# Lament and the Construction of Identity in the Psalms

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**Introduction**

* How did the psalms of lament shape the self-understanding of the Israelites who used them in worship?
* De Vito: ancient constructions of personal identity are based on social roles and relationships.

**Cottrill**

* *Language, Power, and Identity in the Lament Psalms of the Individual* (LHBOTS 493; London: T&T Clark, 2008).
* Narrative identity, expressed dialogically.
* Shame/honour framework gives rise to competing narratives of social diminishment and dominance/aggression.
* Critical of laments as ‘dangerous in their desire to enlist God as a personal champion in order to relieve suffering by imposing suffering.’

**Questioning Cottrill**

* Is God’s ‘violence’ the same as human violence? What is the eschatological perspective?
* Surrendering Retribution (Firth)
* Openness of figurative language.
* Shaping emotive responses or expressing them?
* Expressive function vs. ideological communication.
* ‘obscures the humanity of the one he prays against’?

**Buber**

* No ‘I’ other than as part of ‘I-Thou’ or ‘I-It’. ‘Man becomes an I through a You’
* Personal images for God.
* Psalmist’s experience of the dehumanizing behaviour of ‘enemies’.
* Does the psalmist similarly objectify the enemies, or allow them to remain as people to relate to?
* Relating to the absolute ‘Thou’ of God necessarily embraces and envelops all things.

**Social Setting**

* Private community settings (Gerstenberger).
* Known enemies in an ongoing community context – necessary for the shame/honour framework to have any significance.
* Ongoing relationship, albeit impaired, which demands authenticity.
* Relating to a threatening Thou is vulnerable, thus shaping the narrative that shapes identity.

**Conclusions**

* Genuine relationship with ‘enemies’ – they are not dehumanized.
* Dominance of relationship with God and call for justice is not equivalent to human violence.

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