Ethnicity, Cultural Diversity and Poverty in South Africa: Archaeological Perspectives from Iron Age Palestine

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ABSTRACT

Ethnic and cultural intolerance is still alive and well in post-Apartheid South Africa. It impinges negatively on the country's fight against poverty. Recent statistics on poverty in South Africa indicate that poverty is much higher amongst historically disadvantaged groups with no indication of any improvement. To alleviate poverty, foreign investment, amongst others, is crucial. Foreigners will only invest once they see local people are prepared to invest their skills and capital. This is not happening because South Africans from different ethnic background have not acknowledged or made peace with their ethnic diversities. Recent archaeological discoveries from stratum I at Ekron (an ancient Iron Age Philistine city) revealed evidence of Philistines, Judeans and Israelites working together in factories, sharing their capital, knowledge and skills. The author concludes that the seemingly harmonious and prosperous co-existence evident from the discoveries at Ekron, would not have been possible if these groups didn't somehow managed to accept and tolerate their ethnic diversities and work together to survive under Neo-Assyrian rule. The archaeological evidence from Ekron has revealed valuable perspectives on co-operation between ethnically diverse groups that can assist South Africans in their quest to alleviate poverty.

A   INTRODUCTION

Ethnicity, cultural diversity and poverty are as much part of South African society as "braaivleis, rugby, sunshine and Chevrolet." The words braaivleis, rugby, sunshine and Chevrolet come from a song in a radio and television advertisement that became very popular amongst South Africans, especially the white population, who can identify themselves with the message it carries; South Africa, a country where its citizens enjoy the "good things" the country offers, lovely food, favorite sport, sunny weather and comfortable cars. More than half of the South African population today do not share the "good things" mentioned in the song. More than half do not know where their next meal will come from; they do not have the opportunity to play sport or attend sporting events; their winters are nightmares; they don't share the luxury of owning a private car.

The aim with this article is to confront the reader with the reality of poverty in the world, more particularly, South Africa. Statistics on the distribution of poverty amongst different ethnic groups are presented to highlight the current extent of poverty in the country. Non co-operation and uneasiness between

different ethnic groups are contributing to the perpetuation of poor living conditions of the largest section of the population. It also hampers the South African economy to grow. In an effort to find ways to deal with this reality, I shall investigate archaeological and historical data from ancient Palestine. Thereafter I shall relate my interpretation of these data to the state of affairs in South Africa. Finally, the article opens new perspectives on the role of all South Africans to combat the increasing dilemma of poverty.

B   TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF POVERTY IN AFRICA

In his book *"Rethinking African development: towards a framework for social integration and ecological harmony,"* Lual Deng, a development economist from Kenya, regards poverty reduction as a leading issue in African development in the 1990's and beyond.[1] The recognition that poverty in Africa has multiple faces encouraged him to identify two main types of poverty which he regards as interrelated as well as negatively reinforcing. The first type, which he admits will be controversial, is what he would call intellectual poverty. The second one is the conventional type of poverty that arises as result of lack and/or inability to access basic human needs.

1   Intellectual poverty

Deng is of the opinion that

> intellectual poverty has allowed inappropriate development policies and strategies that are inconsistent with African thought and culture to be applied with impunity. And when these policies and strategies do not work, African social institutions and culture(s) are seen as impediments to modernizing processes and to economic development.[2]

According to him, "the intellectual poverty in Africa, manifests itself mainly in the absence of a serious African scholarship that can systematically guide development policy formulation and ensure its consistency with African thought and culture." He admits that such a type of poverty has been widely acknowledged, but only few dare to mention it explicitly out of fear to be branded as polemic and radical. The approach so far has been to mask this type of poverty with coded phrases, such as lack of analytical capacity, institutional weakness, and so forth.

> Hence, attempts to alleviate this type of poverty have mainly (and rightly so) focused on capacity-building and institutional strengthening. While such efforts are necessary and commendable, they are insufficient to produce a viable African development school of

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[1] Lual A. Deng, *Rethinking African development. Toward a framework for social integration and ecological harmony* (Trenton: African World Press, 1997), 100.
[2] Deng, *Rethinking African development*, 100.

thought, which is urgently needed to provide alternative analysis of African problems and appropriate strategies for their solution.[3]

Deng argues further "that capacity-building and institutional-strengthening initiatives in isolation of African social systems of thought would normally lead to what he likes to call *'imitative'* development." Deng believes that "Imitative has essentially landed Africa to where she is today – slow growing, if not stagnant, economies with rising poverty, indebtedness, faster population growth, civil strife and threats of natural resource degradation."[4]

2   Conventional poverty

In addressing the conventional type of poverty, Deng admits "that there are definitional and methodological problems with respect to the measurement of this type of poverty."[5] In order to reach an appropriate generic definition of this type of poverty, the point of departure should begin at normalcy. In other words, poverty is then seen as a deviation from a situation which an individual in an African society perceives to be normal. What does it mean then to be a normal person? Deng answers "that it means to have dignity and self-respect, which presupposes having the basic needs of a normal human being met. These basic needs consist of primary and secondary needs." Primary needs are food, (including water and clothing) and shelter. Secondary needs consist of economic, cultural and political services. Examples of secondary needs are health, education, security, liberty, freedom of expression and religion, individual rights to own property, to have access to productive employment, credit, et cetera:

> Primary and secondary basic needs could be met through one's own resources, family, community, and/or through a combination of these sources. […] The lack of these resources leads to a state of powerlessness, helplessness and despair, which in turn forces a person to perform undignified and disrespectful actions. In addition, the inability to protect oneself against economic, social, cultural and political discrimination, deprivation and marginalization, can also lead to this kind of poverty.[6]

To end his discussion on conventional poverty, Deng gives a list of general categories of poverty to classify Africa's poor. Although his list cannot be regarded as a blueprint for South Africa's situation, it represents most catego-

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[3] Deng, *Rethinking African development*, 100. See also Mwangi S. Kimenyi, John M. Mbaku & Mwaniki Ngure, *Restarting and Sustaining Economic growth and Development in Africa: The Case of Kenya* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 13-19.
[4] Deng, *Rethinking African development*, 102.
[5] Deng, *Rethinking African development*, 102.
[6] Deng, *Rethinking African development*, 102.

ries of poverty in South Africa. The general categories of poverty in Africa he lists are:[7]

(i)   Those households or individuals below the poverty level and whose incomes are insufficient to provide for basic needs, as defined by the World Bank;
(ii)   Households or individuals lacking access to basic services, political contacts and other forms of support. This category includes the urban squatters and "street" children;
(iii)   People in isolated rural areas who lack essential infrastructure such as basic services;
(iv)   Female-headed households (especially pregnant and lactating mothers and infants) whose nutritional needs are not being met adequately;
(v)   Persons who have lost their jobs and those who are unable to find employment (such as school leavers and college graduates) as a result of economic reforms introduced under the adjustment programs, that is, those who are in danger of becoming the "new poor";
(vi)   Refugees and internally displaced populations due to civil strife; and
(vii)   Ethnic minorities who are marginalised, deprived and persecuted economically, socially, culturally and politically.

3   Other definitions

In the 1950's and 1960's the concepts of "marginalisation" and "marginality" were formed and served to describe the peripheral economic, political and social position of the urban poor and peasants in the countries of the so-called Third World. Later in the 1970's and 1980's, international organisations increasingly replaced "marginalization" with the neutral term "poverty."[8] However, both terms are characterized by multi-dimensionality, which makes an empirical analysis difficult.

The World Bank and the Development Program of the United Nations (UNDP) deal with the problem in different ways. While the World Bank prefers to use income- and consumption-orientated measurements, the UNDP favours a definition of poverty using social indicators (material and non-material basic needs). Accordingly, their definitions of poverty differ. "While the World Bank interprets poverty as the failure to reach a certain level of income, which therefore prohibits the provision of basic consumer goods, the UNDP uses an extended definition. It views poverty as a lack of chances and possibilities of choice, which are crucial for human development: these prevent a long and healthy life, an acceptable standard of living, sufficient education, as well as

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[7] Deng, *Rethinking African development*, 106.
[8] Dirk Berg-Schlosser & Norbert Kersting, *Poverty and Democracy* (London: Zed Books, 2003), 78.

access to private and public services.""[9]

In his recent book, *Architects of poverty,*[10] Moeletsi Mbeki, brother of former South African president Thabo Mbeki, does not give a formal definition of poverty, but continues to explain why Africa has the largest percentage of poverty in the world. He analyses the plight of Africa and concludes that Africa's *people* alone are not to blame for poverty in Africa. The problem lies with the *rulers* of African states – the political elites who contrive to keep their fellow citizens poor while enriching themselves. For Mbeki, poverty in Africa is directly related to the stranglehold of the African elite on political power.

C   POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA

In order to get a better understanding of the proportion of poverty amongst the different groupings in South Africa, we need to look at research done in 2008 by the *Bureau of Market Research* at the *University of South Africa* on the proportion of people living in poverty in South Africa.[11] The research used similar indicators as the World Bank.

Proportion of people in poverty (%)

Year	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Total
1996	50.3	16.8	6.2	2.0	40.5
1997	52.9	17.8	6.6	2.5	42.7
1998	55.6	18.7	6.9	2.6	45.0
1999	57.1	19.3	7.2	2.7	46.3
2000	57.1	19.3	7.2	3.2	46.9
2001	58.5	19.9	7.4	3.7	47.7
2002	58.6	20.0	7.5	3.8	47.9
2003	57.6	19.7	7.4	3.8	47.2
2004	57.9	19.9	7.5	3.9	47.5
2005	57.2	19.7	7.5	3.9	47.0
2006	56.9	19.7	7.5	4.0	46.8
2007	56.5	19.6	7.5	4.0	46.6
2008	56.2	19.5	7.6	4.0	46.4

For the purpose of this article, the above statistics on poverty in South Africa can be interpreted as follows:

(i)   Poverty increased amongst all racial groupings in SA between 1996 and 2008.

(ii)   Although the figure for poor Africans in 2008 are about 6% higher than

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[9] Dirk Berg-Schlosser & Norbert Kersting, *Poverty and Democracy,* 80.

[10] Moeletsi Mbeki, *Architects of Poverty* (Johannesburg: Pan Macmillan, 2009). See especially pages 36-61.

[11] Research done in 2008 by Prof C. Van Aardt of the *Bureau of Market Research* of the *University of South Africa.*

12 years earlier, poverty amongst this grouping steadily declined since 2002 from 58.6% to 56.2%, a drop of 2.4%. Poverty amongst Coloureds, also dropped slightly from 20% to 19.5%.

(iii)   Interestingly, the percentages of poor Indians virtually stayed the same since 2002 (0.1% increase), whereas the percentage of poor Whites increased from 3.8% to 4%. These are the only two groups whose poverty level *increased* since 2002.

(iv)   Since 2002, poverty amongst all groupings in South Africa dropped 1.5%.

Although one can make a few positive deductions from these figures, the overall impression one gets is that South Africa is not making great strides in alleviating poverty. If the total poverty level continues to decline at a rate of 1.5% in 6 years, it will take another 24 years *only* to get back to the poverty level experienced in 1996, which then was 40.5% of the total population.

The most disturbing reality is the disparity between the percentage of Africans living in poverty in 2008, 56%, and the percentage of whites, only 4%. Converted into numbers, roughly 22 million Africans compared to about 160,000 whites were living in poverty in 2008.

D   SOUTH AFRICA'S DOUBLE-DECKER ECONOMY

Many publications, articles and reports in the past have tried to explain the reasons why so many black South Africans are poor and Whites South Africans are economically so much better off.[12] In one such a publication written by Alister Sparks, "*Beyond the miracle: inside the new South Africa,*"[13] he uses the metaphor of a double-decker bus to explain the First World sector and Third World sector of the economy of the country.[14] Those in the upper deck are mainly wealthy whites, due to the legacy of colonialism. Those in the lower deck are mainly black, poor and without skills, due to the lack of education and opportunities "and what is working for those on the upper deck of this economic bus is not working for those on the lower deck. So unemployment is increasing and the wealth gap is widening." [15]

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[12] Haroon Bhorat & Ravi Kanbur, eds., *Poverty and policy in post-apartheid South Africa* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2006); Johannes P. (JP) Landman et al., *Breaking the grip of poverty and inequality in South Africa, 2004-2014: trends, issues and future policy options* (Bellville: EFSA Institute for Theological and Interdisciplinary Research, 2003); Abebe Zegeye & Julia Maxted, *Our dream deferred: the poor in South Africa* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2002); Julian - May, ed., *Poverty and inequality in South Africa: meeting the challenge* (New York, St Martin's press, 2000).
[13] Alistar Sparks, *Beyond the miracle: inside the new South Africa* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2003).
[14] Sparks, *Beyond the miracle*, 332.
[15] Sparks, *Beyond the miracle, 332.*

Sparks is of opinion that the reason for this wealth gap "is a question of skills. The new globalized economy places a premium on skills. Those at the top of the bus have skills, while those on the lower deck do not which means that while those on the upper deck are prospering, growing numbers of those down below are unemployed and rapidly becoming unemployable – and if nothing is done about it, South Africa faces the socially dangerous prospect of this unemployment becoming generationally repetitive. The children of the unemployed will themselves be unemployable."[16]

I further agree with Sparks that those on the top deck lately are no longer a whites-only group. However, I disagree with his view that "they are getting along pretty well, working together, making money together, their kids going to the same schools and universities."[17] The reality at in South Africa today does not reflect this view of Sparks. There are obvious reasons for this reality, reasons which I intend to elaborate on further in this article.

Sparks further reckons that the neo-liberal macro-economy policy, which is what South Africa has, is insufficient to deal with this dual economy. What is needed is a two-pronged strategy to cater for the different needs of both. The developed sector must be encouraged and energised to build on the good start it has made, because they will attract foreign investors. But it is the unskilled sector on the lower deck that needs a different set of strategies, not only for humanitarian reasons, but they need to be drawn "into the economy from which they are now excluded so that they can begin to contribute their huge numbers to its growth and also to build a stairway to the top."[18]

These words are very much in line with those of Jeffery Sachs, special advisor to the previous UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan:

> It is no good to lecture the dying that they should have done better with their lot in life. Rather, it is our task to help them onto the ladder of development, at least to gain a foothold on the bottom rung, from which they can then proceed to climb on their own.[19]

For South Africa to grow its economy, foreign investment is very crucial. The reality is that investors only invest where they see growth, "because that is where they believe they can make money. One must produce growth first to attract them."[20] This can only begin when all South Africans begin to work together:

> Growth, like charity, begins at home. Foreign investors will not

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[16] Sparks, *Beyond the miracle*, 333.
[17] Sparks, *Beyond the miracle*, 333.
[18] Sparks, *Beyond the miracle*, 333.
[19] Jefferey D. Sachs, *The End of Poverty* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 2.
[20] Sparks, *Beyond the miracle*, 332.

come if they see locals are holding back. They will come only when they hear a buzz of excitement coming from the local investors and when they see the growth figures start to rise. So an effective strategy must start with boosting local investment.[21]

Boosting local investment, as Sparks suggests, may seem to be a logical and effective strategy to boost the South African economy. Why then are those in the upper deck, who have the skills and financial resources to boost local investment, not prepared to build a staircase *down* to those on the lower deck. Why should it be the poor ones on the lower deck who have, to use the words of Sparks, "build a stairway to the top," when they do not have the money nor skills to do so? Are those on the top deck not better equipped and resourced to rather build a staircase down? Or even better, why do they not join skills and resources and build a two-way staircase together? Is this not possibly a better solution to get the economy growing? Ironically, the present reality in South Africa is that even if they want to, they do not know *how* to, for the two economies have become strangers to one another.

Over the past 350 years, a number of dividing factors prevented those in the upper and those in the lower deck to join hands and work together.[22] It is crucial that these dividing factors, which were also responsible for the double-decker bus economy, be recognised for it is crucial for survival for both those in the lower and upper decks.

What are these dividing factors and where do they come from? I am of the opinion that they have their roots in the ethnic diversity of the population of South Africa, especially the ignorance and poor handling thereof in the past and still today. Ignorance of those in the upper deck, as well as those in the lower deck, to address these diversities and to encourage toleration of each other's differences, are possibly the main reasons for poverty in South Africa. The history of South Africa lies littered with scores of conflicts between ethnic groups that lead to bloodshed, pain, no communication, mistrust and eventually separation.[23] Living and surviving apart became the order of the day and seems to continue to this day.

Ethnic diversity is a given reality in South Africa and needs to be dealt with urgently. With a long and painful history of ethnic divisions, where do we begin? Where do we find models where ethnic groups from different cultural and religious backgrounds succeeded to find ways to tolerate and respect one another's differences? Are there examples from the past where groups from different ethnic backgrounds co-existed peacefully, which may offer some guidelines?

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[21] Sparks, *Beyond the miracle*, 332.
[22] Alan S. Tiley, *Bridging the communication gap between black and white* (Cape Town: Tafelberg Publishers, 1974), 120.
[23] Tiley, *Bridging the communication gap*, 96.

I am fully aware that South Africa has a unique history influenced by the diverse ethnic groups in the country. This makes it even more difficult to find comparative examples from the past to deal with our particular situation. Though this may be the case, it may be helpful to look for examples in the past where opposing ethnic groups clashed with one another and eventually succeed to co-exist fairly well. By doing so, we may identify guidelines to deal with our particular situation.

If we apply this exercise to the ancient Philistines and Israelites, two groups from completely diverse geographical and ethnic origin, we may find some guidelines for dealing with our unique situation. In what is to follow, I intend to demonstrate this by using archaeological evidence from ancient Israel and literary sources from the Hebrew Bible.

E   TWO ETHNIC GROUPS FROM THE BIBLE

The "Sea Peoples" of which the Philistines were one component, first appeared in the Eastern Mediterranean in the second half of the 13th century B.C.E. They were seafarers whose origins can be traced back to the Aegean and some of the Islands in the Mediterranean Sea. At that time the Egyptians and the Hittites were in power in the Levant, but both were weak, politically and military. The Sea Peoples exploited this power vacuum by invading areas previously subject to Egyptian and Hittite control. In wave after wave of land and sea assault they attacked Syria, Palestine, and even Egypt itself.[24]

In the last and mightiest wave, the Sea Peoples, including the Philistines, stormed south from Canaan in a land and see assault on the Egyptian Delta. According to Egyptian sources, including the hieroglyphic account at Medinet Habu, Ramesses III (c.a.1198-1166 B.C.E.) soundly defeated them in the eight year of his reign. He then permitted them to settle on the southern coastal plain of Palestine. There they developed into an independent political power and a thread to the disunited Canaanite city-states and to the newly settled Israelites.[25]

The new settlers in the southern coastal plain of Palestine, who were actually foreigners to that part of the Levant, were now next-door neighbours to a group of Semites, the so-called Israelites, who were living for centuries in the much less fertile Highlands further east.[26]

These newcomers brought with them their own culture, religion, language and customs, that differed dramatically from those of the indigenous Canaanite/Israelite cultures of the Southern Levant. These ethnic differences were

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[24] Trude K. Dothan, *The Philistines and their material culture* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1982a), 1.

[25] Dothan, *The Philistines,* 24.

[26] Israel Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1988), 295.

to be the major reasons for the animosity between them that continued for several centuries to follow.

F   PHILISTINES AND ISRAELITES AS REFLECTED IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

Whatever historicity or authenticity we place on the portrayal of the Philistines in the Hebrew Bible, the biblical authors succeeded to reflect the tension that developed and continued between the Philistines and Israelites, starting from the appearance of the Philistines in the coastal plain during the twelfth century B.C.E.

The biblical sources suggest that there are four periods of Philistine history, during which they had contact with Israel.[27]

1   Biblical Patriarchs

The *first* is the period of the biblical patriarchs described in Gen 20-21 and 26. The stories here are very brief, centering on Abimelech, called king of Gerar, and his contacts with both Abraham and his son Isaac. These stories are not evidence of entirely peaceful relations with the patriarchs, involving disputes over water rights and the deception of the wife-sister tradition, although in both instances the disputes are resolved. The Philistine names involved – the place names, Gerar and Beersheva and the personal names, Abimelech, Ahuzzat, and Phicol – do not recur in those biblical stories describing later phases of Philistine history. Gerar as well as Beersheva are far from where the Philistines are place in later biblical stories. This disjunction in names between the Genesis and later biblical sources is only part of a larger uneasiness many interpreters have had with the Genesis sources as potential historical references to the Philistines. Even the effort in Genesis 26 where Abimelech and his group are referred to as Philistines, may be connected with the effort by the original author to clarify the problem of Philistine origins in Palestine and so to affirm that the Philistines were indeed in the land when the Israelites under Joshua returned to it.[28]

2   Iron Age I

While the first period of contact with the Philistines focuses on the problems of locating the Philistines in the era of the patriarchs, the *second* period is presented with much more clarity. In archaeological terms, this is the Iron Age I period, in biblical terms, the period of Joshua and Judges. The period ranges for the biblical authors from the first knowledge the Philistines and other Palestinian peoples had of the Israelites after their victorious entry into the land of Palestine under Moses and Joshua, until David's establishment of his united king-

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[27] Eliezer D. Oren, *The Sea Peoples and their World: A Reassessment* (Philadelphia: University Museum Publications, 2000), 54.

[28] Oren, *The Sea Peoples,* 55.

dom. Four major episode complexes make up the focus of this narrative.[29]

The first episode complex concerns Samson and his heroic adventures, climaxing in his purposeful destruction of himself and the Philistines of Gaza, one of their principal cities (Judg 13-16). When Samson decided to marry a young Philistine woman from Timnah, his father and mother were not impressed. Their reaction in Judges 14:3 clearly illustrates that they were not pleased with his decision, because she belonged to an ethnic group with a different set of cultural and religious practices. They complained: "Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?" (NIV). In this instance, the cultic rite of circumcision seemed to be the reason why the Israelites should not associate with the Philistines.

The second episode complex is the narrative revolving around the control of the Israelite ark of the covenant, from the days of Eli to Samuel (1 Sam 4-7). The confrontation between the Philistines and Israelites broadens in this narrative. The difference between the Philistines and Israelites becomes clear with the confrontation between the god of the Philistines, Dagon and the god of Israel, symbolized by the Ark of the Covenant.

In the third episode complex*, the first Israelite king Saul faces new and repeated clashes with the Philistines,* which eventually lead to a disastrous defeat of the Israelites and the death of Saul and his sons in the Jezreel valley.

In the fourth episode complex, the focus is on *the successes of David.* A sharp contrast is created between Saul's Philistine encounters as they turn downward and the activities of David who moves out from under Saul as he goes from success to success in an increasingly broader confrontation with the Philistines: first his defeat of Goliath in the vicinity of Ekron, followed by several confrontations until at last, having taken Jerusalem and united the tribes, he defeats the Philistine forces in the Valley of Rephaim, driving them back into their coastal heartland.

3   Iron Age II: The Divided Monarchy

The third period *covers the divided monarchy or Iron Age II period.* This period is described in a series of cursory notices, now not only in the Deuteronomistic History and Chronicles, but also in the Prophetic Books, which narrate episodes across several centuries from the ninth through the sixth century B.C.E.

The largest concern of these notices is territorial conflicts: border encounters or attacks across borders between Judah and coastal Philistia, which occasionally involved seizure of land.[30] The archaeological remains from stra-

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[29] Oren, *The Sea Peoples,* 55.
[30] Oren, *The Sea Peoples,* 56.

tum I at Ekron that will be discussed later, are related to this period of Philistine and Judean contact.

4   Exile and post exile

A fourth and final period of Philistine contact with Israel, or more exactly now, Judah, covers the *Babylonian exile and immediate post-Exile*, thus of the latter sixth and fifth centuries, during the Neo-Babylonian and then the Persian period. The underlying point from the prophets Joel and Nehemiah's references to the Philistines is that they are not simply memories from older tradition, but still existent in some historical form, through the post-exilic period of Achaemenid Persian domination.

From the above evidence in the biblical narratives, we may conclude that for several centuries, Israelites and Judeans on the one hand and Philistines on the other hand, were in confrontation with one another. If it was not a military, ethnic or religious conflict, then some or other land or territorial dispute. In the process, men, women and children suffered and died on both sides.

The evidence in the Hebrew Bible gives the impression that cultural and religious differences divided the Philistines and Israelites throughout their history. From the available literature, it thus seems that they never reached a stage where they co-existed in peace and harmony. My interpretation of recent archaeological evidence from traditional Philistine sites in the Coastal Plain of Philistia, more specific from Ekron, reveals such a brief period of peaceful co-existence. If this was possible for Philistines and Israelites, given their history, it may be very relevant in the context of this article to take a closer look at how and why it happened. I am of the opinion that my interpretation of the archaeological evidence at these Philistine cities can offer some guidelines for South Africans of different ethnic backgrounds to co-exist prosperously.

G   ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FROM EKRON

To be able to interpret the archaeological evidence at Ekron, a brief overview of the stratigraphic history and discoveries at the site is important.

Ekron (Tel Miqne) was one the five major Philistine cities, often referred to as the *Pentapolis* of the Philistines. It was located in Philistia, on the western edge of the Inner Coastal Plain of Palestine. This region was the natural and historical frontier zone that separated Philistia and Judah. It became a popular trade centre due to its strategic location near major highways. The important highway, the Via Maris, connecting Egypt to the south with Phoenician trade centres and harbours further north-east along the Mediterranean coast, passed close by.

Tel Miqne is one of the largest Iron Age sites in Israel and is composed of two parts: a 10 acre upper tell (the upper city) and a 40 acre lower tell (lower

city). The lower city is a flat, almost square-shaped with a 2.5 acre mound-shaped acropolis at its northern end.

1   Stratigraphical history of the site

Excavations at Tel Miqne have already identified nine distinct strata or occu-pation levels at the site.[31] The lowest stratum or first occupation of the city, stratum IX, dates from the early part of the Late Bronze Age (15th - 14th centu-ries B.C.E. This first city and the next from level VIII extended over most of the 50 hectare tell. In the next stratum, stratum VII, which is the first Iron Age I city (first third of 13th century B.C.E.), a complete new culture is evident on the site, generally believed to be Philistine.[32] Occupants from this level city would be the Philistines we encounter in the biblical stories regarding Samson, Sam-uel and Saul.

This complete new culture, which resembles the transition from the Late Bronze Age Canaanite settlement to the Iron Age I Philistine settlement, is es-pecially evident in the clear-cut division signified by the new pottery from stratum VII. Not only the pottery, but also the fortifications, architecture, in-dustrial activity and even city planning from strata VII and VI represent a com-plete different culture from the previous Canaanite settlement.

The once large urban center with its distinctive material culture, con-tinuously occupied by Philistines from Levels VII to IV, was destroyed and came to its end during the early 10th century B.C.E., possibly due to the inva-sions lead by David early in the ninth century.[33] The once great Philistine city, that covered the entire 50 acre tell, was now reduced to a small fortified town confined to the upper 10 acres of the upper city. Philistines continued to occupy the small upper city while the lower city lay abandoned for the next 270 years. Occupation started again during the 7th century B.C.E.[34]

By the end of the 8th century this small upper city was destroyed during a campaign led by the Neo-Assyrian king Sennacherib, who at that time also conquered several cities in Judah.[35] Control of Ekron then passed from Judah to

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[31] Dothan, *The Philistines,* 21.

[32] Trude K. Dothan, "What we know about the Philistines," *Biblical Archaeology Review.*VII/4 (1982b): 28.

[33] Israel Finkelstein & Neil A. Silberman, *David and Solomon: in search of the Bible's sacred kings and the roots of the Western tradition* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 96.

[34] Trude K. Dothan, "Ekron of the Philistines. Part I: Where they came from, How they settled down and the places they worshiped in," *Biblical Archaeology Review* XVI /1 (1990): 36.

[35] David Ussishkin. "Notes on Megiddo, Gezer, Ashdod and Tel Batash in the tenth to ninth centuries B.C.," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 277/278 (1990):75)

the expanding Neo-Assyrian Empire. "It was then, under Neo-Assyrian hegemony, that Ekron expanded physically, enjoyed a period of renewed prosperity and once again became an important city-state."[36]

Excavation results from stratum I, the occupation level following the 701 B.C.E. conquest by Sennacherib, exposed a prosperous city covering 75 acres, dramatically larger than the Iron Age I city. This growth and expansion during the Iron Age II is also evident at the four remaining Philistine cities – Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza and Gath.

2   Archaeological evidence at Ekron, stratum I (7-6th century B.C.E.)

The most impressive element of the Iron Age II city from stratum I is the olive oil industrial zone discovered in field III in the lower city. Here the archaeologists found 115 olive presses manufactured from stone. This number by far exceeded any number of oil installations uncovered at any other Iron Age II site. The number of oil installations found at other Iron Age II sites in Samaria and Judea ranges between two and seven installations per site. One can thus conclude "that the oil industry at Tel Miqne, at the peak of its development, was at a scale previously unknown in the ancient world."[37]

More significantly, for the purpose of this article, is the archaeological evidence reflecting a very strong Judean presence at Ekron at that time. The most important evidence of Judeans living in the Philistine city of Ekron at that time is the ten four-horned altars found in the rooms adjacent to the olive oil installations. These monumental horned altars with horns at each cornerstone were popular in both Israelite dwellings and sanctuaries during the Iron Age II. Similar examples of these altars, used to burn incense, exist from Dan, Arad, Megiddo, Lachish and Tel Qedesh.[38] Seal impressions, related to the reign of Hezekiah, a royal dedicatory inscription and several other finds are clear evidence of a strong Israelite/Judean presence at Ekron at that time.[39] Although other archaeological evidence from Ekron and surrounding towns are evidence of Judean/Israelite presence, the four horned altars are most significant, for they represent a measure of cultural and religious tolerance between Philistines and Israelites which does not correlate with the narratives in the Hebrew Bible.

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[36] Hayim Tadmor, "Philistia Under Assyrian Rule," *Biblical Archaeologist* 29 (1966): 88.

[37] David Eitam, "Selected oil and wine installations in Ancient Israel," in *Olive oil in Antiquity, Israel and Neighbouring Countries from Neolithic to Early Arab Period* (eds. Michael Heltzer & David Eitam, Haifa: University of Haifa, 1987), 91.

[38] Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the land of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 500.

[39] Symour Gitin, Amihai Mazar & Ephraim Stern, eds., *Mediterranean Peoples in Transition. Thirteenth to Early Tenth Centuries B.C.E.* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1998), 1-16.

These finds at Ekron and Timnah are very significant in the context of this article. Here at the same city and in the same region where the Israelites and Philistines once fought bitterly against one another, we find evidence which I interpret to show signs of a period of harmonious co-existence between Philistines and Israelites. From the evidence it may also be is possible to deduct that:

(i)   there were Philistines, Israelites and Judeans in the 7th century B.C.E. that seemed to develop a level of toleration regarding ethnic, cultural and religious differences;
(ii)   traditionally opposing ethnic groups were willing to share workplaces and living areas;
(iii)   for survival, they exploited the ideal location of Ekron along a major trade route to establish an industry from which all stakeholders benefitted;
(iv)   the demand for olives for the oil industry at Ekron stimulated not only the production of olives in the neighbouring Judean highlands, but also agriculture in general in the region.

H   SIGNIFICANCE FOR POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA

From what was discussed above it seems that the indigenous settlers of Israel/Palestine, the Canaanites/Israelites, clashed at numerous occasions with the "Newcomers" to the Southern Levant, the so-called Sea Peoples, of whom the Philistines was one distinct group.

Several thousands of years after these events, we encounter a more or less similar scenario in Southern Africa. "Newcomers" from European and Asian decent settled at the southern tip of Africa. Separatists from these groups later on moved further north into the continent. They brought with them their colonial heritage, religions and customs. As they moved further north, they got in contact with numerous African tribes. Due to land disputes, cattle theft etcetra, numerous conflicts, clashes and battles took place between these completely diverse ethnic groups.

Like in the case of the Philistines and Israelites, the author is convinced that the *intolerance* of cultural and religious diversities between the "Newcomers" and indigenous Africans was the main reason for these clashes and conflicts. These conflicts eventually lead to separate development and the discriminatory system of Apartheid. This cruel system lasted for more than 50 years and is the main reason for the inequalities between racial groups, as well as the present proportions of poverty in South Africa referred to above.

In conclusion, a few remarks on what I believe South Africans can profit from the Philistine/Israelite experience discussed above. Although no direct line can be drawn between the ancient Philistines and Israelites living at Ekron

and the situation in South Africa in the 21st century, it may at least stimulate some thought on this relevant topic in South Africa at present.

The archaeological evidence at Ekron indicates that the Philistines recognised the Israelites within their midst. They fully accepted them in spite of their dissimilar customs, language, rituals and religious ceremonies. This formed the platform for their harmonious co-existence. Recognition and tolerance of cultural and religious goods of the different ethnic groups in South Africa are very important prerequisites for harmonious co-existence, which will in time lead to improved living conditions for all and the eradication of poverty.

In the story about Samson and Delilah, the authors of the Hebrew Bible create the impression that the Israelites should rather refrain from any contact with the Philistines. They are portrayed to be inferior to the Israelites, because they do not serve the same God and aren't circumcised. Although archaeological finds can't speak for themselves, the evidence from Ekron favours a sense of cultural and religious tolerance amongst the occupants of the city, which may just as well be one of the reasons why the city flourished. Toleration of ethnic or religious diversities is not high on the agenda of the average Black, White or Coloured South African citizen. We have to inculcate a greater level of cultural and religious tolerance amongst the different races and ethnic groups. Tolerance is essential for our long-term survival, co-existence and improvement of living conditions. A society where one group regards their culture or religion to be more advanced or civilized than that of others, will never reach a stage where they can work side by side for a better life together.

For a society to develop a culture of acceptance and tolerance takes time. In the case of the Philistines and Israelites it took ages, about 700 years, to eventually labored shoulder to shoulder in factories and in the fields. Although South Africans had many mentors in the past who tried to establish a culture of tolerance and Ubuntu, indications at present are that they are not there yet. Until this culture is not established, the struggle to narrow the poverty gap between rich and poor will not gain momentum.

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