

Land: An Empowerment Asset for Africa

The Human Factor Perspective



Edited by
Claude G. Mararike

© C. G. Mararike, 2014

ISBN 978-1-77920-110-2

First published in 2014 by
University of Zimbabwe Publications
P. O. Box MP 203
Mount Pleasant
Harare
Zimbabwe

Typeset by D. Masala, University of Zimbabwe Publications

Printed by **Printforce Productions**

Contents

About the Contributors	vi
Acknowledgements	viii
Introduction	ix
<i>Claude G. Mararike</i>	

Part One

Land Ownership, Control and Utilisation in Relation to the Human Factor

Chapter One

Land and the Human Factor: Access, Control, Ownership and Utilisation	2
<i>Claude G. Mararike</i>	

Chapter Two

History of Land Disempowerment in Africa	12
<i>Kenneth D. Manungo</i>	

Chapter Three

Land and the Changing Fortunes of Madzishe in Zimbabwe	22
<i>Claude G. Mararike</i>	

Chapter Four

Reflections on the Problems of Land-ownership and the Challenges of Title Deed Acquisition in Africa	30
<i>Senyo Adjibolosoo</i>	

Chapter Five

The Land as an Inalienable Asset: Lessons from 1 Kings 21: 1-29	59
<i>Obvious Vengeyi</i>	

Part Two

The Fast-track Land Reform Programme

Chapter Six

The Ethics behind the Fast-track Land Reform Programme in Zimbabwe	82
<i>Fainos Mangena</i>	

Chapter Five

Land as an Inalienable Asset: Lessons from 1 Kings 21: 1-29

Obvious Vengeyi

Introduction

This chapter offers a biblical basis for the indigenous African philosophy that regards land as an inalienable asset. It argues that to regard land as solely an economic asset is somehow to trivialise it. Land is more than an economic entity. From a Human Factor perspective, it is inseparably connected to the spirituality, identity, history and wellbeing of a people. The land is, therefore, an inheritance hence an entitlement. From an indigenous African perspective, the loss of land is loss of everything that defines an African. The same conception guided the Israelites prior to the introduction of foreign philosophies that reduced land to an economic asset from the ninth century BCE. The struggle between King Ahab and Naboth in 1 Kings 21:1-29 revealed the disharmony that was created thereafter. And the vehemence with which Naboth, a peasant, resisted King Ahab's request to exchange or buy his ancestral land showed that the peasants refused to recognise both the foreign ideology and its local agents. Naboth and the peasants were aware of their Human Factor content and were prepared to die in defence of their birthright; as did Naboth. The chapter concludes that Naboth and his constituency that involves prophet Elijah and the peasants provide a model of inspiration to the Africans today. On the other hand, King Ahab and Jezebel are models of African leaders, institutions and policies that Africans must resist.

Background

1 Kings 21:1-16 carries a story depicting the cruelty of King Ahab of Israel who plotted the murder of one of his subjects, Naboth, in order to confiscate his land. Shortly after the murder of Naboth, Prophet Elijah appeared before Ahab to pronounce the punishment from God on Ahab and his household (1 Kings 21:17-29). The story says very little to constitute enough background to clearly understand this particularly awful event. Evidently, there is usually a tendency among interpreters to discuss the text as depicting the conflict between King Ahab and Naboth as individuals.

Yet a closer look shows that the conflict is bigger and involves more players than the two mentioned. It is a microcosm of the macrocosm. The chapter proposes that for a clear understanding of the story, one needs to identify key players in the story. And these are King Ahab and Jezebel, his wife, Naboth and prophet Elijah. In terms of social status and ideological persuasions of the key players, one would notice that King Ahab and wife are on one side, while Naboth and Elijah are on another. In other words, there are two camps here that are battling. Ahab and Jezebel are representatives of a particular constituency in Israel. The same is true of Naboth and Elijah.

To properly situate the attitudes, ideological persuasions and actions of the camps, the chapter recognises the importance of the background to the development of the two camps. Therefore, the chapter discusses 1 Kings 21:1-29 in light of important events before and after this incident. It emerged that the two camps manifested themselves in Israel shortly after the establishment of the monarchy. Thus, although the immediate causes of the conflict between Naboth and Ahab is the exploitative measures of the Omride dynasty (Omri and Ahab), especially that Ahab wanted to buy Naboth's vineyard, the broader context of the conflict was the general resentment among the peasantry towards the monarchy from the time of its inception in Israel. It is with this in mind that the chapter gives a brief background to the rise of the monarchy as a necessary step towards understanding the immediate context of the clash between Ahab and Naboth. Until one establishes the nature of the conflict from the background of Israel of the 9th century BCE, it is possible to regard Ahab as quite a reasonable king and Naboth as an unreasonable fellow who refused a lucrative offer from the king.

The Broader Context to the Naboth-Ahab Conflict

Old Testament scholars agree that ancient Israel developed into a monarchy from around 1 000 BCE with the reign of David, after successfully repelling the threat of the imperial Philistines in the highlands owing to his military skills (Flanagan, 1981:47-73; Frick, 1985:51-97; Hauer, 1986:3-15; Rogerson, 1986:17-26; Gottwald, 1978:37-52). It should be stressed, however, from the start, that the peasant populations who were the majority had never dreamt of themselves having a monarchy. It seems there are some few leaders who conceived the idea as a political strategy to ward off military threats posed by the Philistines (1 Sam 8: 5).

From the time Israel was constituted in the 13th century BCE, the Israelites considered themselves different from the rest of the ancient Near Eastern

nations in that they were led by Yahweh, and not a human king. This was because they came about through a peasant revolution they believed to have been led by Yahweh against the city-state oppressors. The aim of the peasant revolution was to create a society serving the interests of peasants. According to Gottwald (1974: 223-255; 1975: 89-100; 1976: 145-154; 1978: 37-52; 1979) the leading proponent of the revolutionary origins of Israel, the peasants, turned the society up-side-down; turning outlawry into inlawry. In other words, the revolution prioritised the worldview of peasants that was previously frowned upon by the city-state oppressors, and dismantled all the policies of the previous regime. That means political, economic, social, cultural and religious programmes designed were informed by the worldview of the peasants. As such, this revolution established peasant-run institutions in Israel. The tribal leaders, chiefs or council of elders, were responsible for the administration of the whole society, dealing with all matters: political, social, economic and religious (Exod. 12:3, 21; Num. 8:7; 14:1-4; 31:26, 28, 43; Josh. 22:13). It can be claimed that all the institutions served the interests of the majority peasants.

The introduction of the monarchy, however, brought with it a radically different system. Contrary to the established revolutionary tradition, it could serve only the interests of the elite few. In fact, all revolutionary institutions, such as priesthood, prophecy and judiciary, were supposed to serve the interests of the ruling class (Vengeyi, 2013:79-80,86). This was the reason why the monarchy was such a detestable institution among the peasants as captured in some of the traditions of Israel. While the anti-monarchic sentiments of the peasants are generally suppressed by the writers and presented as views of the few (Samuel 1 Sam 8: 6-22), it seems the sentiments were popular. The fact that Yahweh is presented in the narrative as having told Samuel to advise the leaders of Israel against establishing the monarchy shows that these were the views of the majority. The fable of Jotham also carries this anti-monarchic sentiment (Judges 9:8-15). For the majority peasants, the establishment of the monarchy was tantamount to a rejection of Yahweh and it was synonymous with 'returning to Egypt', for it brought with it enormous religious, cultural, political and socio-economic burdens. The kings began to oppress and exploit peasants as described in 1 Samuel 8:11-18 and 1 Kings 21:1-16. In other words, the monarchy reintroduced an oppressive system that the peasant revolution had previously dismantled (cf. Gottwald, 1986:77-106; 1993:139-164; 1993:3-22).

The oppression of the peasants by kings in Israel needs to be understood in proper context. The monarchy in all the surrounding states was

exploitative. It could not function without exploitation of human and natural resources. It being a foreign institution in Israel required foreign ideology for it to function. That means, the kings of Israel had to govern the Israelites using foreign political, social, economic worldviews, ideology, law and assumptions. In that way, the monarchy was unable to serve the interests of the common people who stuck to their indigenous systems. That was the problem. The situation would have been better had the kings of Israel transformed and adapted the monarchy to serve Israelite peasant aspirations. Instead, the ruling elite quickly discarded their own values, traditions and worldviews for foreign ones. They wanted to speedily become like other nations (Chirichigno, 1993: 111; Andreasen, 1983: 179-194; Gottwald, 1979: 143; Tadmor, 1968: 46-68; Talmon, 1986: 21-25). On the other hand, the peasants, the tribal elders, as well as related sacral institutions (such as prophets), exerted enormous political and constitutional pressure upon the king (cf. 1 Sam 8:1-22; 10:25; 1 Kings 12:1-15; 2 Kings 23:1-3). Their quest was to protect the tribal and egalitarian structure that defined Israel as unique from the rest of the societies around them. This explains the political, social, cultural and economic conflicts that quickly characterised various key institutions of Israel. This is the nature of the conflict between Naboth and Ahab as will be discovered shortly.

Throughout the days of Solomon as king, the monarchy failed to serve the majority peasants. Their economic position deteriorated greatly as they lost their means of production, the land, to the marauding greedy rich few. According to Chirichigno (1993), it is likely that the rich land-owning elite, many of whom were connected to the palace, were able to improve their economic position through the acquisition of land that was lost on account of debt. This scenario of exploitation of the peasants by the ruling elite spilled into later periods. It was ultimately the reason why the Northerners rebelled against the son of Solomon, Rehoboam, after he refused to lighten the burdens of forced labour and heavy taxation (1 Kings 12). It must be remembered, however, that this exploitative architecture was inherited by Rehoboam from David and Solomon. Solomon, for instance, divided the Northerners into 12 districts for the purpose of forced labour and taxation (1 Kings 4:7-19; 5:13-15). The circumstances of the poor peasants never improved throughout the whole monarchic era. In the North, during the Omride Dynasty, for example, there was marked increase in the oppression of the peasants by the ruling elite. This was the immediate background to the conflict between Naboth and Ahab that is captured in 1 Kings 21:1-16.

Immediate Background to the Naboth-Ahab Conflict

The reign of Omri (876-869 BCE) and that of his successor, Ahab, his son (869-850 BCE), in Israel and the reign of Jehoshaphat (873-849 BCE) in Judah, saw massive accumulation of wealth in both kingdoms. This was largely because the two sister states were able to secure important trade routes which resulted in economic prosperity (Elat, 1979: 527-46). In Israel, economic prosperity was possible, particularly due to Omri's foreign policies. First, Omri realised that the rivalry between the sister kingdoms of Judah and Israel was detrimental to the strength and prestige of both kingdoms. He, therefore, made calculated overtures of peace to King Asa of Judah, and eventually there was established between them a state of mutual friendship and esteem. To seal the friendship between the two nations, Omri gave his daughter, Athaliah, in marriage to Asa's son, Jehoshaphat (2 Kings 8:26; 2 Chron. 22:2) (Chabad.org, 2014). Naturally, the peace brought about huge economic advantages to the two states. Second, Omri also realised that without peace with Syria, Israel would not achieve any economic gains, for it would remain in a state of war. As a result, he made peace with Syria and gave the Syrians some significant portion of land (Chabad.org, 2014). Because Israel was on friendly terms with her immediate neighbours, she was guaranteed huge economic gains, hence prosperity was inevitable.

Third, and the most important policy of Omri, was the reestablishment of good relations with Sidon, the land of the Phoenicians. He was aware that the same friendship had helped to increase the wealth and power of King David and King Solomon during their reigns. As he had done with Judah, Omri again affirmed the political alliance by a marriage. In this case, his son Ahab married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, the King of Phoenicia (1 Kings 16:31). Phoenicia, being a great and well-established nation, the treaty with it would indirectly open for Israel an opportunity to tap into Phoenicia's advanced and well established economic system. These factors explain the economic boom that Israel experienced. This period of prosperity is highlighted by an extensive building programme in Israel (1 Kings 16:24). However, the economic prosperity came about at the expense of massive exploitation of the peasants. The building programme required the citizens, peasants that is, to serve in *corvées* almost as they were required under the Davidic house (1 Kings 5:13). What is clear is that peasants in ancient Israel had a precarious existence; they largely existed at the mercy of the high class who subjected them to various forms of exploitation (Lang, 1982:47-63). Therefore, for the peasants, the so called economic boom of this time was a myth. While they were daily recruited by the ruling elite to contribute to this economic

growth, they did not have access to the proceeds of their toil. The wealth never trickled down to them. It remained in the top echelons of the society.

Also, for the peasants, the close association between the two countries exerted a very bad influence upon the political, religious and cultural life of Israel. For instance, under the growing influence of the Phoenicians, the degeneracy of the royal house of Omri became worse, and it reached its height under the rule of his son Ahab and the queen Jezebel as depicted in 1 Kings 16-21 (Chabad.org, 2014). The marriage between Ahab and Jezebel opened floodgates to political, social and economic ideologies, religions and cultures from Phoenicia. The Israelite elite began to regard themselves as part of the 'global citizens' who did not have a distinct or particular identity. They began to regard their indigenous traditions as archaic.

Jezebel: The Ambassador of Phoenicia

Today we may wonder how it was possible that a king would be influenced by his foreign wife to abandon his own traditions. However, what we need to realise is that marriages were part of the diplomatic system. This is why kings always married daughters of kings of surrounding nations. The wives were sort of ambassadors of their own countries. In that regard, a wife who came from a great nation had much influence on the mind of the king, hence on the day-to-day affairs of the state. This is what Jezebel was. She was an ambassador of Phoenicia in Israel. She represented the interests of Phoenicia and not of the Israelites. She intended to transform Israel to resemble Phoenicia in terms of everything: laws, architecture, economic, political, cultural and religious outlook. To achieve this aim, Jezebel set out to conquer the minds of the people through the introduction of a new religion whose demands were diametrically opposed to their traditional religion. She was aware that once the mind is conquered, everything else follows: their land, resources and culture.

Jezebel nearly extinguished Yahwism in Israel. She literally sponsored the killing of large numbers of the prophets of Yahweh (1 Kings 18:4). All the zealous followers of Yahweh were rounded up and killed. Only a few survived the onslaught after being hidden in a cave by Obadiah (1 Kings 18:4). By these actions, Jezebel became the biggest threat to Yahwism since its founding. She promoted her religion, Baalism. She brought 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Ashera (1 Kings 18:19) to Israel. These were the gods worshipped in Phoenicia by her parents. Actually, her father's name was Ethbaal, meaning worshipper of Baal. The text is clear that these prophets ate at Jezebel's table, suggesting that they were

in the service of Jezebel. Their main task was not ministering to Jezebel and maybe a few Phoenician experts (in economy, education, law, culture) who were operating in Israel but to convert Israelites to Baal. Threatened by resistance and competition, it is possible that they were the ones who instigated and participated in killing prophets of Yahweh.

The activities of these prophets of Baal and Ashera should be looked at in the same light as the presence in Israel of Phoenician experts of law, education, commerce and business. After all, they were devotees of the same national religion, Baalism. And Baal was central to the economic, political and social wellbeing of their nation. Therefore, all served the economic interests of Phoenicia, their homeland and not Israel; of Baal and not of Yahweh. For instance, on a legal front, the significant legal reforms that Omri and Ahab instituted had Phoenician outlook. Omri replaced the customary law with royal appointed judges in Israel. This means judges were, first and foremost, appointed to serve the interests of the Israelite rulers. They, in turn, had become puppets of the Phoenician government through Jezebel. In other words, royal appointed judges in Israel were trained in Phoenician law until they graduated, ready to serve the interests of the Phoenicians, and not of their people. Yet, the practice was contrary to the traditions of Israel. As part of the peasants, the judiciary was supposed to serve the interests of the peasants and not the ruling elite (Exo 18:13-27; Deut 1:9-17) and their foreign allies.

Apart from their bias against their people, the royal appointed judges were corrupt; receiving bribes. Deuteronomy 16:18-20 tells the judges not to take bribes. This implies that they were being corrupted by the ruling elite. The poor had nothing to bribe the judges with. The judges were taking sides with the rich who could pay. In fact, Deuteronomy 16:18-20 should be read in the broader context of Deuteronomy 16:18-18:22. Mark O'Brien (2008: 155-172) is wrong to suggest that these laws were given before Israel settled in Canaan. They were promulgated later (probably during the time of Ahab) in response to the ills of the monarchy. Deuteronomy 16:18-18:22, in other words, presents a confrontation between peasants and the king who had (trained and) corrupted prophets, priests and judges. Clearly, the text is against the elite class who were influenced by Phoenicia in all spheres: judiciary, priesthood, prophecy and kingship.

Because of this Phoenician influence on the Israelite judiciary system and corruption, the trained young judges would authorise the confiscation of land on account of debt. Not only were debts common among peasants, given the persistent droughts, but defaulters too. It was common for

defaulting peasants and their children to be taken into slavery (2 Kings 4:1). With this background, it is possible that a great drought that occurred in Ahab's reign may have forced many small land-owners, peasants to lose their land (cf. 1 Kings 17 Bright, 1981: 224). During that time, it was obvious that the ruling elite increased their wealth and extended farms through the manipulation of both the peasants to sell their lands and the judiciary especially which had to authorise the appropriations. Yet, had the judiciary remained organised according to indigenous Israelite traditions, those scenarios could have been foiled by judges. One example that is often cited to illustrate the injustice of these times is the expropriation of Naboth's vineyard by Ahab (1 Kings 21:1-16).

Human Factor Content Analysis of the Naboth-Ahab Conflict

In the story, Naboth and King Ahab represent two constituencies in Israel whose Human Factor content is diametrically opposed. These constituencies developed with the emergence of the monarchy. As observed already, the ruling elite had a tendency towards appropriating foreign worldviews, as hinted in 1 Sam 8:5, where they wanted to 'be like other nations'. The peasants, however, despised and resisted that philosophy, and stuck to their indigenous worldviews. Therefore, in 1 Kings 21:1-16, we encounter these two contrasting opinions regarding their view about the land. First, there was the perspective among the peasants that the land was sacred and an inheritance from ancestors. Hence the land could not be sold or exchanged under whatever circumstances. Naboth was the face of this group, naturally the majority. The second perspective was that espoused by the ruling elite, the urbanites. These looked upon the land as an economic asset and no more as an inalienable inheritance. The land, for them, could be bought, sold and even exchanged. These were influenced mainly by foreign ideologies and laws about kingship and the land. Their hold on to the land was driven mainly by the need for profit and not identity. These despised indigenous worldviews about land and dismissed them as backward, primitive and retrogressive; only to promote their newly acquired foreign philosophy as progressive. Ahab represented this group of the elite few.

These categories are clear in the text. According to Stephen C. Russell (2014: 459-460), the conflict between Ahab and Naboth was caused by these different perspectives about the land. From the narrative, King Ahab regarded the vineyard of Naboth as purchasable. Clearly, this was a foreign philosophy, taught to Ahab by his wife Jezebel. Jezebel viewed the land (as did her people, Phoenicians) as at best a tradeable commodity to which

the crown has special and privileged claim (Brueggemann, 2000:257). However, Naboth, a peasant farmer, on the other hand, regarded the offer to purchase his ancestral land as an insult. His response, which was also an oath expressed in harshest terms, revealed his indignation at the suggestion of King Ahab to buy or exchange with his ancestral land. He said: 'Yahweh forbids that I should sell the inheritance of my fathers to you!' (1 Kings 21:3). The involvement of God is very important here. The different conceptions of land were caused by different historical and religious systems between Phoenicia and Israel. According to Brueggemann (2000:264), the concept of land as inheritance (*nahalah*) was integral to revolutionary Yahwism whereas the land as a tradeable economic asset such as estate or farm (*latifundia*) was a concept integral to exploitative Baalism.

Naboth's refusal to sell the land was, therefore, not based on low purchase price, nor personal dislike for King Ahab, nor the fact that he would no longer be able to make a living from the land. First, Ahab, according to the narrative, had offered a fair price, maybe the highest price that the land could fetch in Israel. Second, Ahab had offered to provide Naboth with a better or more fertile replacement land with greater agricultural potential (Russell, 2014: 459). Naboth's objection was not based upon such trivial matters. For him, the land that Ahab wanted to buy or exchange with was not merely a vineyard, which could be interpreted as an economic asset, hence could fetch a market price. Naboth talked about the land as 'the inheritance of my fathers', a *nahalah*. For Conroy (1983:191), this is the key phrase for it shows that Naboth was holding stubbornly to the ancient, traditional concept of patrimonial property, whereby each family was thought to have received its portion of the land from Yahweh. And this portion of land was to remain within the family as a sacred and inalienable trust (Lev 25:23). This philosophy upon which Naboth relied placed honour on each family or tribe for clinging to and dying in the process of defending the inheritance of their fathers, the land (Num 36:7-9; Rofé, 1988:90).

Because of this indigenous philosophy, the land was sacred. As such, the land could not be construed as an economic asset, which could attract a market price. The land and its occupants were, therefore, inseparably related. For Naboth and his followers, the 'land belongs in and with and for a family, tribe or clan as its inalienable place of belonging, living and safety' (Brueggemann, 2000: 263). No amount of money for Naboth and his constituency therefore, could buy an inheritance, land! The value of land as an inheritance was in the fact that it could not attract a commercial price. To put a commercial price on the land was to devalue the land. The

land for the peasants was like a mother. No matter how she could be like, she remains one's only mother! As a matter of fact, every human being has one mother. No one was born of two mothers. Because of this indigenous philosophy or worldview, it was unheard of that the land could be sold or exchanged. For Naboth, therefore, it was unbelievable that someone as high as Ahab, the King of Israel who was supposed to be the custodian of Israelite traditions and culture, could make such a silly proposal. For Naboth, as a representative of the peasants in Israel, the land had to do with identity and being. And this is hinted in the text when it begins by saying: 'Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel', (1 Kings 21:1). According to Russell (2014: 460) the double reference to Jezreel in the text is not mere coincidence; it was to show that Naboth's vineyard held special significance for him, given that it was located at his ancestral town or village.

Naboth's refusal with his ancestral land did not go down well with the king. And his reaction shows that he did not see anything wrong about his absurd request. In his narrative to Jezebel, his wife, a daughter of the Phoenician king, Ahab did not mention that Naboth refused on the basis that he (Naboth) did not own the land, for it belonged to his ancestors. Instead, Ahab reported to Jezebel that Naboth refused him with the words, 'I will not sell my vineyard to you'. He does not tell Jezebel that Naboth based his refusal on the Israelite tradition. Yet, this was twice clearly emphasised in the conversation. Naboth refused him with the words: 'The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my ancestors (1 Kings 21: 3, 4). In this oath, Naboth did not say 'my inheritance'; he said 'the inheritance of my fathers', suggesting that he did not own it. Logically, therefore, Naboth was justified not to negotiate about the land that did not belong to him. He was just a custodian of the ancestral land, suggesting that the land ultimately belonged to God, his departed ancestors and future generations.

From a Human Factor content perspective, Naboth was conscious of his traditions, his being. He respected the traditions of his ancestors that were given by God (Lev 25:23ff). It was because of this association of the vineyard with his departed fathers that he regarded the vineyard as inseparably attached to his family identity, history and everything. The failure of Ahab to appreciate this worldview shows that his Human Factor content was questionable. Since he disregarded his own traditions, the traditions of his people, as old fashioned and primitive; Ahab's Human Factor content was such that he was not fit to be a leader. He was as good as dead. Ahab was absorbed in the 'global mentality syndrome' that promoted the identity of others at the expense of self-identity. Obviously,

this helped him to be liked by Phoenicia, whose culture and identity he promoted. And such was the image of the urbanites and elite of the time. They valued profit and luxury more than anything else.

Although Ahab understood very well the force of Naboth's response to his request (1 Kings 21:4-6), he was so absorbed in the new philosophy of land holding that he could not take a no for an answer. He was prepared to get the land in order to fulfil his plans. According to a renowned biblical archaeologist, Nadav Na'aman, (2008:197), in light of the archaeological and textual analysis and some extra-biblical sources, the story in 1 Kings 21:1-16 refers to the time when Ahab was planning to build a new royal centre in the place where Naboth's vineyard was located. Ahab, therefore, negotiated with the local inhabitants about purchasing their lands as Omri had done before building Samaria (1 Kings 16:24). Therefore, the story of Naboth reflects an incident that took place in the course of the negotiation between Ahab and the peasant tribes that preceded the transaction. Ahab's thoughts represented a more secularised conception of land (and most likely everything) that had gripped the whole upper class. For this elite group of Israelites, the sale of one's ancestral land was legal (Conroy, 1983:191). Their minds had become preoccupied with profit-making to the extent that they could sell even the sacred land. And as Russell (2014:460) rightly observed, Naboth and Ahab's opposing perspectives on the land's significance are at the centre of the dramatic tension here.

In light of this exposition about the conflict between Naboth and Ahab, what lessons can the people of Zimbabwe or of Africa draw from this story? Or the question could be: What lessons can the people of the world draw from this story? Reflecting on the significance of the story today, Brueggemann (2000: 263) argues that the Phoenician economic philosophy which resulted in the conflict between Ahab and Naboth (1 Kings 21:1-16) is similar to what capitalism is doing today. For him, global capitalism has brought with it new patterns of land-holding in various places of the globe, leaving the indigenous inhabitants in semi-slavery conditions. Wherever global capitalism has been, it has turned the indigenous societies up-side-down, causing almost permanent ideological conflicts. With the Naboth-Ahab conflict as a premise and the history of colonialism and resultant land conflicts in Africa, particularly Southern Africa, the question: What lessons can Africa draw from this story? becomes pertinent.

African Lessons from Naboth-Ahab Conflict

In the story, one discovers the strategies that are designed by imperial forces to subjugate their vassals. And these strategies have been employed

in Africa repeatedly. Africans, therefore, need to know these strategies for their own survival; that is in order to fashion sustainable counter strategies to liberate themselves. The story is also important to Africa as conflicts over land are growing. And a closer analysis of the story shows not only that African land was expropriated in the same way as Naboth's vineyard, but also that the African indigenous philosophy of land ownership is similar to the one that guided peasants in ancient Israel during the Naboth-Ahab conflict. Land in Africa has always been considered an inheritance from the ancestors, by the peasants. Therefore, it is associated with their history and identity; spirituality and honour. Losing ancestral land is a disgrace to both the living and the dead. On the other hand, gaining control of it, keeping it and dying in its defence is rewarded with honour from the living and the departed. From a Human Factor content perspective, Africa can draw important lessons from the main characters in the conflict: Jezebel, Ahab, Naboth and prophet Elijah. These characters depict not only the strategies used by both sides of the conflict over land-ownership and utilisation in Africa but also the models for analysing the Human Factor content of Africans today.

Ahab, the Archetype of African Leadership Crisis

From a Human Factor content perspective, Ahab as presented in the text, represents African opinion leaders in general who disregard their traditional values, peasant philosophy in every sphere, only to be inspired by foreign ideologies. These African opinion leaders include presidents, government ministers, academics, legal and economic experts, politicians and Members of Parliament, among many. Like Ahab, they do not identify with the peasant philosophy of land, peasant language and peasant culture. They consider themselves too civilised and sophisticated to be inspired by the worldview of the peasants. If ever there is an attempt to approach peasants, such African leaders will be interested in transforming peasants into being like them, not the other way round. And being like them means transformation of peasants into useful tools of the imperial forces, just like such African leaders. Thus, opinion leaders in Africa who wear the hat and tag of Ahab do not plan with the peasants, they plot against them. Yet the same peasants are the ones whose culture, religion, philosophy, blood and sweat brought about political freedom in Africa. Instead of premising every programme of government, education, law, religion, culture, on peasant aspirations and philosophy, these African leaders seek to be 'like other nations', foreign imperialist nations.

African leaders who are like Ahab believe that what is good for the imperial forces is good for Africa. Hence they seek to imitate what foreign countries

do. Some have called for legalisation of prostitution and homosexuality as is the norm in some former colonial powers. These African leaders are, therefore, mere extensions of the imperial forces, robots even. This is why the language they use in schools, universities, offices, parliament and business is different from the language of the peasants. In most African countries today, the official languages are mostly foreign; and the languages in the streets are foreign as well. No wonder why the agenda articulated in most African policies at every level, be it in private or public organisations, is foreign and against the peasants. The African Ahab, however, are proud to rely on these colonial institutions and systems that will never serve the interests of the masses of their people. They rely on foreign political theories and strategies, economic blue-prints, religious institutions, cultural values and norms, educational and legal systems, among others, that were designed in foreign lands to serve the interests of those lands. Some of these African leaders have the guts of inviting former colonial powers to come and solve political problems in Africa; to attack African neighbours even. As such, Ahab is an example of Africans (especially leaders) who are off track; Africans who rebel against their own traditions.

One notable example where these African opinion leaders, who are like Ahab, are clearly visible is on the issue of land. Their conception of land-ownership, utilisation, production is very divorced from how the peasants look at the same. For them, the land in Africa is owned by one who has title deeds, no matter how he or she got them. Accordingly therefore, to these Africans, the entitlement to the land is based upon this colonial legal document. They also believe that land can belong to all who presently live in Africa, not only to Africans. This is the main reason why these Africans dispute any reform on the land-holding patterns especially those tilted towards empowering the African peasants. They vehemently dispute any policy that seeks to reverse the colonial patterns where Africans were pushed off their land, creating foreign conceptions such as, farms, prazos, estates and so on. For these Africans, the land-holding patterns of the colonial era are permanent. Further, for them the land should be owned by those who can economically utilise it; those with capital to produce for export to former colonial masters. This means the land in Africa must be used productively to feed former colonial masters and not Africans. Ideally, therefore, land should remain in the hands of colonial masters, so that they can grow crops that are needed back home. As such, these Africans disagree with the land being transferred to the peasants, who would produce not for export but for local consumption.

The Ahab-type African opinion leaders have no spine to resist foreign powers. They are weak leaders who are controlled by foreign powers through their ambassadors, in the same way Ahab was controlled by his wife Jezebel, who was an ambassador of Phoenicia. Like Ahab, some of these African leaders are actually given wives by the former colonial masters and cannot marry until the master clears them to do so. And such Africans who marry foreign wives have a distorted view of African heritage and African peasants. In the end, they are given good names and various titles of honour by the colonial masters. As was Ahab, who was praised and supported by Phoenicia in the drive to turn the Israelite society into a replica of Phoenicia, these African leaders get financial and technical support to turn Africa into another western country.

The Jezebel Model and Strategies in Africa

The text shows that Jezebel was fully in charge of both the household of Ahab and the state policies. She was the power behind Ahab's attitudes and actions, both private and public. Ahab was not independent; he was influenced by opinions from Jezebel. She is the ideological think-tank of all the policies that Ahab implemented in Israel. After analysing the Human Factor content of African Ahabs, it therefore goes without saying that Jezebel symbolises the real force behind African leadership crisis described above. In the narrative, Jezebel did not suggest to Ahab; she commanded and Ahab obeyed. She ordered him to rise and eat and he did as commanded (1 Kings 21:7). She took charge of the plan to execute Naboth by writing letters herself and put the seal of the king and Ahab watched the drama unfold (1 Kings 21:8-11). After Naboth was executed, she again commanded Ahab to rise and take the land (1 Kings 21:15; Brueggemann, 2000: 259).

Analysed with a critical Human Factor content approach, one can notice that the problem here was not influence *per se*, because every leader must consult. Therefore, every leader must be open to be influenced. The problem in this case is the source of the influence. Jezebel was non-Israelite; hence her opinions naturally would not be in the best interest of the generality of Israelite peasants. Her opinions, as an ambassador of Phoenicia, served first and foremost the interests of Phoenicia. This scenario is typical of the dilemma in Africa today. The choice of advisers is the problem in Africa. African Ahabs consult foreign ambassadors, political, economic, cultural and religious think-tanks and non-governmental organisations, among others, whose agendas are foreign. Their opinions naturally serve the interests of their home countries, and not African interests.

In the narrative about Jezebel, we have observed that one of the most lethal weapons deployed by Jezebel to influence the Israelite elite into being like Phoenicians was foreign religion, Baalism. However, because its demands were contrary to the traditional religious and cultural system of the peasants, they naturally resisted. For the peasants, Baalism had no capacity to serve their interests because it was an ideology that originated in a different context, to respond to specific issues in that context. To break this popular resistance, Jezebel employed savage strategies, killing the prophets of Yahweh. This strategy nearly brought Yahwism to extinction. The target on the prophets of Yahweh was very strategic; the prophets were spiritual, moral and political rallying points of the peasants. They were peasant opinion leaders, driving a popular rival ideology that threatened Baalism. Hence, by targeting the prophets, Jezebel wanted to deprive the peasants of their critical opinion leaders, so as to substitute them with foreign Baal prophets.

The same Jezebel strategy was employed in the colonisation of Africa. It is well-known that colonisers deployed Christianity to colonise the minds of Africans as the very first necessary step towards colonising the land. In the same way as the peasants of Israel, the peasants fiercely resisted the foreign ideology. Like Jezebel, the colonisers appealed to savage tactics, arresting and killing the spiritual mediums that led the popular resistance. As if it was an enactment of Jezebel era, Christian missionaries, like the prophets of Baal, were key players in the killing of African spirit mediums. The intention was also the same; to turn African peasants into spiritual orphans, in order to give them foreign (foster) spiritual parents, Christian missionaries. To date, the strategy is operational. Foreign ambassadors and colonial institutions do not promote traditional religions. They promote Christianity, giving a lot of incentives to the Christian practitioners which are not extended to African religious practitioners. Have Africans ever wondered why a Christian pastor is allowed to visit schools, patients in hospitals and inmates in prisons to evangelise while African traditional practitioners are not allowed the same? The same is what happened in Israel when Baalism was promoted while Yahwism was suppressed. However, despite the spirited determination to extinguish the traditional religion, the religion of the peasants, the peasants remained steadfast in their religion, culture and traditions of their fathers. Naboth was one of their leaders.

Naboth, the Model of an African Hero

A critical analysis of the conflict between Naboth and Ahab revealed that although he was killed, Naboth was a hero of the peasants. Naboth was

determined, committed and willing to die in defence of what was rightly his. This principled Naboth stance shows that he was conscious and aware of his Human Factor content. He serves as a model of an ideal African: president, politician, academic, educationist, legal and economic expert and any peasant opinion leader who prioritises the history, aspirations and struggles of the peasant Africans. His commitment and respect for the traditions of his ancestors must be an inspiration for Africans today. Naboth considered his personal gain as loss to the community of peasants. Instead of selling the land of his ancestors (and maybe move into the city) or accepting an exchange, receiving a better piece of land, he was preoccupied with the common good, remaining on track. In other words, Naboth's resistance against foreign ideologies shows that he was someone who was prepared to stay in position, regardless of incentives to betray the struggle of the peasants.

Every African whose Human Factor content is in position must aim to be like Naboth. That is, a principled African who establishes everything on indigenous traditions and ideologies: be it in medicine, legal fraternity, education, governance, commerce, politics, and so on. To do that, that African must have courage like Naboth to face huge and sometimes fatal consequences from the detractors. An African Naboth is an African leader who does not get easily threatened by big powers of this world. That African must not abandon his people and his birth right, the land. Instead, he or she must be willing to die in defence of the African land and its people. There are many Africans who have demonstrated the spirit of Naboth: war veterans, war collaborators and the peasants who fought for the liberation of African countries. Although they were aware of the disequilibrium that existed between them and the colonial forces, in terms of resources, they nevertheless fought back. Some, like Naboth, were killed in the struggle. They will, however, remain alive in the hearts and minds of Africans. Like Naboth, naturally such Africans become popular among their people, the peasants. On the other hand, such Africans become unpopular and enemies of the elite class and foreign powers.

To disentangle the relationship between such a popular African Naboth with his or her people, the elite and foreign powers often appeal to smear campaigns. As a matter of fact, they concoct lies about African Naboths to the peasants and make the lies appear true by setting up some false witnesses from one's own to accuse him or her of the crimes. The judiciary too is set up and the judges are mostly carefully selected. Those whose Human Factor content is in position are left out while those whose Human Factor content is foreign, are given prominence. This strategy is clearly present in the narrative about the murder of Naboth. Plots against Naboth

were done secretly and the accusers were carefully selected and maybe bought with some huge incentives by the ruling elite and their foreign backers. The accusations against him were crafted in such a way that ordinary peasants would agree to his death. Yet the main reason for his murder was in order for the king to take his land. Naboth was accused of cursing God and the king. In other words, he was falsely accused of sacrilege and treason, both of which were punishable by death.

Naboth represents African leaders who are framed by detractors in order to stop or derail the agenda of the peasants such Africans will be championing. African Naboths are always accused of human rights violations, crimes against humanity, violations of the rule of law, violence, dictatorship and rigging elections. There is always the threat of being sent to the International Criminal Court (ICC), itself an instrument set up by imperial forces to deal with those leaders in Africa mostly and the global South, who stand with their people against foreign machinations. These false accusations and threats are targeted at reversing the peasant friendly reforms. The ICC, in that case, is similar to the tribunal set up to try Naboth which had well selected judges who already had arrived at the verdict before the trial began.

Another most important lesson derived from the accusations against Naboth is as long as one is committed to the cause and principled to remain in position regardless of threats and real danger of death, traitors will always be there. African leaders whose Human Factor content is correctly attuned to their tradition and that of their people, are betrayed over and over again by their own people who willingly sell out the struggle of their people for the sake of personal gain. These African puppets, the Ahabs of the foreign forces, are normally bought out of the struggle of the people through monetary inducements. They, as a result, speak against the peasants and against traditions of their people. African Naboths must be different. Like Naboth, whose stance and attitude towards the land showed awareness, conviction, consistence, readiness and willingness and preparedness to pay the ultimate price, Africans need to exude these values. Only after that are they able to serve Africans.

Prophet Elijah, the Model of African Religious Leaders

In the Naboth-Ahab conflict, Elijah appeared on the scene immediately after the murder of Naboth (1 Kings 17-29). Elijah confronted King Ahab and protested the killing of Naboth and the expropriation of his ancestral land. Elijah then proclaimed catastrophe upon Ahab and his posterity, which later come to pass (2 Kings 9:25) as retaliation for the execution

and expropriation of the land of Naboth's ancestors. The text does not tell us how Elijah heard of the killing of Naboth over the land. It only tells us about the confrontation he had with Ahab.

However, reading between the lines, it is clear that Prophet Elijah and Naboth were in the same camp, physically and ideologically. They were fighters, comrades who shared trenches against exploiters of the peasants. Elijah, like Naboth, was an enemy of the ruling elite for introducing and promoting foreign ideology at the expense of their own, the peasant ideology. This was so because, Elijah like Naboth, believed in traditional Yahwism. According to Brueggemann (2000:260), because Elijah was rooted in Yahwism and fully committed to the peasant community, he was, therefore an adversary of royal ideology. Brueggemann, therefore, proposed that I Kings 21:1-29 must be understood in the broader context of the Elijah-Ahab ideological conflict (1 Kings 18-19) whereby the two are representative figures of two conflicting social perspectives and social interests (Brueggemann, 2000:257). The two social interests are representatives of two conflicting religious ideologies. Baalism was not only a foreign religion; it was also a religion of the elite, whereas Yahwism was the indigenous religion of the peasants.

As a medium of Yahweh, prophet Elijah represented the spiritual and moral force behind Naboth and peasants in the resistance struggle. In other words, he was the link between the departed, living and future peasants and Yahweh. He was their rallying point, not foreign prophets of Baal. In Elijah's ideology and conduct, we discover the centrality of African indigenous religions in the fight against colonialism. Like Elijah, so many indigenous religious leaders resisted expropriation of land from the indigenous peoples. Being peasants themselves, African spirit mediums; traditional chiefs, traditional healers, magicians, among other African traditional practitioners, have always stood with the peasants of Africa. Together with peasants, they have been suppressed, humiliated, arrested, tortured and killed for resisting the expropriation of their land and change authored by foreigners.

Despite these measures, they remained resolute and determined to stand for the people. They, in other words, stayed in position. This is why these indigenous practitioners have continued to support the peasants in matters of health, education, political consciousness, economic productivity and religious instruction. Because of these critical roles they have played in the history and contemporary struggles of Africans, it is high time that Africans take them seriously. Their indigenous age-old knowledge and wisdom must be given prominence in all spheres of life in

Africa. Their approach and ideology to life must inform government policies on land ownership, utilisation, productivity and agricultural mechanisation. Since they are the ones who brought about independence in Africa, their views must be the bedrock of national assembly debates on land, education and legal policies, social and religious practices of the Africans.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that valuable lessons can be drawn from the Naboth-Ahab conflict over land (1 Kings 21:1-29). From a detailed exposition of the ideological underpinnings of land-ownership and utilisation that influenced the main characters in the conflict, the chapter has revealed that all key players were representatives of constituencies in the Israelite society. The chapter has deliberately taken sides with the constituency of the peasant, led by Naboth and prophet Elijah. The bias towards the poor is premised on the fact that a majority of Africans are peasants whose survival depends on ownership and utilisation of land. Their conception of land-ownership and utilisation is radically opposed to the new concept introduced by colonial capitalism. The chapter demonstrated that the conceptualisation of the land by Israelite peasant, Naboth and Elijah was similar to the African peasant concept of land ownership. From that perspective, the chapter advocated for African opinion leaders who are informed by and identify with the struggles of the peasants over land. These have been compared to Naboth and Elijah, leaders of the peasants, it has been demonstrated too that such Africans are aware of their Human Factor content. Their conviction and determination to stay on course, or stay in position, regardless of fierce resistance from the enemy territory, was highly praised as an inspiration. On the other hand, Africans who are influenced by foreign ideologies have been discussed as the Ahabs of Africa. The chapter has been categorical that these need to be identified and resisted.

References

- Andreasen, N. E. (1983) *The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society*, CBQ 45, pp. 179-194.
- Bright, J. A (1981) *History of Israel*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- Brueggemann, (2000) *1 & 2 Kings*. Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing.
- Chirichigno, G. C. (1993) *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East*. Sheffield: JSOT Press.

- Conroy, C. (1983) *1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings with an Excursus on Davidic Dynasty and Holy City Zion. Old Testament Message, Volume 6*. Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc.
- Elat, M. (1979) 'The Monarchy and the Development of Trade in Ancient Israel', in E. Lipinski, (ed.), *State and Temple Economy in the Ancient Near East. 1, 11. Proceedings of the International Conference Organised by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 10th to the 14th of April 1978*. OLA 5. Leuven: Dept. Orientalistiek, pp. 527-46.
- Flanagan, F. (1981) 'Chiefs in Israel', *JSOT* 20, pp. 47-73.
- Frick, F.S. (1985) *The Formation of the State of Ancient Israel*, SWBAS 4. Sheffield: Almond Press.
- Gottwald, N. K. (1979) *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 BCE*. New York: Maryknoll.
- (1974) 'Were the Early Israelites Pastoral Nomads?' in J. Jackson and M. Kessler (eds.), *Rhetorical Criticism. Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*. Pittsburgh: Pickwick, pp. 223-255.
- (1975) 'Domain Assumptions and Societal Models in the Study of Premonarchic Israel', in *Vetus Testamentum Sup Edinburgh Congress Volume*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 89-100.
- (1976) "Early Israel and 'The Asiatic Mode of Production' in Canaan", *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*. Montana: Scholars Press, pp. 145-154.
- (1978) 'The Hypothesis of the Revolutionary Origins of Ancient Israel: A Response to Hauser and Thompson', *JSOT* 3, pp. 37-52.
- (1986) 'The Participation of Free Agrarians in the Introduction of Monarchy to Ancient Israel: An Application of H.A Landsberger's Framework for the Analysis of Peasant Movements', *Semeia* 37, pp. 77-106.
- (1993) 'Social Class as an Analytic and Hermeneutical Category in Biblical Studies', *JBL* 112 No.1 pp. 3-22.
- (1993) 'A Hypothesis about Social Class in Monarchic Israel in the Light of Contemporary Studies of Social Class and Social Stratification', in Gottwald, (ed.), *The Hebrew Bible in its Social World and in Ours*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars, pp. 139-164.
- Hauer, C. (1986) 'From Alt to Anthropology: The Rise of the Israelite State', *JSOT* 36, pp. 3-15.
- Lang, B. (1982) 'The Social Organisation of Peasant Poverty in Biblical Israel', *JSOT* 24, pp. 47-63.
- Na'aman, N. (2008) 'Naboth's Vineyard and the Foundation of Jezreel', *JSOT* 33, pp. 199-204.
- O'Brien, M. (2008) 'Deuteronomy 16:18-18:22; Meeting the Challenge of Nations

- Rogerson, J.W. (1986) 'Was Early Israel a Segmentary Society?' *JSOT* 36, pp. 17-26.
- Rofé, A. (1988) 'The Vineyard of Naboth: the Origin and Message of the Story', *VT* 38, pp. 89-104.
- Russell, S.C. (2014) 'The Hierarchy of Estates in Land and Naboth's vineyard', *JSOT* 38, pp. 453-469.
- Tadmor, H. (1968) 'The People' and the Kingship in Ancient Israel: The Role of the Political Institutions in the Biblical Period', *JWH* 11 pp. 46-68.
- Talmon, S. (1986) 'Kingship and the Ideology of the State', in *King, Cult and Calendar in Ancient Israel: Collected Studies*. Jerusalem: Magnes, pp. 21-25.
- Vengayi, O. (2013) *Aluta Continua Biblical Hermeneutics for Liberation: interpreting biblical texts on slavery for liberation of Zimbabwean underclasses*. Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press.

Internet Sources

Chabad.org, "The House of Omri"

http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/463991/jewish/The-House-of-Omri.htm (Accessed on 15 June 2014).



This work is licensed under a
Creative Commons
Attribution – NonCommercial - NoDerivs 3.0 License.

To view a copy of the license please see:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

This is a download from the BLDS Digital Library on OpenDocs
<http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/>