The Poor in the Book of Psalms and in Yoruba Tradition[1]

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ABSTRACT

It is an indisputable fact that poverty is the greatest known enemy of humankind. The richest one percent of the world's population controls forty percent of the world, and the poorest fifty percent of the population controls a mere one percent of the world wealth. It has also been established that about 68 percent of the Nigerian population live in abject poverty. During the OT period, poor people were present and were well known. This is the reason why there was legislation to protect them. Terminologies for the poor in the OT are both diverse and problematic. The OT writers use most often, the following vocabularies for the poor: אֶבְיוֹן, דָּל, עָנִי, and עָנו. These terms with others are used in the book of Psalms. The purpose of this article is to examine the vocabularies relating to the poor in the book of Psalms and how these vocabularies demonstrate to have various meanings that differ from the traditional meaning already recognised by many scholars. It will also examine the terms used for the poor and poverty in Yoruba religion and culture. The understanding of the polysemiotic nature of these terms will help not only in translating properly the book of Psalms, but also in the construction of a theology of Psalms. Understanding the concept of the poor in the OT and Yoruba tradition can also be regarded as a preparation for Christianity in Africa because of the similarities and differences between the two traditions.

Key words: poverty, Psalms, Yoruba culture, Bible translation, polysemiotic approach

A INTRODUCTION

> Poverty is the greatest of man's known enemies as it has sent many to early graves, left many malnourished, while others perpetually remain in hopelessness and misery.[2]

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[1] This article was originally presented at the Joint Conference of Religions in South Africa, University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa.

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[2] Samuel Odoma, "Security Sector Management: A Pivot to Economic Development of Nigeria," in *Dynamics of Peace Processes* (ed. Isaac O. Albert and Is-haq O.

The richest one percent of the world's population controls forty percent of the world, and the poorest fifty percent of the population controls a mere one percent of the world wealth. According to the World Bank in 1981, by the end of the decade seventy percent of the Sub-Saharan Africa would be living in abject poverty, that is, in a situation in which the basic necessities of human existence are lacking.[3] The 2007/2008 United Nations Development placed Nigeria at the 158th position out of 177 nations listed as far as poverty is concerned.[4] The 2009 United Nations Human Development Report states that 68% of Nigerians are living on less than $1.25 per day while 84.5% are living on less than $2.00 per day.[5] This prediction has actually come to pass in the recently released by Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics report that about seventy million Nigerians are living below the poverty line.[6] This statistical figure showing the percentage of the oppressed masses in Nigeria is alarming. Not surprising also, the most recent National Bureau of Statistics on 14th February, 2012 said that 112.519 million Nigerians, out of the estimated 163 million people living in relative poverty conditions.[7]

The discussion of the basic terminologies in the book of Psalms has centred primarily on the various meanings of the Hebrew words אֶבְיוֹן, דָּל, עָנִי, and עָנוּ. Yet a proper understanding of the poor in the book of Psalms necessitates a good analysis of more terminologies than the traditional ones as above. There is a need for a broader concept of poverty in the Psalter. Establishing the various terms used in the book of Psalms will assist the reader to establish various meanings behind these various terminologies within the field of semantics. The consideration of each term in the broader sense will assist to decipher the multivalent nature of each term. This study seeks to establish the terms con-

Oloyede; Ilorin: University of Ilorin Centre for Peace and Strategic Studies, 2010), 202.

3 The world Bank Report of 1981,*Accelerated development in sub-Saharan Africa : an agenda for action*.Report Nr: 14030. 1 January 1981, [cited 12 July 2012] Online: http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/1981/01/438047/accelerated-development-sub-saharan-africa-agenda-action.

4 Adekunle O. Dada, "The Role of the Church in the Fight Against Poverty," (speech delivered at the 50th Graduation Ceremony of the United Theological Missionary College, Ilorin, Nigeria on 5 September 2008), 1-15. See Caleb O.Ogunkunle, "Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament: An Exegesis of Deuteronomy 15:1-11 in the Nigerian Context," in *The Relevance of Religion in Contemporary Society* (ed. Rasheed A. Raji; Ilorin: The Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions [NASR], 2008), 136-151.

5 Wikipedia contributors, "List of Countries by Percentage of Population Living in Poverty," n. p. [cited 12 April 2012].Online: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_percentage_of_population_living_in_poverty .

6 Dada, "Role of the Church," 1.

7 Ifeanyi Onuba, "112.5 Million Nigerians Live in Poverty," n. p. [cited 12 May 2012].Online: http://www.punchng.com/business/business-economy/112-5-million-nigerians-live-in-poverty-nbs.

tained within the semantic domain of poverty as evident in the Psalms and in Yoruba tradition.

This article will discuss the general Hebrew terms and the treatment of the poor in the OT and Yoruba tradition. This essay will emphasise and establish the fact that there are more Hebrew terms with different kinds of meanings than the normal traditional meanings. It will also emphasise that the Yoruba tradition in Nigeria concerning the poor, although similar, have some differences. The good knowledge of both traditions will serve as a *preparatio* for the gospel in Africa particularly among the Yoruba of Nigeria.

B THE POOR IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

1 Terminologies for the Poor in the Old Testament

Terminologies for the poor in the OT are both diverse and problematic.[8] The OT writers use most often the following vocabularies for the poor: אֶבְיוֹן, דָּל, רש עני, and ענו which means "to be poor, needy, famished." ענו is used the least of all the vocabularies though it is the favourite word in the Wisdom Literature. The word is used about 24 times in the OT especially in the book of Proverbs (14 times). It means poverty in the social sense without any religious nuance.

The poor person is אֶבְיוֹן in that he desires, begs, or is lacking something and awaits it from another person. It is used 60 times in the OT, especially in the book of Psalms (24 times) and the Prophetic books (17 times).

דָּל is an adjective occurring more than 60 times with the consistent meaning of "poor" in most contexts and refers to those who are impoverished in material sense.[9] It is also used to mean the weak and the frail individual or groups of people who are underprivileged in a material, economic sense and are subject to abuse. It is used 48 times in the OT. Of these 48 uses in the OT, most occurrences are in the Prophetic books (13 times), Job and Proverbs (20 times). The word *dal* is used in various ways in the OT. In some places it is used as a term for a psychosomatic constitution of men and animals (Gen 41:19; 2 Sam 13:2), as a social concept in the Book of the Covenant and Priestly Code (Exod 23:1-9; Lev 19:15; Deut1:17), and as a form of the tribal ethos in the Wisdom thought of the early monarchy (Prov 22:22; Pss 41:10; 116:11).[10] The prophet

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[8] Ernest Bammel, "Protochos, Ptocheia, Ptocheuo," *TDNT* 6: 885-915; Albert Gelin, *The Poor of Yahweh* (trans. Mother Kathyryn Sullivan; Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1964).

[9] Stephen Renn, "Poor" in *Expository Dictionary of the Bible Words* (ed. Stephen D. Renn; Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 2006). 742-743.

[10] Bonn Fabry, "דָּל" *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament,* vol. III (ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren; transl. by J. Willis, G. Bromiley and D. Green; Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans, 1978), 210-222.

Amos intensified the social-ethical issue in his book by using *dal*, *ebyon* and *anaw* synonymously (Amos 2:7; 4:1; 5:11; 8:4-6).

The word עָנִי is the word for the poor person who means "the bent over one, the one labouring under a weight, the one who is not in possession of his whole strength and vigor, the humiliated one." It is found about 78 times in the OT and in especially the Psalms (32 times) and in the Prophets (25 times).[11] The word *ani* is another adjective that describes the poor in a literal sense. In several places the word *ani* is used to describe that Yahweh is the one who rescues the poor and takes up their causes (Ps 72:12; Jer 22:16) and condemnation awaits those who oppress them (Isa 3:15; 10:2; 32:17; Amos 8:4).[12]

Ebyon appears to be a synonym for *dal* and *ani* referring to those who are poor or needy. However, in certain contexts it may suggest more than simply a material, or economic poverty (Pss 37:14; 70:5; 82:4; Prov 14:31; Isa 14:30; Jer 22:16; Ezek 18:16; Amos 8:4-6).[13]

Muk is a verb which means "to be" or become, poor in each of the five occurrences of the term (Lev 25:25, 35, 39, 47; 27:8).

Yarash is a common word which primarily means "to inherit" but in several places it also means "to become destitute" or "poor" (Gen 45:11; Prov 20:13; 23:21; 30:9).[14]

Rush is another verb which means "to be poor" and used only in the nominal sense in all its 25 occurrences, indicating a "poor man" or the "poor clan of people" (1 Sam 18:23; 2 Sam 12:3; Prov 13:8; Eccl 5:8).[15]

Milken is a very rare word with only three occurrences meaning a "poor man" (Eccl 4:13; 9:15, 16).[16]

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[11] In the LXX, the OT translated the terms *ebyon, ani, dal,* and *rush* as *ptochos* and *penes.* The term *penes* does not really mean to be poor in the modern sense but also does not mean to be wealthy (*plousior*). He or she is the one who has few possessions and must constantly work for his or her livelihood. However, the *plousios* can live comfortable on his income without working and is, therefore, in Greek parlance, a man of leisure. The *penes* can own a slave and even land. Women were excluded from participation in political activities. The *penes* can participate in all political activities. However, *ptochos* refers to a man who is a destitute, who has no choice but to beg for his daily living from other people. Unlike the *penes, ptochos* has nothing and cannot help himself or herself. This is the word most used in the NT for the poor.

[12] Stephen Renn, "Poor," *Expository Dictionary*,742.

[13] Stephen Renn, "Poor," *Expository Dictionary*,742.

[14] Stephen Renn, "Poor," *Expository Dictionary*, 742.

[15] Stephen Renn, "Poor,"*Expository Dictionary*, 742-743.

[16] Stephen Renn, "Poor," *Expository Dictionary*,743.

All these words mentioned above are normally descriptive of social relationships. The interconnectedness of the life of ancient Israel in terms of religio-cultural wholeness is difficult to separate and therefore the sociological and religious meanings of these terms may also be difficult to separate. These words do not change in their meanings but the application may change.

Beyond the linguistic understanding of the poor, it is important to recognise that the Hebrew mind was concerned with concrete things. Therefore, the actual poor people in the OT are the orphans, widows and aliens. They are protected by the Law Codes. In addition to these three groups, one finds the Levites who are referred to as poor. All the people are disadvantaged people because of their inferior status or because Yahweh was their special inheritance (Deut 18:1-8). These people do not have full legal status in the community. According to the Deuteronomic codes the three groups were excluded from communal gatherings. The orphans and widows do not have an adult male to represent them. The aliens are a distinctive social category which cannot own land. The above demonstrates that the concepts of the poor can possibly be broken down into separate parts, each of which is concerned with a different group of the inferior social working class.[17] The poor are also the landless, social outcasts and the dispossessed.

2 Treatment of the Poor in the Old Testament

Israelite law codes depict much of the flexibility that characterises other ancient law codes. The poor is defined by the law codes mainly in social and economic terms, but with theological reflections. According to the Deuteronomic Codes, "There ought to be no poor man in your midst" (Deut 15:4). This admonition actually implies that poor people were present among the ancient Israelites. The poor should receive profitable work and those who employ them should pay their workers every evening or they would be in danger of incurring the divine wrath of the Lord (Lev 25:35 and Deut 24:15). This implies that the poor workers needed their money every day to survive. They should receive a tithe every third year (Deut 13:28-29; 26:12-15).

As a pledge, the Israelites were forbidden to take articles which his debtor needed for a livelihood (Deut 24:6). If the rich took the poor man's mantle, it was mandatory that it be returned by evening (Exod 22:25-26; Deut 24:10-13). This is because his affliction may be a punishment for Israel's sin (Deut 15:16, 28:12). In other words, the poor is a victim of misfortune. Several stipulations were given to aid the poor. For example the powers of the creditors were limited (Exod 21:7-11; 22:6). Sabbatical years were proclaimed and slaves would be set free and debts would be remitted (Exod 21:2; Deut 15:1-6). The assumptions are that land belongs to Yahweh and that it is a gift to Israel

[17] Thomas Hoyt, Jr., "The Biblical Tradition of the Poor and Martin Luther King, Jr," *JITC* 4/2 (1977): 12-32.

because Yahweh is always the owner. The Holiness Code enacted the Jubilee when liberty would be announced to all Israel's inhabitants and each should return to his own family and automatically receive back his own possessions every fiftieth year. The Holiness Code also provided for the release of land and slaves through a law of redemption. For example, if a brother became poor and was compelled to sell his land or himself, he or his land could be reclaimed if redeemed by a kinsman (Lev 25:25; 48-49). If he had no relatives, he could redeem himself if he became prosperous (Lev 25:27, 49). These laws to protect the poor and the needy are a consequence of the theological interest in keeping the divine order of society intact in Israel.

Of all the prophets, Amos became the most outstanding prophet to denounce those who oppress the poor. He is the most critical of social injustice. His remark can be found in Amos 2:6-8:6. Perhaps the prophet Amos was aware of the law codes and the treatment of the poor.[18] There was a general condemnation of fraudulent commerce and exploitation. The prophet Zephaniah was not silent either about the condemnation of those who oppressed the poor (Zeph 3:11b-13).

In the wisdom Literature poverty was viewed as opposite to wealth. The books of Proverbs and Job emphasise that to be poor is to be miserable, lonely and oppressed (Prov 22:7). Generosity to the poor is a righteous thing to do (Prov 11:23-24; 21:26; 29:7). Those who were poor and needy were identified with the righteous as opposed to the wealthy.

Ani appears about 37 times which means "oppressed, poor, humble, lowly."[19] It is connected with *anaw* which means to "afflict, oppress, humble." The word is generally synonymous with the socially poor, with those without land. *Ani,* although frequently synonymous with *ebyon* and *dal,* is different from both because it connotes some kind of distress or disability.[20]

Dal, low, weak, poor, is used 22 times which actually means "physically weak and used of the position of the lowest social classes of the peasants as poor, needy, unimportant."[21] According to Leonard Coppes, *dal* denotes the

[18] Robert Wafawanaka, "Amos' Attitude toward Poverty: An African Perspective," *AJBS* 19/2 (2003): 97-109.

[19] Collin Brown, "Poor," *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, Vol 2 (ed. Collin Brown; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 820-829.

[20] "*ani,*" *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament* vol. II(ed.R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr, and Bruce K Waltke, Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 683-684.

[21] Collin Brown, "Poor," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology,* 820-829.

lack of material wealth and social strength such as in Prov 10:15 and Amos 2:7. *Dal* is used very infrequently in the spiritual sense or spiritual poverty.[22]

Dal means the "one who is low" and the root occurs mostly in adjectival form. Unlike *ani* it does not emphasise pain or oppression; unlike *ebyon* it does not really emphasise need and unlike *rush*, it represents those who lack rather than the destitute.[23] The meaning of *dal* refers to the lower classes in Israel (2 Kgs 24:14; 25:12). The idea of physical deprivation predominates.

Ebyon, "in want, needy, poor" occurs 11 times. It refers to the person who is seeking alms or a beggar. It is also used generally for the very poor and homeless.

Ras, "in want, poor" occurs 11 times. This term is used purely in a social and economic sense of the poor who is needy and in want.[24]

Another term is *miskemut* which refers to the poor in a social, economic and religious sense. This term is still used by the oriental beggars in the place of *ani*.[25]

There was an excellent organisation of care for the poor both in the synagogue communities which went as far as founding hospices. Priests and Levites without estates, foreigners, widows and orphans are also classified as poor people.

The Qumran community who renounced private ownership of property chose the term "poor" (1QpHab 12:3, 6, 10; 4QpPs 37; 2:10) and frequently used the term "poor and needy" for themselves.[26]

3 Terminologies and the Concept of the Poor in the Book of Psalms

Most of the discussion of the concept of poverty often centres on the two terminologies, עני and ענו.[27] Yet for a proper understanding of Psalms there is a

22 Coppes, "*dal*,"190.
23 Coppes, "*dal,*" 190.
24 Brown, "Poor," 829.
25 Brown, "Poor," 829.
26 Brown," Poor," 820-829.
27 For example there is a considerable debate as to the meaning and interpretation of the two Hebrew words, עני and ענו. Carl Schultz has the following to say concerning these two terms: (1) The Psalmist never sees himself as a member of ענוים unless one first identifies himself with עני; (2) In the Psalmist's suffering and affliction, he grouped himself with עני and only after the deliverance that he actually grouped himself with עני. (3) In other words, עני has to do with affliction but ענוים has to do with victory; (4) עני is always a victim, but ענוים are represented as always thanking God and praising him; (5) ענוים talk about fulfilment of vows and participating in sacrificial meals; (6) The ענוים alone were actually connected with the congregation and its cultic

need to establish the fact that there are other terms beyond the two traditional terms above that can mean poor/poverty. The meaning associated with the concept of poverty appears fluid throughout the Psalms. The truth is that other terms appear in the book of Psalms that actually reflect similar meanings. While in some Psalms poverty seems to mean economic deprivation, other times it is used in a metaphorical sense.[28] In the Psalms, there are also four main Hebrew terms which actually imply poverty: עני, (poor), ענו (poor), ואביון (needy), דל (poor or weak). All these terms, in various degrees, imply the sense of poverty. In fact, most of the time, they are translated as "poor" or "afflicted." These terms are the most frequently used terms for poverty and they have an "overlapping synonymous relationship," with other members in the larger word field.[29]

These terms above are considered as first level terms relating to poverty. In addition to these terms above, there are second level terms that are not usually translated as "poor" or "afflicted" as the first level terms. Yet these second level terms actually represent individual persons who are prone to poverty through social injustice and oppression,[30] they establish the larger group, by way of "semi-contiguous synonymous relationships."[31] The terms that occur at the second level of poverty field are: דל (oppressed), רש (those in want), עשוקים (oppressed), חלכה (helpless), יתום (orphan), אלמנה (widow). The two levels are illustrated below:[32]

act of worship.; (7) עני depicts a forced situation but ענוים reflects "a volitional posture" from forced situation. See Carl Schultz, "*Ani* and *Anav* in Psalms" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1987), 225. Steven Croft, agreed with Schultz even though both words have a common root, ענה. See Steven Croft, *The Identity of the Individual in the Psalms* (JSOTSup 44; Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1987), 51. Dennis Tucker, Jr., sees these two Hebrew words as different words despite the fact that they come from the same root word. See W. Dennis Tucker, Jr., "A Polysemiotic Approach to the Poor in the Psalms," *PRSt* 31/4 (2004): 426.

[28] Peter Mackey, *The Centrality of Metaphors to Biblical Thought* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 48-51.

[29] Tucker, "Polysemiotic Approach," 426-439; John F. A. Sawyer, *Semantics in Biblical Research: New Methods of Defining Hebrew Words for Salvation* (SBT 24; Napeville: Allenson, 1972), 30.

[30] Tucker, "Polysemiotic Approach," 426-439.

[31] Tucker, "Polysemiotic Approach," 426-439. The term "semi-contiguous synonymous relationships" notes the relationship of level two to level one terms, as well as the relationship of level two terms to other level two terms. Some of the terms in level two may be more closely related to level one terms than others. Even though they convey a general sense of poverty, these terms cannot be readily exchanged with others because they are identity specific.

[32] Tucker, "Polysemiotic Approach," 427

Level 1: עני, ענו, דל, אביון

Level 2: רשׁ, דך, עשׁוקים, חלכה, אלמנה, יתום

These two levels suggest that there are ten semantic terms for poverty scattered throughout the book of Psalms. Furthermore, while there are at the first level some terms with an "overlapping synonymous relationship," the second level exhibits "semi-contiguous synonymous relationships." For example the term יתום cannot be used interchangeably with the term דל. While orphans may be oppressed not all oppressed are orphans.[33]

4 Polysemiotic Nature of the Terminologies in Psalms

This means that the various terminologies used for poverty in the book of Psalms have several nuances of meanings. For example, poverty can be economical or spiritual and can also be a way of life. Although all the terms used above denote a sense of poverty, they do not possess the same nuance in their various contexts. One should not make the mistake of what Silva calls an "illegitimate totality transfer,"[34]namely to believe that there is only one meaning for a term. Croft suggests that the terms in the world field of "the poor" often shift or vary in meaning in their various contexts.[35] Polysemy occurs when a word is "said to possess several meanings, the interrelatedness of which is fully grasped, but which are so remote from each other as to make the symbol unserviceable in isolation."[36] The symbol may retain its previous sense and at the same time acquire new meanings.[37] In an attempt to determine the meaning of a symbol, interpreters are always guilty of what Silva calls illegitimate totality transfer.[38] Although all the terms in the present lexical field fall under the sense of "poverty," they do not all possess the same nuance in their context. This means that the polysemiotic nature of each of the terms actually excludes the possibility of assigning one meaning to them. A proper understanding of the context of the text is crucial to handling the polysemiotic nature of words.[39] The context of a word is the prime linguistic unit of the sentence and that may include larger units such as books, or chapters.[40] John Sawyer believes that context means not only a word's situational context and its literary text, but

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33 Tucker, "Polysemiotic Approach," 427.

34 Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and their Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 119-35.

35 Croft, *Identity of the Individual*, 55.

36 Steven Ullman, *The Principles of Semantics* (New York:Basic Blackwell and Mott, 1957), 63.

37 Ullman, *Principles*, 117.

38 Silva, *Biblical Words*, 25.

39 Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 44-49.

40 Sawyer, *Semantics*, 29.

also its immediate linguistic environment.[41] That is why Osborne says that in reality words are arbitrary symbols and only in the context can words acquire their true meanings.[42]

Ani or *ebyon* which literally means "poor" could also mean "humble" or "righteous" according to the context. This is because the word which precedes Ps.18:26-31 has an idea of "righteousness." In vv. 20-24 there is an emphasis on the psalmist's righteousness and the "clean hands." Based on contextual evidence the term *ani* reflects a synonym for righteousness in Ps 18.[43]

Kafang's interpretation of the concept of the poor in the book of Psalms uses a semantic and theological concept, but it appears to be opposite to what Tucker Jr. is saying. According to Kafang he focuses on the poetic structures and meaning of the word "poor" in the book of Psalms.[44] He takes all references to the poor in the Psalms to be metaphors, referring only to the religiously righteous rather than to those of material wants, even though *ani* and *ebyon* would normally have socio-economic references in the other books of the OT, but not in the Psalms.[45] According to Kafang, even a text like Ps 22:2 (which says that the poor [*anivim*] will eat and be satisfied) should be interpreted in a metaphorical and spiritual sense. This attempt to spiritualise all the terminologies of the poor in the Psalms is untenable.

One tends to agree with Tucker Jr. concerning the various meanings of the numerous words for the poor in the book of Psalms.

5 Psalm 70 and the Use of *ani* and *ebyon*

This is an individual complaint Psalm. The Psalm makes use of the two words *ani* and *ebyon*. In addition to the fact that it is almost identical to Ps 40:13-17, the usual translation is "I am poor and needy" but when one examines very closely according to its context, it could be synonymous to "affliction" rather than "poor and needy." This is because in the context the enemies sought to kill him (3), deride him, and mock him with words and action of shame (v. 4). There is an urgent plea to Yahweh by using the imperative חוּשׁ immediately to rescue him from the affliction. To understand the statement of *ani* and *ebyon* in

41 Sawyer, *Semantics*, 29.

42 Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1991), 75.

43 Tucker, "Polysemiotic Aproach," 431.

44 Zamani Buki Kafang, "A Semantic and Theological Investigation of the Concept of 'Poor' in the Psalms," (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1993); Zamani Buki Kafang, *The Book of Psalms: An Introduction to Their Poetry* (Kaduna: Baraka Press, 2002).

45 Kafang,"Semantic and Theological Investigation," 256.

v. 5 to mean a general need or to see it as synonymous with righteousness or some kind of pietistic posture is to miss the mark.[46]

The Hebrew term *ani* occurs thirty seven times in the Psalter.[47] The word should not be translated as having one meaning. *Ani* meaning "afflicted" occurs 13 times, *ani* meaning "destitute" occurs 10 times (e.g. 12:6); *ani* meaning "in need" occurs 10 times (eg. 25:16, 18); *ani* meaning "righteousness" occurs 4 times (e.g. 14:16; 18:28). These various uses of *ani* suggest that it is mostly used to represent economic poverty or physical oppression in a literal sense. Such a meaning occurs in half of its appearances.

The Hebrew term *anaw*, or its plural form *anayim*, appears 12 times in the Psalter. Since *anaw* is used to depict a level of piety, it should also be translated as "righteousness" (e.g. Pss 76, 147 and 149). *Anayim,* the plural form, emphasises communal restoration, national victory and deliverance. In Pss 25,34 and 69 therefore *anaw* means "righteousness." But those passages where *anaw* is mentioned in connection with *anayim,* it means "affliction" or "destitute." While the meaning "afflicted" only occurs once, that of "destitute" occurs three times. It also appears three times to mean righteousness and five times to mean literally "just to the poor."

Dal, the third term in the world field of poverty has a total of five occurrences in the Psalter (41:2; 72:13; 82:3; and 11:13). *Dal* maintains the most consistent meaning in its usage to mean "destitute." The word *dal* appears to have its origin in the Akkadian root, *dullum* which means "trouble, oppression, distress."[48]

Ebyon and its related form appear 24 times in the Psalter. *Ebyon* appears with *dal* three times to mean "physical need." *Ani* in conjunction with *ebiyon* occurs eight times to mean "truly poor" or "needy poor," especially when it occurs with *ebiyon*.

Ebyon occurs four times to mean "afflicted," 15 times to mean "destitute," and four times to mean "in need." It never occurs in the meaning of "righteousness."

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[46] Tucker, "Polysemiotic Aproach," 431

[47] Tucker, "Polysemiotic Aproach," 432

[48] Fabry, "דָּל," 210. *Dullu* also appears in some Middle Babylonian Literature as medicinal treatment. At Ugarit, the identification of the root constitutes some problems. The root *dll* is found about 18 times to mean "to plunder, steal, rob" which also mean to "make poor, oppress, enslave." Bonn Fabry, "דָּל," 210.The occurrences of *dll* in Phoenician-Punic are no less disputed. It seems *dl* appears with the meaning "little, small."

The abovementioned four terms so far represent level one. Let us now look at the terms (רשׁ, דך, עשׁוקים, חלכה, אלמנה, and יתום) associated with level two.

Dak appears only three times from the root דך, which means to "crush" or "pulverise." The usage means "affliction" in two places (Pss 9:10 and Pss 10:18). In one other instance, Ps 74:21, it means "destitute."

The term *asuqim* appears only twice, namely in Pss 103:6 and 146:7. The root is עשׁק, which means to "oppress" or "wrong" someone. Since the usage refers to those who are hungry, prisoners, the blind, the humble, the aliens, the orphan and the widows, it should therefore mean "destitute."

The Hebrew term *rush* which is derived from the root רשׁ, means to "be in want" and appears only in Ps 82:3 once. According to the context of Ps 82, it means "destitute" because it is talking about economic deprivation.

The Hebrew term *halakah* literally means "helpless" and it appears only in one Psalm, that is, in Ps 10:8, 10 and 14. This term appears only in the Psalter and should mean "affliction," that is, those who are helpless.

Alamona (אלמנה) and (יתום) are often used in reference to widows and orphans in the Psalm. They belong to similar social status. *Alamona* appears five times (68:6; 78:64; 94:6; 109:9; 146:9). Although they do not mean poverty, their social status suggests the threat of social ostracism and economic deprivation. These two terms, *alamona* and *yatum* have eight occurrences and should mean "destitute."

6 The Psalms and the Poor

In the Law Codes and the Prophets, the poor one in Israel was viewed as defenseless. Therefore, they are in need of Yahweh's protection. They needed protection not only from Yahweh but also from kings and the most fortunate ones. According to the book of Psalms somebody must intercede for them. The king was considered as a man whose responsibility to Israel was to execute righteousness and justice (Pss 18:20, 24; 72:1-2, 7; 89:14, 16) and includes the protection of the defenseless.[49] The ANE societies, before the establishment of the monarchy, had already propagated the concept of royal responsibility toward the weak and the poor ones.[50] Possibly Israel was influenced by them.

[49] Walter Houston, "The King's Preferential Option for the Poor: Rhetoric, Ideology and Ethics in Psalm 72," *BibInt* 7/4 (1999): 342-364.

[50] F. Charles Fensham, "Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature," *JNES* 21/2 (1962):129-139. The ideal of the righteous king capable of just judgment, is well attested in Israel (Ps 72; 2 Sam15:6; 1 Kgs 3:16-28) and other contemporary Near Eastern cultures. It should therefore not be a surprising thing that the king had such prominent role in intervention for the poor and

Yahweh is described as a refuge for the oppressed (Pss 9:9; 12:5; 14:66), a defender for the poor and the unfortunate (Pss 82:1-4; 109:31; 140:12), a deliverer of the afflicted (Pss 25:16-17; 34:6; 35:10; 70:5; 40:17; 107:41; 109:21-22); and a provider for the needy (Pss 68:10;145:13-16;147:3). He is very sensitive to the plight of the poor (Pss 9:12; 69:33; 146:8-9) and vindicates them (Pss 113:7-8). He helps the poor not because they are righteous or because they deserve such help.[51] It is their cause that is just and right.

The Psalms reflect not only the worship of the economically deprived but also the politically oppressed and religiously faithful. Yahweh is pictured as concerned for the righteous (Pss 14:5-6; 34:15-22; 37:12, 14; 69:28-30; 140:12-13; 146:7-8), and the faithful saints (Pss 12:15; 18:25-27; 34:9; 132:15-16; 149:105). In real sense the poor are righteous in the Psalms because they are not proud and their opponents are the ungodly and oppressors. The wicked is characterised as proud, greedy, prosperous, presumptuous, and oppressive, and wealthy and powerful as well (Pss 10:3-11; 37:14-15; 94:1-7: 109:16-19).

B COMPARISON OF THE POOR IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND IN YORUBA TRADITION

1 Terminologies for the Poor/Poverty in Yoruba Tradition

While the main Hebrew terminologies for poor in the OT are עני, ענו, דל, and אביון at level 1 and דך, רשׁ, דך, עשׁוקים, חלכה, אלמנה, and יתום at level 2, the Yoruba terminologies are *osi* (poverty), *otosi* (the one who is poor), *talaka* (the one who is poor), *alaini* (the one who does not have, or the needy), *iponju* or *oluponju* (the affliction or the one afflicted), and *iwofa* (those who give themselves to a rich person to pay debts). *Iwofa* is what is called voluntary slavery in the OT. However, among the Yorubas *iwofas* are not treated as slaves. *Atoroje* (beggars), *opo* (widows), *omo alainiya* (motherless child), and w*ere* (lunatic), can be considered as part of the various terms for the poor in Yoruba tradition.

needy Richard W. Neville, "The Relevance of Creation and Righteousness to Intervention for the Poor and Needy in the Old Testament," *TynBul* 52/2 (2002): 307-310.

[51] Arnold A. Anderson, *Psalm 73-150* (NCBC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1972), 591-595. Richard Clifford, *Psalms 73-150* (AOTC; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 63-67.J. Clinton McCann, Jr., agrees with John Crossan that Ps 82 is "the single most important text in the entire Christian Bible." See J. Clinton McCann, Jr., "The Single Most Important Text in the Entire Bible: Toward a Theology of the Psalms," in *Soundings in the Theology of Psalms* (ed. Rolf A. Jacobson; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2011), 63-75; Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), 291-293.

Since I have explained the Hebrew terminologies in the above discussion there will be no need to repeat them. Only the Yoruba terminologies for the poor will be discussed.

The word *osi* literally means poverty while *otosi* is a combination of the pronoun "o" referring to a person and the "t" with *osi* forming one word, *otosi* to mean the "one who is poor." This word *otosi* and *talaka* can mean a person who is in abject poverty and almost without hope except by a miracle of *Olodumare*. The poverty is his destiny or *ayanmo*. It is not unusual among the Yoruba people to insult people by saying *olosi*. One of the greatest insults to another person is to be called *olosi*. What appears to be the equivalence in Hebrew is *ani*, and *anu*. However, among the Yoruba the words *otosi* and *talaka* are sometimes used to mean any kind of poverty in general, despite their specific meaning.

The words *osi* and *talaka* are tied to a specific Yoruba legend called *ayanmo* (destiny) which explains the reason why people are perpetually poor. Like the OT concept of the reason for poverty, the Yoruba tradition believes that some people are poor as a result of destiny from *Olodumare* – the Supreme Being. However, the story of how *Olodumare* does it is different from that of the OT.

Before the conception or before every child is born, he/she has to travel on a journey from heaven to the earth. On the road *Olodumare* places two small calabashes (covered dishes) before each person. One is always put on the right hand and the other on the left. The one on the left is full of evil (*buburu*), suffering (*iya*) and poverty *(osi*). The one on the right is full of wealth, wellbeing, riches, and success. The contents of the two calabashes are both covered and concealed. If the person happens to choose the one on the left hand, he/she is bound to be poor in his/her life on earth. If a man marries a woman who happened to choose the calabash on the left or a woman marries a man who chose the calabash on the left, they would never be successful in life. His or her life would be full of suffering. This is one of the differences in the OT and the Yoruba understanding of poor.

The word *alaini* generally means the one who is in need. This is the one who lacks money, clothes, and food. It may refer generally to a beggar. What appears to be the equivalent in the OT is *ebyon* and *dal. Alaini* can be the one who is jobless or the sick or weak one. This need may not be permanent. The situation can change in the future.

In both the OT and in the Yoruba tradition and culture, Yahweh/*Olodumare* is the primary person who takes care of the poor (Ps 14:6). That is why one of the Yoruba proverbs says, *Malu ti koni iru, Olorun ni nle esinsin fun* – that is, (the cow that does not have a tail, God is the one who drives away flies for that cow).

Iwofa among the Yoruba people is a person who borrows money from a rich person and voluntarily agrees to work for that person for a number of months or years until the amount of work equivalent to the amount of money is done. This is the equivalence of what is called voluntary slavery in the OT. The Yoruba people do not regard such a person a slave as in the OT. The person is *iwofa*. The term for a slave is *eru*. The person leaves as soon as he/she completes the work that amounts to the amount of money he/she borrowed. Unlike the OT, there is no jubilee year for freedom unless someone pays for the person. In the Yoruba tradition the person remains there until the money is paid. The evidence that *iwofa* is not a slave is in the Yoruba saying, *Bi a logun eru, bi a logbon iwofa, omo eni ni omo eni* – "If a man has twenty slaves, if a man has thirty *iwofa*, his child is always his child."[52]

Another important word for the poor is *opo* which means a widow. There are basic similarities and differences. Both OT and Yoruba widows are remarried after a deceased husband within the deceased husband's family. The widows are treated like property that have no actual independent status and cannot inherit their husband's property. In both situations whoever marries the widow inherits the diseased husband's property.

However, the primary purpose of each marriage differs. For the OT the primary purpose is for procreation while that of the Yoruba is primarily for welfare and protection for the *opo*.

Another important group of people classified as poor is *omo alainiya,* called "ophans." *Omo alainiya* literally is a descriptive name, the child without mother. Usually care of the *omo alainiya* is in the hand of relatives as in the OT.

According to the Yoruba tradition, someone can also be poor as a result of a curse by the ancestors or parents. Such a person will toil all his/her life and never be successful. This is not the case in the OT. According to the Yoruba tradition poverty can be as a result of *ayanmo* (destiny) which the poor person has chosen when coming to the earth, but it is not so in the OT.

While in the book of Psalms, lunatics are not regarded as poor people, it is believed that some lunatics or homeless people wandering around are actually spirits of the ancestors or spirits from the forest to see who will take care of them by giving gifts or food. *Olodumare* may also send an angel (angeli) in the form of a lunatic or destitute to test who will take care of them or who will be kind to them. Whoever takes care of them would receive blessing, riches and success. However, in the OT poor people or wanderers are not regarded as spirits of ancestors.

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[52] Isaac O. Delano, *Owe L'esin Oro: Yoruba Proverbs* (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1979), 56.

In the Yoruba culture and religion it is mandatory to take care of the poor and destitute among them. It is a requirement for favour from *Olodumare* for good life. Such is also required in the OT. Although strangers are not regarded as poor people, it is mandatory to take care of them because they may be the spirit of ancestors or angels wandering around according to the Yoruba tradition. That is the reason why strangers are well respected among the Yoruba people of Nigeria. However, strangers are not regarded as the spirits of the ancestors in the OT.

2 Selected Translation of the Vocabularies for the Poor in the Yoruba Bible

Unfortunately, the Yoruba Bible translated *ani* with only one meaning, *talaka.* In Ps 70:5 the phrase "I am poor and needy" is translated in Yoruba Bible "*talaka atialainiiniemi*." In other words, the term *ani* is translated *talaka* and *ebyon* as *alaini*. According to the content of the passage it should have been translated *oluponju* (affliction), that is, *oluponjuniemi* according to my comment above. Likewise in 14:6 *ani* should have been translated *olododo* (righteous) instead of *talaka* in the Yoruba Bible.

As discussed above *ani* should be translated in different ways according to the content of the passage to mean *oluponju* and *olododo*. *Ani* can also be translated to mean destitute – *talaka*. The word *anaw* in Pss 147:7 should be righteousness (*ododo*) and in 25:16 affliction (*iponju*). In 41:1 *dal* means destitute, that is *talaka* instead of *alaini.* But unfortunately it was translated with *alaini.* In 72*:13 dal* means destitute (*talaka*) and not *alaini. Ebyon* can mean afflicted and destitute and *alaini*. In Pss103:6 and 146:7 *asuqim* is supposed to mean *talaka* – destitute instead of *enitianilara*, that is, affliction. *Rush* also means *talaka* and not *alaini* or *oluponju* in 82:3 as it is translated in Yoruba Bible. The term *halakah* which literally means "helpless" should have been translated *iponju*, that is "affliction" instead of *talaka.* The translation of *yatum* and *alamona* are well translated as *opo* and *alainibaba*.

3 CONCLUSION

What I have done is to extend the discussion of the terms used in the book of Psalms to include the larger world field of poverty. It will enable the reader to discover more expansive meanings of poverty or concepts of the poor. This includes the use of ten terminologies: *ani, anu, ebiyon, dal, dak, asukim, rush, helaka, alamona and yatum*. While they do not all share overlapping synonymous relationships, they do exhibit similar meanings to justify their inclusion in the world field of poverty.[53]

[53] Tucker, "Polysemiotic Approach," 426-439.

This essay did not only discuss the traditional Hebrew terms in the Psalms, it discussed the fact that every Hebrew term has a potential for a variety of meanings. These various meanings are "affliction," "destitute," "in need," "righteousness." In total there are 99 occurrences of the terms for the world field of poverty in the Psalter. Out of these over half of the occurrences appear to mean "destitute," 23 occurrences means "affliction," 14 "in need," 7 "righteousness," and 5 are general metaphors. "Destitute" seems to be the dominant nuance of terms from the word field of poverty.[54] The majority of the texts do not represent a class of pious individuals, but rather individuals who are economically poor and have been relegated to the margin. They are helpless because they lack wealth or power. They live with a constant threat of oppression, abuse and injustice.

Since many scholars have not considered the polysemiotic use of the various terms in the book of Psalms, the recognition of the polysemiotic nature of the above terms within the word field of poverty helps in the construction of the theology of Psalms.

A close examination of the translation of the Yoruba Bible shows that the translation to Yoruba language appears unfortunate because it follows the same pattern of English translation. The polysemiotic nature of the Yoruba vocabularies for the poor is taken into consideration in the translation as demonstrated above.

As can be seen in the discussion above there are some similarities and differences between the Yoruba tradition and the OT. Unlike the OT, the Yoruba culture and religion do not consider strangers as poor people. Yoruba people consider poverty as a choice which became the destiny of the one who made that choice. Both the OT and Yoruba traditions teach people to be godly to other people, and avoid wickedness especially to the poor and destitute because the Psalmist sees God as the defender of the fatherless, and widows (Pss 10:16-18; 40:17; 68:5), protector of the poor (Ps 12:5), rescuer of the poor (Pss35:10; 72:4, 12-14), provider for the poor (Pss 68:10; 146:7) and refuge for the poor (Ps 14:6).

These are to be taken seriously for every particular tradition for the gospel to be authentically African. The Yoruba tradition about poverty can be regarded as a *preparatio* for Christianity in Africa.

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[54] Tucker, "Polysemiotic Approach," 426-439..

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