frozen metaphors, there is a "limited point

to memory and representation”, some singular characteristic, “a stark image”, in which the metaphor only establishes “similarities in a rigid way, a compulsive need to force a similarity between the past and the present” (Anker 2009:57).

This explanation of “frozen metaphors” is helpful in understanding the frequent repetitions of certain refrains and metaphors found in trauma literature. For instance, the refrain “to break down and to build up again, to uproot and to plant” is used throughout the book of Jeremiah to capture both the calamity of the destruction of the city and her people and the hope for restoration (Jer. 1:10; 18:7; 31:5) (O’Connor 2011:94; Garber 2014:349). It seems that, given the difficulty, or even, in some instances, the impossibility of trying to put into words the traumatic events of the past, the author tends to fall back onto some stereotypical expression of the traumatic event – something that is particularly evident in the repeated application of the woman-in-labour metaphor to capture situations of trauma (see, for example, Jer. 4:31; 6:24; 22:23; 30:6). As I have argued elsewhere, the anguish and feelings of helplessness and despair associated with a woman in labour throughout the book of Jeremiah become an apt way to capture the “terror [that] is all around” (Jer. 6:25) (Claassens 2013:119-120). In fact, Van der Kolk and Van den Hart (1995:176) explain the repetitive nature of this metaphor, as they remark that, in order for this transformation from traumatic memories to narrative memories to take place, “the traumatized person has to return to the memory often in order to complete it”.

In order for healing to take place, though, it is necessary to move beyond these frozen metaphors to embrace more creative metaphors as a means of coming to terms with trauma. It requires an active process of reframing traumatic memories so as to form new narrative memories. In this regard, Anker (2009:57) reflects on the potential healing effects of “telling the story through new perspectives” that affords the interpreter of traumatic events the opportunity “to assign meaning, integrate the experience, find recognition and relive events”. Anker writes that it is in “the slow evolution of symbolic metaphors that severe trauma may be healed [as] the past and present, image and reality” are integrated and blended, hence causing the original traumatic memory to no longer be experienced in a traumatizing way. Rather, the trauma survivor may now be able to reframe and reformulate the traumatic memory into narrative language in such a way that it loses its initial terrorizing effects. This is considered to be a crucial step in the process of healing and recovery (Anker 2009:58; Van der Kolk & Van den Hart 1995:171). Van der Kolk and Van den Hart (1995:178) rightly state:

Once flexibility is introduced, the traumatic memory starts losing its power over current experience. By imagining these alternative scenarios, many patients are able to soften the intrusive power of the original, unmitigated horror.

There is a good example of such a creative alteration of the woman-in-labour metaphor in Isaiah 42:13-14. Darr (1987:564) argues that, by having God assume the persona of the woman in labour,

the poet proceeds to transform radically the meaning of the simile. Stripped of its conventional connotations, it ceases to be an image of fear and pain and become[s] instead a new way of describing God's behaviour and its awesome effects (see also Bergmann 2011:52; 2007:662).

In terms of trauma theory, this change could be ascribed to the integration of the traumatic memories in terms of a larger narrative framework at work in Deutero-Isaiah that views the Creator-Liberator God in action in a chaotic world. The woman-in-labour metaphor is utilized to speak about God. It is transformed in such a way as to express the hope for a new creation that is rooted in the belief in a God who makes all things new (Dille 2004:71-72).

Bearing in mind these insights from trauma theory on metaphor and trauma, and, particularly, the way in which it may help in understanding the rhetorical function of the woman-in-labour metaphor in the remainder of this article, I will consider the unique ways in which the book of Micah reimagines/reframes the traumatic memories encapsulated in this metaphor. I propose that, in this appropriation and creative re-appropriation of the woman-in-labour metaphor in Micah 4:9-5:3, there is something of this movement from potentially debilitating traumatic memories to memories that have been integrated into some kind of narrative framework and that may potentially be viewed as a sign of healing and recovery.

4. REFRAMING THE METAPHOR OF A WOMAN IN LABOUR IN MICAH

In Micah 4:9, the woman-in-labour metaphor, which throughout the prophetic traditions captured Judah's panic and fear in the face of overwhelming military invasion, is used in the conventional sense, when the female subject, Daughter Zion, cries out in anguish regarding the absence of a king to deliver her. According to Anderson and Freedman (2000:445) as well as Smith-Christopher (2015:153), Zion's anguish in this text expresses the fear that this is the end of the line of David and that there will be no king,

no saviour, no messiah. This experience of feeling profoundly vulnerable and without hope for the future is conveyed, as elsewhere in the prophetic traditions, by the metaphor of a woman-in-labour with all its associations of panic, anguish, helplessness, and despair.

However, immediately following the customary application of this metaphor, one notes that the woman-in-labour metaphor is transformed unexpectedly when, in Micah 4:10, the woman who finds herself in labour emerges as a warrior who will go out of the city where she will be delivered and redeemed by the Liberator God. Reminiscent of the merger of warrior and woman-in-labour imagery in Isaiah 42:13-14, one observes how, in an enactment of the Holy War tradition, Daughter Zion is said to be victorious over her enemies, and promises to offer their spoils to her God. O'Brien (2015:50) describes this portrayal of Daughter Zion in Micah 4:13:

[T]he newly empowered Daughter Zion is pictured with horns of iron and hooves of bronze, treading nations underfoot as it were grain on a threshing floor.

In yet another important alteration of the woman-in-labour metaphor, in Micah 5:3, a woman is said to successfully give birth to a child – a text that, similar to Isaiah 7:14, has typically been associated with the birth of the messiah coming from a little town of Bethlehem (Runions 2001:160; Mays 1976:116). The birth of this child encapsulates the hope for a new ruler in the line of David and dramatically transforms the associations of despair, panic, and hopelessness associated with the way in which the woman-in-labour metaphor has been used elsewhere in the prophetic traditions.

This creative act of reframing the woman-in-labour metaphor in Micah 4-5 could conceivably be understood in terms of the process outlined in the first part of the article that involves moving from traumatic to narrative memories. By merging the original metaphor with all its connotations of panic, anguish and despair with the prophetic traditions outlined earlier that envision a future beyond the painful present, one notes that something of this moving beyond a frozen metaphor, reminiscent of the traumatic memories impeding Judah's ability to deal with its traumatic past, is transformed into a more creative metaphor that shows signs of a community finding, in Stulman's (2014:183) words, "a world in and through and beyond traumatic violence."

First, one finds that the original metaphor of a woman in labour in Micah 4:9 is markedly altered by the joyful reference of an actual birth of a child. In contrast to the futility of a woman giving birth to wind in, for example, Isaiah 26:18 or a woman trapped in labour without end as in, for example, Jeremiah 4:31; 6:24, and 30:6, in Micah 5:3, the birth of a child

signals a radical departure from the hopelessness and despair associated with the original metaphor. Bietenhard (2012:425) argues:

The image of childbearing, earlier a symbol for the pain and depravity of death, now becomes an expression for new life.

But this child that is born is not just any baby. In the spirit of Isaiah 7:10-17, 9:2-7 (MT1-6), and 11:1-5 (Clements 1989:12-13), the expectation of a new leader that expresses the enduring hope for deliverance is encapsulated in the description of the birth of a child in Micah 5:3. By reframing the woman-in-labour metaphor in this unique way, the text in Micah 4-5 thus speaks of the hope of restoration and deliverance, and of a reinstatement of kingship that would reverberate far beyond this original text.¹

This yearning for a new and, more importantly, better leader is continued in the image, in Micah 5:4, when the child who will be born will feed the flock of God. In texts such as Ezekiel 34:11-16 and Psalms 23:1, one finds a sharp critique of the rulers who were considered to be bad shepherds. *Godself* will be the shepherd and will take care of the vulnerable and the weak – thus serving as an example for the ideal king, or one could say the good shepherd, who, according to Psalm 72, is supposed to defend those who are weak and powerless (Smith-Christopher 2015:169).

A second prophetic tradition underlying the transformation of the woman-in-labour metaphor, which is also closely aligned with the hope for a new and better leader, is the yearning for a better world. Once again reminiscent of the peaceable kingdom, as held especially in Isaiah 11:6-9 and 65:17-25, out of the trauma of the devastation of Jerusalem, one finds a longing for a different world.² In Micah 4:1-5, one observes something of this desire for a restored city, with all the nations streaming to Jerusalem to worship God on his Holy Mountain.

In Micah 4:6-10, one finds, as Smith-Christopher (2015:145) describes it, “a building of a new society of crisis”. Central to this vision of restoration is the reference to “the lame”, who will be assembled by God, who will become the remnant, who will be gathered and built up to be a strong nation (Mic. 4:6-7). The reference to “the lame” is significant in its connotations

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- 1 See O'Brien's (2015:60-65) helpful exposition of the interpretation history of this text in the Christian tradition. O'Brien (2015:58) also points out that, in terms of the messianic understanding evident in the context of the Persian Period, one would have expected a human king. See Collins & Yarbro Collins (2008:47).
 - 2 See the recent article by Groenewald (2017), in which he seeks to utilize trauma hermeneutics in order to contemplate the way in which Micah 4:1-5 reflects this longing for a different world from that within a context of severe trauma.

of suffering and vulnerability that closely aligns with the conventional connotations of the woman-in-labour metaphor that is typically understood in terms of vulnerability. Smith-Christopher (2015:147-148) rightly points out that the “lame” can also serve as a symbol of the victims of both the Assyrian and Babylonian military invasions who will be restored by God. Similar to Jeremiah 31:8, in yet another creative reinterpretation of this metaphor, the aspect of vulnerability associated with “the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labour” becomes the symbol of strength in the newly constituted community. In these texts and in the suffering servant tradition (Isa. 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12),³ one notes the emergence of a different, non-traditional understanding of power closely associated with the trauma and recovery experienced by the wounded community at this time.

Thirdly, the metaphor of a woman in labour turned warrior serves as a sign of Daughter Zion’s empowerment. This vision of restoration in Micah 4:1-7 is followed, in Micah 4:8-13, by a further promise of restoring Daughter Zion to a position of honour and strength, in which the woman-in-labour metaphor plays a central role. Dille (2004:58, 65-66), for instance, demonstrates how both Micah 4:9-10 and Isaiah 42:13-14 use the woman-in-labour metaphor to innovative effect when the woman in labour is identified as a mighty warrior that dramatically changes the original meaning of the woman-in-labour metaphor from its original connotations of helplessness, panic and anguish to one that speaks of deliverance and emphasizes the female subject’s agency, in particular. Dille (2004:64-65) argues:

This passage in Micah has transformed the conventional simile by empowering the birth mother (Zion) as a holy warrior who will defeat her enemies.

No longer an image denoting powerlessness and despair, this metaphor has come to signify the “power to bring forth victory”.

Runions (2001:158) is intrigued by this text as a great example of “gender bending”, in which feminine imagery merges fluidly into masculine imagery when “Zion exhibits a different, more aggressive kind of femininity”, that includes rather masculinized descriptions such as her being a strong tower, having an iron horn, and trampling the nations, in addition to the more traditional feminine descriptions such as giving birth and being saved.

3 For a detailed discussion of the suffering servant traditions specifically in Isaiah and how this relates to the New Testament, see Porter (2016:79-104).

This unexpected transformation of the metaphor from an image of distress to one that envisions a productive outcome is rooted in a call to the people of Zion to “writhe” (חורל) and “bring forth” (גורר), thus to be women in labour who are embracing the labour process in order to bring about deliverance from the enemy (Dille 2004:65). In terms of a hermeneutics of trauma, this focus on giving back agency to the trauma victim and encouraging him/her to take action in a context of inaction can be viewed as a positive development. In this regard, Bietenhard (2012:425) is optimistic about the positive nature of the female warrior language in this text; she argues that

the images of passive victims suffering violence give way to those of an active force that anticipates and helps to give shape to happy fulfilment.

5. INTERROGATING NARRATIVE FRAMEWORKS

While celebrating instances where one perceives signs of healing and evidence of individuals and groups moving beyond traumatic memories to embrace life-giving and empowering memories, one should immediately take heed that all narrative frameworks that form part of the recovery process are not equally healthy. In fact, this last reinterpretation of the woman-in-labour/warrior metaphor in Micah 4-5 can be regarded as problematic for a number of reasons. First, the association of violence with Daughter Zion demolishing the nations and looting their possessions for the honour of God ought to infuriate the contemporary reader. In the current world of an ever-increasing nationalist emphasis by many nations that is rooted in a narrow interest in self-preservation, protecting borders, and building walls (and that might be quite dangerous), this nationalistic inclination surrounding this text is already evident in the opening vision in Micah 4:1-5. This text finds a parallel in Isaiah 2:1-4, but, according to O’Brien (2015:41), it is much less universalistic in nature than its parallel text; it underscores Micah’s preoccupation with making Jerusalem great again.⁴

4 See also Smith-Christopher’s warning that an interpretation of Micah 4 that seeks to make Jerusalem a source of military strength again undermines the argument of Micah 4 as resistance literature, according to which the reference to garden implements in verses 1-5 points to farmers insisting on farming instead of making war. Smith-Christopher (2015:143-145), whose reading assumes an 8th-century context for Micah, views this text as anti-war literature, resisting the military exploits of the centralized government of the day that drained the resources of the colonies in order to build up the capital.

In addition, Garber (2014:355) rightly warned that a typical feature of trauma literature is that it participates in scapegoating individuals and/or groups. He cites the views of Lifton who argues as follows regarding the “tendency of victimized groups to victimize others” in an interview with Caruth (1995:139):

It's deriving one's solution to one's death anxiety from extreme trauma, in this case in an extreme situation, by exploiting a group of people and rendering them victims.

In Micah 4-5, one could also argue that the complex relationship with the nations who are somehow targeted to make Daughter Zion strong again stems from this experience of weakness and shame on the part of a traumatized and violated city and its people.

Secondly, feminist interpreters have raised concerns regarding the gendered nature of the images being used in this text. As elsewhere in the prophetic traditions (for example, Jer. 13:21-22), the reframing of the woman-in-labour metaphor in Micah 4 still occurs in the context of keeping Daughter Zion in a (sexually) vulnerable position that is both rooted in and tends to perpetuate some rather troubling gender scripts. For instance, the language of sexual violence is once more used to capture the sheer vulnerability of the city being invaded by enemy forces. Thus, the reframing of the woman-in-labour metaphor in Micah 4 continues to occur in the context of the persistent victimization of the city personified as a young woman, when a verb denoting sexual violence and coercion (הגיר) is used in Micah 4:11 to describe Daughter Zion's ongoing experience of humiliation and the threat of being violated (O'Brien 2015:49). Moreover, O'Brien (2015:49) raises a further concern with regard to the gendered construction evident in this text when she argues that the hope for the Saviour to be born serves as a further indication that vulnerable Daughter Zion ultimately needs protection by the male deliverer to come.

6. CONCLUSION

This article showed how the woman-in-labour metaphor in Micah 4-5 occurs both in its conventional sense and in a dramatically transformed fashion in terms of its integration with a number of central prophetic traditions, as outlined earlier. Viewed in this way, it appears that the appropriation and re-appropriation of the woman-in-labour metaphor in Micah 4 is a good example of the process of moving beyond traumatic memories by reframing the original memory in such a way as to cause a change of perception that may help the individual reconstitute him-/herself. This

creative reinterpretation of the woman-in-labour metaphor shows signs of the community slowly coming to terms with both their traumatic past and their present that may have posed its own challenges.

However, the particular acts of reframing the woman-in-labour metaphor in Micah 4-5 also serve as a keen reminder that one's narratives in order to recover from trauma may have potentially traumatizing effects for others. In this regard, Alexander's work on cultural trauma and the construction of trauma narratives offers helpful avenues to explore, in order to help one be vigilant of the ways in which manifestations of cultural trauma may contribute to further victimization of other individuals and groups.⁵

Such a critical engagement with prophetic metaphors and the way in which it relates to the complex process of coming to terms with extreme trauma is helpful for contemporary interpreters who are reading these valiant, though at times flawed attempts, in a world that is also often fairly traumatic in nature.

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5 Alexander (2012; 2004) investigates, for instance, the role of trauma narratives following the Holocaust and the way in which these particular manifestations of cultural trauma impact on the current conflict in Israel-Palestine. For a description of cultural trauma and how this theoretical insight may help us better understand the rhetorical function of the Temple, Covenant and Sabbath sermons in the Book of Jeremiah (Jer. 7; 11:1-14; 17:19-27), see Claassens (forthcoming).

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Keywords

Trauma hermeneutics
 Micah 4-5
 Birth metaphors

Trefwoorde

Trauma hermeneutiek
 Miga 4-5
 Geboorte metafore