

A Re-Reading of 1 Kings 21:1–29 and Jehu's Revolution in Dialogue with Farisani and Nzimande: Negotiating Socio-economic Redress in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

More than a century after South Africa's Natives Land Act of 1913 which entrenched land dispossession and poverty, many black South Africans are still haunted by socio-economic injustice as well as the legacy of colonialism and apartheid in the land discourse even after twenty years of democratic rule. In view of the persistent socio-economic injustice in South Africa today, the main question posed by this article is: would a socio-economic reading of 1 Kgs 21:1–29 in the context of the Omri dynasty offer possibilities for socio-economic redress in South Africa? This article engages with Farisani's and Nzimande's study of the text under discussion, and draws parallels between the Omri dynasty and South Africa's colonial and apartheid past in relation to the present land discourse. It is argued that given the seeming failure of Elijah to redress the dispossession of Naboth of his vineyard, Jehu's revolution could be used as a model for socio-economic redress in South Africa.

A INTRODUCTION

The issue of land in post-apartheid South Africa should be settled once and for all. The quest for socio-economic justice and equitable sharing of the wealth accruing from the use of productive land in his country underpins the statement by President Mugabe of Zimbabwe that:

. . . Repossession (of White owned farms) is in pursuit of true justice as we know and understand it . . . We have said as we acquire land, we shall not deprive the White farmers of land completely. Every one of them is entitled to at least one farm, but they would want to continue to have more than one farm . . .¹

One wonders whether this quest is shared by the previously disadvantaged black South Africans, when considering the apparent problem of inequitable access to land and benefits from the use of productive land. The Natives Land Act of 1913 and the subsequent historic land dispossession have stimu-

¹ Robert Mugabe. "Address to the World Summit on Sustainable Development," 5 [cited 3 September 2002]. Online: http://www.sarpn.org/documents/d0000039/Mugabe_WSSD.pdf, 5–7.

lated the discourse on land and socio-economic injustice in the country. As such, some scholars are of the view that the legacy of colonialism and apartheid regarding the issue of land and economic injustice continues to haunt majority of South Africans, who are black.² Many white South Africans benefited economically from the colonial and apartheid past in terms of the use of agricultural land, and they continue to do so even today. The slow progress on land reform in South Africa is problematic and frustrating to poor black South Africans. A pertinent question arises: could the failure to redress the socio-economic injustice, which South African scholars agree was inherited from the colonial and apartheid past, be a matter that needs to be addressed? This question brings to mind the story of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kgs 21:1-29.

In 1 Kgs 21:1-29, Ahab confiscates Naboth's vineyard. As the king and a political élite, Ahab must have owned land of his own. But he wanted more productive land than he already had (see above statement by Mugabe), and nothing would stop him from dispossessing Naboth of his vineyard. The injustice of dispossessing Naboth of his land led to a confrontation between the Prophet Elijah and Ahab (1 Kgs 21:17-24). As Nzimande rightly observes, the confrontation did not lead to justice.³ The elements and evidence of socio-economic redress and land redistribution are omitted in 1 Kgs 21:1-29. Thus, one could reason that the text in question failed to redress the problem of socio-economic injustice. In this instance, land dispossession is construed as an element of socio-economic injustice. Thus, a critical question to pose is: was the problem of land dispossession ever addressed in the history of the Israelites, in the Monarchical period?

There seems to be very limited inquiry into how land redistribution and socio-economic redress were advanced in the text under discussion during the period of the Omri dynasty. In view of the evidence of land dispossession both in the South African context and in 1 Kgs 21:1-29, it might be worthwhile to consider the relevance of the story of Naboth's vineyard, which was told within the context of the Omri dynasty, to the situation in South Africa. Thus, this article will determine whether a socio-economic reading of 1 Kgs 21:1-29 offers possibilities for socio-economic redress in South Africa. Given the seeming failure of Elijah to redress the injustice of dispossessing Naboth of his

² Ruth Hall, "The Legacy of the Land Act of 1913," (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Theological Society of South Africa, University of Western Cape, Cape Town, 19 June 2013), n.p.; Sampie J. Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa, 1652-2002* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press / Sandton: KMM Review Publishing, 2005), 3-4, 441.

³ Makhosazana K. Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel: A Post-Colonial *Imbokodo* Reading of the Story of Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21:1-16)," in *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest of a Shared Meaning* (ed. Hans De Wit and Gerald West; Leiden/London: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2008), 252.

vineyard, could a critique of Jehu's revolution provide clues for socio-economic redress and land redistribution in South Africa?

To answer this question, this discussion will interact with literature on land issues in the OT and in South Africa by both local and global scholars. Attention will be given, first, to the land discourse in South Africa; second, to a socio-economic reading of 1 Kgs 21:1-29; third, to Jehu's revolution and the issue of socio-economic redress; and in particular to the issue of socio-economic redress in 1 Kgs 21:1-29 and of land in South Africa. As a departure point, we shall consider the land discourse in South Africa.

B LAND DISCOURSE IN SOUTH AFRICA

1 Legacy of Colonialism and Apartheid

Ruth Hall has argued that the landlessness of black South Africans and their poverty are linked to the legacy of colonialism and apartheid. In fact, the present socio-economic realities in South Africa, which are marked by land dispossession, oppression, and exploitation of black Africans, are founded on and inherited from the colonial and apartheid past.⁴ Hall's view suggests that the discourse of land in South Africa cannot be divorced from the country's legacy of the colonial and apartheid past. This view is not surprising given the historical reality of dispossessing black South Africans of their land by the European colonists, which entrenched persistent poverty and inequality. What is questionable about Hall's claim is the apparent lack of clarity on whether the black South Africans were poor before their land was taken or whether the land dispossession induced poverty among the people. Thus, it could be helpful to examine the issue of ownership and/or occupation of land before the era of land dispossession.

Prior to the Natives Land Act of 1913 and the confiscation of land owned by black Africans was an era in which poverty was minimal for the natives.⁵ Poverty was minimal because black South Africans owned productive

⁴ Hall, "Legacy," n.p. For further reading, see Kirk Helliker, "Land Reform and Marginalised Communities in the Eastern Cape Countryside of Post-Apartheid South Africa," in *Land Struggles and Civil Society in Southern Africa* (ed. Kirk Helliker and Tendai Murisa; New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2011), 43-44; Ruth Hall, "Reconciling the Past, Present and Future," in *Land, Memory, Reconstruction and Justice: Perspectives on Land Claims in South Africa* (ed. Cherryl Walker, Anna Bohlin, Ruth Hall, and Thembele Kepe; Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 18; Elelwani Farisani, "Land in the Old Testament: The Conflict between Ahab and Elijah (1 Kings 21:1-29) and Its Significance for Our South African Context Today" (M.A. diss., University of Natal, 1993), 68-73.

⁵ See Leepo Modise and Ndikho Mtshiselwa, "The Natives Land Act of 1913 Engineered the Poverty of Black South Africans: A Historico-Ecclesiastical Perspective," *StHistE* 39/2 (2013): 362.

land which they used productively for their economic well-being. In his study of the Nguni tribe of Natal, Maylam claims that "in the year 1874 it was estimated that, in practice, about five million acres of land owned by the British colonists and companies were occupied by black South Africans."⁶ Black South Africans paid rent to white landlords to occupy such land. It is difficult, at this point, to assume that black Africans generated wealth or were economically well off under that arrangement. Nonetheless, it is apparent that land was somehow accessible to black South Africans at that time. Later, in 1880, it became more widely reported that black South Africans purchased land. Ownership of land and its productive use by black South Africans increased. For example, the acres of land owned by blacks in Natal increased from between 6000 and 8000 to 238 473 acres of land by 1905.⁷ From Maylam's claim, black South Africans evidently owned and effectively utilised land for their welfare and for their economic stability prior to the Natives Land Act of 1913. With the produce from their land, black people participated in the economic market of South Africa. However, a critical question is: what happened to the productiveness and economic stability of black South Africans? Terreblanche has attempted to answer this question and to account for socio-economic injustice in South Africa.

The point of this discussion is that South Africa's colonial and apartheid past, particularly the promulgation of the Natives Land Act of 1913, entrenched the poverty and inequality, which characterise the lives of black South Africans today.⁸ Although black South Africans had access to productive land, the 1913 Act prohibited them from further owning and using land outside the "native reserves,"⁹ which constituted 8.3 percent of South Africa's land. It appears that the prohibition of black South Africans from accumulating productive land caused their economic activities to become restricted and stagnant resulting later in poverty. As Terreblanche has noted, the prohibition of black South Africans from renting land for farming from the white people indicates a restriction on their economic activities.¹⁰ Thus, the impact of poverty and inequality became intensified.

⁶ Paul Maylam, *A History of the African People of South Africa: From the Early Iron Age to the 1970s* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1986), 86. According to Terreblanche, the seizure of the productive land owned by the Xhosa people in the Eastern Cape between 1835 and 1853 shows yet another example of how the British colonists exploited black South Africans. See Terreblanche, *History of Inequality*, 385.

⁷ Maylam, *History of the African People*, 86.

⁸ Terreblanche, *History of Inequality*, 260–264, 385. Modise and Mtshiselwa support Terreblanche's claim, but from a historico-ecclesiastical point of view. See Modise and Mtshiselwa, "Natives Land Act," 359–378.

⁹ Terreblanche, *History of Inequality*, 260.

¹⁰ Terreblanche, *History of Inequality*, 263–264.

The idea that the British colonists instigated wars that led to the seizure of land owned by black South Africans is perturbing.¹¹ Thus, black people were violently dispossessed of their land and the conquered land then became the private property of the British colonists.¹² The violent acquisition of the productive land, which was first and foremost a means of livelihood, induced among black South Africans, the poverty which is still experienced in the present post-apartheid era.

More than a century after the promulgation of the Natives Land Act of 1913 which entrenched land dispossession and poverty, many black South Africans are still haunted by socio-economic injustice. The legacy of colonialism and apartheid in form of socio-economic injustice with regard to the land discourse continues despite the country's transition to democratic rule. One would have expected South Africa's democratic rule to come with the redress of the socio-economic injustice that was driven by land dispossession during the colonial and apartheid era. What possibly went wrong? Did the negotiation of democracy and the acceptance of neo-liberal economic globalisation fail to redress the legacy of colonialism and apartheid in form of socio-economic injustice and land dispossession? These questions are addressed in the following section.

2 Land and Neo-Liberal Economic Globalisation

Terreblanche ascribes the apparent failure to redress the legacy of colonialism and apartheid at the dawn of democracy in South Africa to what he calls the "élite compromise."¹³ That compromise was between the black political élites of the African National Congress (ANC) and the white élites of the corporate sector. A compromise is reached when two parties struggle to attain their respective objectives and eventually meet each other halfway. But the agreement can be costly and detrimental to any of the negotiating parties. Regarding the "élite compromise," Terreblanche explains that the compromise was over the nature of the economic policies that would be adopted in the post-apartheid dispensation. Instead of seeking the redress of the legacy of colonialism and apartheid through land redistribution, the black political élites agreed to policies that favour high economic growth rate.¹⁴ This meant that privatisation

¹¹ Aninka Claassens, "For Whites Only – Land Ownership in South Africa," in *A Harvest of Discontent: The Land Question in South Africa* (ed. Michael De Klerk; Cape Town: Institute of a Democratic Alternative of South Africa, 1991), 43–45.

¹² Ernst M. Conradie, Dawid E. de Villiers and Johann Kinghorn, *Church and Land* (Stellenbosch: The Stellenbosch Economic Project, Centre for Contextual Hermeneutics, University of Stellenbosch, 1992), 3. See also Claassens, "For Whites Only," 45.

¹³ Sampie J. Terreblanche, *Lost in Transformation: South Africa's Search for a New Future since 1986* (Johannesburg: KMM Review Publishing Company, 2012), 124; Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality*, 600.

¹⁴ Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality*, 600.

rather than redistribution of the land which was taken from black South Africans was a priority to the black political élites.¹⁵ However, this decision appears to be costly to the majority of South Africans, in that it sealed any possibility of retaining land and of escaping from poverty.

As Terreblanche also rightly observes, privatisation specifically increased the predominantly white ownership and white control of private business, including productive land, at the expense of black empowerment and the redistribution of South Africa's wealth.¹⁶ In addition, privatisation was entrenched at the cost of socio-economic redress, which could have resulted in equitable sharing of the wealth from the use of productive land. Hence, Saayman decries the private ownership of land. He argues that privatisation of land did not only legitimise land theft, but the policy is alien to the African theological view of communal access to as well as ownership and use of land.¹⁷ Saayman's argument is interesting as it shows that privatisation of land, which is based on the American led neo-liberal economic globalisation, does not support equitable sharing of South Africa's wealth. Instead, privatisation promotes economic growth, but shows little concern for poverty alleviation. The emphasis on privatisation and economic growth suggests that the "élite compromise" implied, to a large extent, the acceptance of the American led neo-liberal economic globalisation.¹⁸ In other words, privatisation is linked to the idea of globalisation.

The neo-liberal economic globalisation which fosters global relations and influence, as well as its demands and pressures, has suppressed the demand for redistributive land reforms in South Africa.¹⁹ How did this happen? Accord-

¹⁵ Sampie J. Terreblanche, "The Need for a Transformation Period towards a Post-Apartheid South Africa," *OccP* 3 (1991): 9; Andile Mngxitama, "The Taming of Land Resistance: Lessons from the National Land Committee," *JAAS* 41/1-2 (2006): 41; Willem Saayman, "Being Human Together in Democratic South Africa" (paper Presented at the Conference on Violence in the Democratic South Africa: A Challenge to Theology and the Churches, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 11 August 2010), 5.

¹⁶ Terreblanche, "Need for a Transformation Period," 9.

¹⁷ See Saayman, "Being Human Together," 5.

¹⁸ According to both Lemke and Mudge, the neo-liberal economic globalisation was coined by the Chicago school of thought, which sought to liberate the economic market from the state governments. See Thomas Lemke, "'The Birth of Bio-Politics': Michel Foucault's Lecture at the Collège de France on Neo-Liberal Governmentality," *EcSoc* 30/2 (2001): 197; Stephanie Mudge, "The State of the Art: What is Neo-Liberalism?" *SocEcRev* 6 (2008): 715. The liberation of the economic market from the state means that the state government is controlled by the market rather than the market being supervised or monitored by the state. Neo-liberal economic globalisation places emphasis on privatisation, free trade, and deregulation of key sectors, and on capitalism.

¹⁹ Ruth Hall, "Land Reform in South Africa: Successes, Challenges and Concrete Proposals for the Way Forward," in *Land Reform in South Africa: Constructive Aims*

ing to Hall, the deregulation of the agricultural sector which included the removal of key state functions such as price control, marketing and subsidised credit has contributed to the circumscription of land redistribution.²⁰ This means that for black South Africans to retain their land, they need to acquire credit (capital), but they also have no control of the price of the land which was seized from them. Therefore, acquiring land by black South Africans in such circumstances is difficult.

Neo-liberal economic globalisation also places emphasis on global relations, economic growth²¹ and production. The farmers including a few emerging black ones need to produce high quality agricultural products to compete in the global market. Hall stresses the importance of production as she argues that the redistribution of land resulted in the decline in production, which subsequently stifled economic growth.²² The decline in production emanated from the talks of land redistribution which triggered fears on the part of the white farmers that their productive land would be confiscated from them. Thus, white farmers under-produced, and the minimal production stifled economic growth. Notwithstanding the root of the fear and the reduction in production, it is evident that production is important in the context of neo-liberal economic globalisation.

Hall also argues that if land reform is to redress inequality and alleviate poverty, it is a prerequisite to redistribute assets (land) and maintain or increase production.²³ The second prerequisite makes economic sense in that land redistribution will need to forestall the challenges to economic growth and poverty alleviation. Furthermore, sustaining or increasing production establishes the economic rationale that seems to be missing in the land reform discussion. Although Hall supports the idea of land redistribution, the disturbing reality is

and Positive Outcomes – Reflecting on Experiences on the Way to 2014 (ed. Tracy Seider; Johannesburg: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2009), 33; Helliker, "Land Reform," 46, 66.

²⁰ Hall, "Land Reform in South Africa," 33.

²¹ For Mbeki, economic growth alludes to the increase in the production or output which an economy produces. Moeletsi Mbeki, "Underdevelopment in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Role of the Private Sector and Political Elites," *CFPB* 85 (2005): 9. See also Patrick Bond, "Basic Infrastructure for Socio-Economic Development, Environmental Protection and Geographical Desegregation: South Africa's Unmet Challenge," *Geoforum* 30 (1998): 47–48. An increase in production /or output is induced by the investments and new businesses which subsequently provides capital to start a business.

²² Ruth Hall, "Land Reform for What? Land Use, Production and Livelihoods," in *Another Countryside? Policy Option for Land and Agrarian Reform in South Africa* (ed. Ruth Hall; Cape Town: Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies / Cape Town: University of the Western Cape, 2009), 56.

²³ Hall, "Land Reform for What?" 56; Hall, "Land Reform in South Africa," 32.

that the land which was confiscated from black South Africans by the white (British) colonists continues to be, by and large, in the hands of white South Africans. The influential neo-liberal economic globalisation, with its emphasis on privatisation, competitive production, and economic growth, does not appear to be helpful in the pursuit of socio-economic redress in particular of land redistribution. In my view, privatisation of productive land such as farms and the government's slow progress in land redistribution show the influence of neo-liberal economic globalisation on South Africa's economy. Moreover, the private ownership of wealth and land (farms) by the élites (a few blacks and many whites) at the expense of the need for equitable distribution and sharing of wealth amounts to socio-economic injustice.

In respect of land and socio-economic injustice, private ownership of wealth and land perpetuate inequality, as the poor become poorer while the rich become richer. Both Maluleke and Mosala rightfully point out the rationale behind land redistribution and redressing socio-economic injustice, that is, the advancement of the interests of the poor.²⁴ This line of reasoning is appealing, mainly because it highlights God's preferential option for the poor which advocates the redress of socio-economic injustice. Therefore, from a theological point of view, one finds it difficult to accept a system which conspicuously disadvantages the poor, while protecting the wealth of the rich élites through privatisation of land.

The discussion of land in South Africa, with particular interest in the legacy of colonialism and apartheid as well as of neo-liberal economic globalisation, is significant. As noted earlier, in the colonial and apartheid past, many black South Africans lost their land to the white British colonists. The loss entrenched and intensified their poverty. Land dispossession which gave rise to poverty and inequality constitutes socio-economic injustice. However, the demise of apartheid and the dawn of democracy failed to redress land dispossession and the socio-economic injustice that accompanied it due to the "élite compromise." To make matters worse, the acceptance of the neo-liberal economic globalisation did not seem to help socio-economic redress as it affects the ownership of land by private companies, which are owned, largely, by white South Africans. Furthermore, it is difficult for the majority of black South Africans to either repossess their land or equitably share land with white people because they lack the capital to do so. The apparent failure to redress socio-economic injustice which is manifested in the land issue in South Africa is disturbing, and it is therefore pertinent to make a case for redressing socio-

²⁴ Tinyiko Maluleke, "The Land of the Church of the Land: A Response to the Whole Issue," *BCTA* 5/3 (1999): 63. For a related view, see also Itumeleng J. Mosala, "Ownership or Non-Ownership of Land Forms the Basis of Wealth and Poverty: A Black Theological Perspective," in *An African Challenge to the Church in the Twenty-First Century* (ed. Mongezi Guma and Leslie Milton; Cape Town: South African Council of Churches, 1997), 57-58.

economic injustice in South Africa. We now turn to a socio-economic re-reading of 1 Kgs 21:1-29.

C A SOCIO-ECONOMIC RE-READING OF 1 KINGS 21:1-29

1 A Brief Description of the Omri Dynasty

In order to investigate the possibilities that a socio-economic reading of 1 Kgs 21:1-29 in the context of the Omri dynasty offers for socio-economic redress in South Africa, some critical OT research will be considered. In his article, "Social Class as an Analytic and Hermeneutical Category in Biblical Studies,"²⁵ Gottwald shows that the acquisition of land in ancient Israel was achieved through a heavy taxation system, peasant indebtedness, and violence, which included killing of small land owners.²⁶ He claims that the political élites extracted heavy taxes from the farmers during the monarchical period in Israel.²⁷ Considering the minimal production by the small farmers in the light of the heavy taxes, a shortfall in the payment of such taxes could be expected.

In developing Samaria as a commercial centre Omri re-entered into a trade alliance with Phoenicia. The alliance was made, first, through the marriage between Ahab the son of Omri and Jezebel a Phoenician princess and the daughter of Ethbaal the king of Tyre. Second, as related in 1 Kgs 5:10-11, prior to the rise of the Omri dynasty, the Phoenicians supplied Israelites with timber as well as with the tools and skills to cut timber in return for food. Farisani also shows that Israelites were successful producers of agricultural products.²⁸ On the land issue, Mosala offers a noteworthy evaluation of the Davidic-Solomonic monarchical foreign relations.²⁹ In his reading of Genesis 4:1-16, he observes that, as a result of the foreign relations, the dispossession and the exploitation of Israelite peasants by the ruling class hegemony led to the landlessness of the village peasants.³⁰ Also, 1 Kgs 5:13-18 narrates the exploitation of the peasants through forced labour. This form of exploitation will be touched on later. Omri sustained the trade relations between the Israelites and the Phoenicians,³¹ but due to the heavy taxes, indebtedness and

²⁵ Norman K. Gottwald, "Social Class as an Analytic and Hermeneutical Category in Biblical Studies," *JBL* 112/1 (1993): 3-22.

²⁶ For further reading, see Gottwald, "Social Class," 5-6, 8; Elelwani Farisani, "A Sociological Reading of the Confrontation between Ahab and Elijah in 1 Kings 21:1-29," *OTE* 18/1 (2005): 49.

²⁷ Gottwald, "Social Class," 8.

²⁸ Farisani, "Sociological Reading," 48, 50.

²⁹ Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989), 34-35.

³⁰ Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 34-35.

³¹ Marie supports Farisani's view that the marriage of Ahab and Jezebel was a solidification of international relations between the Israelites and the Phoenicians. See Rowanie Marie, "Land, Power and Justice in South Africa in Dialogue with the Bibli-

land loss, it seems that the relationship had a negative impact on the Israelites. Nevertheless, the Israelite élites did not seem to observe anything wrong with their socio-economic policies and practices. Rather, they tried to justify such practices.

The élites in Israel's monarchic period claimed that their superior wealth and power were justified because the nation experienced improved production, domestic peace, and freedom from foreign aggression.³² This means that the accumulation of wealth by the rich at the expense of the poor was not seen as a problem because there was improvement in production as well as good relations with the foreign states. Interesting as the view is, Gottwald fails to elaborate on it or relate it to the Omri dynasty. Thus, Farisani's sociological reading of 1 Kgs 21 becomes significant.

According to Farisani, as a way of sustaining relations with the Phoenicians and enhancing economic growth, Ahab intensified agricultural production in Israel. On the one hand, we cannot simply rule out what appears to be the positive contributions of the Omri dynasty, which used its wealth and political power to achieve production, domestic peace, and economic stability. On the other hand, the intensification of production was detrimental to the small farmers in that they could not meet King Ahab's demand to overproduce for the Phoenicians. As a result, the small farmers, having been declared economically disadvantaged and unproductive, were forced off their land.³³ This means that the wealthy Israelites, because of their financial muscle, gained possession of the productive land, when the small farmers could not afford to produce the quantities required by Ahab. Farisani's view that the growth of the wealthy class increased the gap between the rich and the poor is also not surprising.³⁴ Furthermore, as a result of the loss of land, the poverty of the Israelite peasants became intensified. Since the land was the main source of income and wealth generation, it is conceivable that poverty among the peasants was intensified due to land loss.

There seems to have been little regard for the poor during the reign of Omri. Instead of uplifting the poor peasants from their poverty, Omri was more concerned with the accumulation of assets such as land and the generation of personal wealth. However, if understood first and foremost within the context of private ownership of land, the issue of self-enrichment on the part of the king would make some sense. In 1 Kgs 16:24, Omri purchased a parcel of land

cal Story of Naboth's Vineyard," (M.A. diss., University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2004), 34.

³² Gottwald, "Social Class," 9.

³³ Farisani, "Sociological Reading," 50; Judith Todd, "The Pre-Deuteronomistic Elijah Cycle," in *Elijah and Elisha in Socio-Cultural Perspective* (ed. Robert Coote; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1992), 6.

³⁴ Farisani, "Sociological Reading," 50.

from a citizen named Shemer for two talents, and there he built the city of Samaria. In this instance, there is no evidence of violent acquisition of land. Instead, as Andersen rightly points out, the king did not abuse his power to secure land from Shemer, but purchased it.³⁵ In other words, from a socio-economic point of view, both the buyer (Omri) and the seller (Shemer) were willing to enter into a transaction, which would suggest that both the buyer and the seller benefited from this transaction. Nevertheless, Scripture is silent about Shemer's condition after selling his land. It is not clear whether Shemer purchased and productively used another land so as to escape poverty. Due to that silence, one would hesitate to conclude that both Omri and Shemer benefited equally from the transaction. Nonetheless, the land (on which Samaria was built) became the private possession of the king of Israel.³⁶

It is not certain that land was privatised at the time of the Omri dynasty. On the one hand, the limited evidence of private ownership of land during the Omri dynasty in the OT as well as the unsubstantiated view of private ownership of land by Omri would occasion such uncertainty, as noted by both Farisani and Cogan. On the other hand, Omri's purchase of land indicates that there was private ownership of land in Israel. It can then be assumed that Omri owned the land that he purchased. Thus, self-enrichment at the expense of the poverty of the Israelite peasants is evident. Farisani also notes that there was foreign ownership of land, for instance, the ownership of the land purchased from Shemer by Omri as well as of Israel's land by kings from the House of Omri.³⁷ Therefore, it is clear that the land belonging to the Israelites was eventually owned by foreigners, in particular, by the rich élites.

Gottwald and Farisani have noted that many native Israelites, specifically the small farmers, lost their land, and the loss intensified their poverty. Although some people such as Shemer were compensated for their land in form of cash payment, there is no evidence that they used the compensation effectively and that they escaped poverty. Worth noting is the view that the rich native élites induced land loss and the attendant poverty. Political figures (e.g. Omri) enriched themselves by purchasing land for private ownership. This act bears elements of capitalism and privatisation of productive assets. Furthermore, the relations with the foreign states resulted in heavy taxes, indebtedness of small farmers, loss of land, forced labour, and eventually the poverty of Israelites. Another crucial issue with regard to the acquisition of land by the rich élites is the use of violence which seems to be evident in the story of the dispossession of Naboth's vineyard.

³⁵ See Francis Andersen, "The Socio-Juridical Background of the Naboth Incident," *JBL* 85/1 (1966): 49.

³⁶ See Farisani, "Sociological Reading," 48 and Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 419.

³⁷ Farisani, "Sociological Reading," 48.

2 Dispossessing Naboth of his Vineyard

Farisani asserts that the story of Naboth's vineyard mirrors the socio-economic realities of the period of the Omri dynasty. The fact that the story portrays Ahab the son of Omri as being responsible for the death of Naboth and the confiscation of Naboth's vineyard legitimises Farisani's assertion. He (Farisani) looks at the influence of the relations with foreign states on Ahab's decision making and actions. He notes that in terms of the Phoenician practices, the sovereignty of the ruler was unlimited.³⁸ This means that for Ahab, being in power gave him the right to acquire land from anyone, at any cost, and by any means. Thus, in the case of Ahab's appropriation of Naboth's vineyard, the influence of the Phoenicians seems to be evident. An important question is: how was Naboth dispossessed of his vineyard?

We have seen that Ahab offered Naboth compensation for the vineyard, which was close to his palace (cf. 1 Kgs 21:1–2).³⁹ First and foremost, from a socio-economic perspective, the exchange of land on Ahab's terms, which was the provision of compensation in form of another land or the value of the land in silver, was different from the "willing buyer willing seller" arrangement evident in the case of Omri and Shemer. As noted above, Naboth was not willing to offer Ahab his land but rejected the king's offer, despite the possibility that Ahab offered a fair and just price for it. Ahab's offer might have been fair, but because it contravened the tradition of restricting the transfer of land from one tribe to another,⁴⁰ Naboth rejected the offer. Naboth and Ahab were from different tribes, that is, Naboth was a Jezreelite and Ahab was the king of Samaria.⁴¹ Therefore, Omri's purchase of Shemer's land which was in the territory of Manasseh was made possible because Ahab probably descended from the tribe of Manasseh.⁴²

³⁸ Farisani, "Sociological Reading," 54; Walter Brueggemann, "Reflections on Biblical Understandings of Property," *IRM* 64/256 (1975): 356; Mark Love, "Blessed are the Meek: The Land and Economic Justice," *Leaven* 1/2 (1990): 22; Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2002), 94.

³⁹ Both White and Andersen observe that the vineyard was within the proximity of Ahab's palace; hence, he could easily desire it. See also Marsha White, "Naboth's Vineyard and Jehu's Coup: The Legitimation of a Dynastic Extermination," *VT* 44/1 (1994): 70; Andersen, "Socio-Juridical," 48.

⁴⁰ Marvin A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 249 (cf. Lev 25:8–31; Deut 25:5–10; Jer 32:6–12). Jezreel was located in the tribal territory of Issachar, while Samaria was in the territory of Manasseh (Josh 19:18; 17:1–13).

⁴¹ 1 Kgs 21:1.

⁴² Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 249; cf. 1 Kgs 16:24.

Subsequently, Ahab executed Naboth and possessed his productive asset, the vineyard.⁴³ The fact that Naboth's execution and the possession of his land took effect regardless of his refusal to offer Ahab the ownership of the land shows that King Ahab, being influenced by the Phoenicians, possessed land at all cost. Nonetheless, it is useful to probe whether there are views that legitimised Ahab's confiscation of Naboth's vineyard.

In his article, "Reflections on Biblical Understandings of Property," Brueggemann provides some rationale for Ahab's appropriation of Naboth's vineyard. He reasons that "Ahab believes that property is to be bought and sold and traded and bargained."⁴⁴ Ahab viewed land as a commodity which could be accessed with money. Based on such a view, only rich people with capital could afford to acquire land, but the poor who did not possess financial resources would be unable to purchase productive land and would subsequently remain in their state of poverty. However, Naboth's understanding of land as an inheritance and a birth-right in 1 Kgs 21:3 differed from Ahab's view of land as a commodity. Therefore, Naboth's refusal to sell the land makes sense. In his discussion of the differing views of land by both Ahab and Naboth, Brueggemann remarks that, "While Ahab believes that persons, especially royal persons, can own and possess and even seize land, Naboth holds to the notion, surely primitive by contrast, that persons have rootage in and belong to the land."⁴⁵ What Brueggemann means by having rootage in and belonging to the land is that land has a history which links it to a person and his or her family. Naboth's vineyard belonged to his family and not just to him. Thus, in Naboth's view, the land could not be sold, and by and large he rejected the idea of reducing the land into a commodity and commercialising it.

Volschenk concurs with Brueggemann that Ahab viewed land as a tradable commodity while Naboth saw it as an inalienable inheritance. However, Volschenk uniquely highlights an element of self-indulgent consumerism in Ahab. This means that Ahab was more interested in the accumulation of assets – the productive land – and less on Naboth's dependence on land for his economic wellbeing. In my view, a capitalist tendency of self-enrichment is detected in Ahab. That tendency led to Naboth's loss of the land. On the issue of land loss, Volschenk argues that the kings' ignorance of the interrelationship between Yahweh, land and the people led to landlessness and death, that is, in

⁴³ 1 Kgs 21:16.

⁴⁴ Brueggemann, "Reflections," 356.

⁴⁵ Brueggemann, "Reflections," 356; Brueggemann, *The Land*, 94; Gert J. Volschenk, "The Land: Primary Category of Faith," *HvTSt* 60/1 (2004): 634; Temba L. J. Mafico, "Land Concept and Tenure in Israel and African Tradition," in *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations* (ed. Musa Dube, Andrew Mbuvi and Dora Mbuwayesango; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 242.

the case of Naboth.⁴⁶ That the land is provided by Yahweh to the Israelites as an inalienable inheritance is integral to Volschenk's argument. Instead of taking Naboth's interest into account, Ahab acted out of self-interest and became responsible for Naboth's land loss and death. However, we cannot also gloss over the impact of the foreign relations between the Omri dynasty and the Phoenicians on land dispossession, as gleaned from the role of Jezebel in the story.

In an attempt to argue for the redress of socio-economic injustice brought about by land dispossession in the OT, Nzimande reconfigures the character of Jezebel. She tries to highlight the influence of globalisation and European imperialism on the issue of socio-economic redress in South Africa by pointing out similarities between the Phoenician influence on Israel and the influence of imperialism in South Africa. In her analysis of the role of Jezebel in the dispossession of Naboth of his vineyard, Nzimande claims, first and foremost, that Phoenicia stands as an embodiment of the presence of the empire in 1 Kgs 21. Further, the Omri dynasty introduced Baal worship and implemented the terms of alliance with Phoenicia which included the imposition of heavy taxes on the people. The king also followed the Phoenician practice that allowed the king to appropriate whatever he desired. In addition, the Phoenician legacy of appropriating land which contrasted with the Israelite view of land as an inheritance (see Naboth's response to Ahab in 1 Kgs 21:1-3) is detected in Jezebel's suggestion to confiscate Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kgs 21:5-7. Thus, it is no surprise that Nzimande sees Jezebel's influence on Ahab in the orchestration of Naboth's death as a Phoenician influence.⁴⁷ One could say that the Phoenicians embodied an imperialistic influence that not only instigated land loss in Israel but also the intensification of poverty.⁴⁸ However, the situation did not go unchallenged as we see in Elijah's protest.

Farisani comments on the protest by Prophet Elijah in 1 Kgs 21:17-24. Elijah's prophecy implied that, "since Ahab shed innocent blood, his own blood must be shed."⁴⁹ Farisani, among others, sees the pronouncement against Ahab as justice. However, one would wonder why the return of the land to Naboth's family is omitted in what is regarded as justice. Old Testament interpreters cannot be blamed for the omission since the text of 1 Kgs 21 is disappointingly silent on the return of the land to Naboth's family or to any other family during the Omri dynasty. In view of the silence on the return of land to

⁴⁶ Volschenk, "The Land," 634, 638-639; Brueggemann, *The Land*, 94; Marie, "Land, Power and Justice," 37.

⁴⁷ Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel," 237, 248-249.

⁴⁸ The Deuteronomistic History offers a depiction of poverty among Israelites in the book of 2 Kings. For example, in 2 Kgs 6:5, an Israelite could not afford an axe to cut down trees, and in 2 Kgs 4:38-41, Israelites gleaned vegetables from the wild when they had nothing else to eat.

⁴⁹ Farisani, "Sociological Reading," 54.

the original owners in both the OT text and biblical scholarship, it is reasonable to conclude that there was failure to redress socio-economic injustice in terms of land dispossession in Elijah's protest.

What should we then make of the views of Brueggemann, Farisani and Nzimande? They manage to show how Naboth's execution and the confiscation of his vineyard mirror the dispossession of the Israelite peasants of their land during the Omri dynasty. However, there are apparent limitations in their contributions, as none of them mentions whether the land in question was returned to the original owners. Even though Farisani goes further to consider Jehu's revolution, clear mention of the redistribution of the seized land to either Naboth's family or any other family that lost land during the period of the Omri dynasty is missing in OT scholarship. Given the seeming failure of Elijah to redress the dispossession of Naboth of his vineyard, it would be worthwhile to investigate whether Jehu's revolution achieved socio-economic redress and redistribution of land to the original owners.

D JEHU'S REVOLUTION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC REDRESS

Nzimande asserts that the absence of justice in the story of Naboth's vineyard is disturbing.⁵⁰ That point is reasonable considering the evident lack of redress of land dispossession, exploitation of the poor by the rich political élites, and the accumulation of wealth at the expense of the less powerful. The apparent failure to redress socio-economic injustice, for instance, the need to redistribute the land in 1 Kgs 21:1–29, bears resemblance to the South African context without the elements of obtaining redress for and empowering the poor. Thus, one would disagree in part with Nzimande because an element of justice is present in the Naboth's story. However, Farisani's view of the revolution by Jehu ben Nimshi which seems to have achieved justice in Naboth's plight is noteworthy at this point.

In Farisani's view, Jehu's elimination of the Omri dynasty (with its relations with the Phoenician) in 2 Kgs 10:1–17 contains an element of justice.⁵¹ One can easily be tempted to say that justice was served in the story of Naboth's vineyard when an end was put to the Omri dynasty. However, because the land that was forcefully acquired by the Omri dynasty was not returned to the original owners or farmers, it is doubtful that justice was obtained. Thus, we need to probe further whether Jehu's revolution achieved socio-economic redress in terms of the redistribution of land to the original owners. With the apparent limitation of the OT text in this regard, one is war-

⁵⁰ Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel," 252.

⁵¹ Farisani, "Sociological Reading," 55. The elimination of the Omri dynasty is seen as a fulfilment of the prophecy by Elijah in 1 Kgs 21:21–24. See also Niels P. Lemche, *The Israelites in History and Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 52.

ranted to draw insight from the Tel Dan and the Mesha Inscriptions, with particular focus on the land issue in Israel in the ninth century B.C.E..

Schniedewind provides an analysis of the Tel Dan Inscription of the ninth century B.C.E., which partly refers to the events surrounding the revolution of Jehu, in 841 B.C.E.⁵² Line 2 which states that: *[l] bab hmh't [hb hwl]]qsY Yba la [°°°]*, translated, "[°°°]-el my father, went up [against him when] he was fighting at A[bel?]," is interesting.⁵³ In the reconstruction and translation of line 2 of the inscription, there is a reference to Abel which was the city on the border of the land of the House of Omri and the districts of the kingdom of Israel, that is, the so-called "districts of the land of the House of Omri."⁵⁴ According to Na'aman, Abel-beth-maacah (the city's full name) was a city in northern Israel; but neither Na'aman nor Schniedewind states that this land or the city of Abel was reclaimed.⁵⁵ However, if line 2 is read in conjunction with both lines 3 and 4, a different picture would emerge. Line 3 mentions that an Israelite king entered the city to wage war. In addition, there is reference to land twice in line 4, that is, in the statement, ראל קדם בארץ אבי "formerly in the land in my father's land."⁵⁶ The mention of land twice in that line portrays the land as a focal interest in the revolt.

Moreover, a particular king invaded Abel with the aim of conquering the land. It is interesting that Na'aman translates lines 3 and 4 as, "and the king of Israel invaded, advancing in my father's land."⁵⁷ Thus, the assumption that a king of Israel waged war with the political élites in the city of Abel in order to possess the land might not be far-fetched. Reclaiming the land that was possessed constitutes to some extent socio-economic redress. The farmers, who lost their land in the city of Abel, in all probability, regained it. Subsequently, those farmers would have been elevated from the poverty that was induced by the loss of their land. However, it is pertinent to determine who the invaders and the victims were.

⁵² William M. Schniedewind, "Tel Dan Stela: New Light on Aramaic and Jehu's Revolt," *BASOR* 302 (1996): 75–90. Lemaire, among others, notes that the Tel Dan Inscription was discovered in 1993 and 1994 by Biran and Naveh, but it was authored by Hazael, the great Aramaen king of Damascus. See André Lemaire, "West Semitic Inscriptions and Ninth-Century B.C.E. Ancient Israel," *BritAc* 143 (2007): 283.

⁵³ Schniedewind, "Tel Dan Stela," 77.

⁵⁴ Gershon Galil, *The Chronology of the Kings of Israel and Judah* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 33.

⁵⁵ Schniedewind differs with Na'aman in that he merely states that Abel-beth-maacah was important to the Assyrians. See Schniedewind, "Tel Dan Stela," 79; Nadav Na'aman, "Three Notes on the Aramaic Inscription from Tel Dan," *IEJ* 50/1-2 (2000): 98.

⁵⁶ Schniedewind, "Tel Dan Stela," 77.

⁵⁷ Na'aman, "Three Notes," 96.

Different names have been suggested for the king(s) mentioned in the Tel Dan Inscription. Most scholars identify Hazael as the king of Israel introduced in the inscription.⁵⁸ This identification finds support in 2 Kgs 12:17–18, where Hazael is said to be campaigning against Judah. Joram (son of Ahab and king of Israel) and Ahaziah (son of Joram and king of Judah and/or house of David) have been suggested as the victims mentioned in line 6 of the inscription which refers to Israelite kings killed in the revolt.⁵⁹ Based on inferences from the Tel Dan Inscription, it therefore seems that Hazael killed both Joram and Ahaziah to terminate the Omride dynasty. Of course, the aim was to reclaim the land and to redress the socio-economic injustice that the kings had entrenched in Israel.

However, Schniedewind does not rule out the possibility that Jehu was the king alluded to in the Tel Dan Inscription, that is, based on the biblical statement, "Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill . . ."⁶⁰ In the Deuteronomistic History, Jehu is characterised as being responsible for the elimination of the Omride dynasty and the repossession of the land as stated in 2 Kgs 10:1–7, 17. Thus, as part of a new alliance with Aram, Jehu probably worked with Hazael to eliminate the socio-economic injustice promoted by the Omride dynasty. Engaging with one source however might not sufficiently account for the possibility that Jehu's revolution was a call for socio-economic redress.

A valuable contribution on the Mesha Inscription and on Jehu's revolution is the study by Lemaire. The Mesha inscription which is dated ninth century, ca. 810 B.C.E., is ascribed to Mesha the king of Moab who is mentioned in 2 Kgs 1:1 and 2 Kgs 3(4). Without offering a detailed discussion on the dating, we shall consider the content of the inscription especially lines 4 to 8. In lines 4 and 5, we read of the oppression of Moab by Omri which includes paying tribute and forceful submission. Further, in lines 7 and 8 of the inscription, Omri is said to take possession of the land of Medeba. These lines provide evidence of land dispossession in the period of the Omri dynasty. However, Lemaire has rightly noted that the inscription does not clearly mention whether the land of Medeba was owned by the Israelite before Omri took possession of it. Moabite ownership of the land could be postulated in this instance since the Mesha Inscription shows that Omri appropriated land. Also important is the clue that during the reign of Jehu and as a result of his revolution, the land was redistributed to Mesha the Moabite. That clue is embedded in line 8 which states that "And he (Omri) in it (land of Medeba) in his days, and (during) half of my days

⁵⁸ Schniedewind, "Tel Dan Stela," 83; Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation* (AB 11; New York: Doubleday, 1988), 89–93; Avraham Biran and Joseph Naveh, "The Tel Dan Inscription: A New Fragment," *IEJ* 45 (1995): 15; Lemaire, "West Semitic Inscriptions," 283.

⁵⁹ Schniedewind, "Tel Dan Stela," 79.

⁶⁰ Schniedewind, "Tel Dan Stela," 84; see also 1 Kgs 19:17.

his son: forty years." Lemaire argues that the expression, "half of my days," refers to the liberation of the land by Mesha during the Jehu revolution.⁶¹

In my view, the return of the land to the original owners as evident in the Mesha Inscription constitutes socio-economic redress. Jehu's revolution made it possible for Mesha, a farmer, to recover his land. As Chouraqui rightly points out, 2 Kgs 3:4 shows that Mesha regularly lost 100, 000 lambs and the wool of 100, 000 rams to Ahab.⁶² If his wealth was restored as a result of Jehu's revolution, as I would argue, it would mean that the revolution was meaningful to those who lost land to the Omride dynasty. Thus, it is probable that Mesha was elevated from poverty because not only did he retain his land, he used it productively.

Moreover, because the restoration of land to the Moabites was fallout of Jehu's revolution, it is reasonable to deduce that socio-economic redress in the area of land redistribution was realised. The end of the Omride dynasty did not only bring about political liberation, it also led to socio-economic redress. Thus, Jehu's revolution could be employed as a model of socio-economic redress in South Africa. But we cannot do this with certainty, unless we prove that land was also restored to poor farmers in the aftermath of the Jehu revolution. Therefore, we shall take a look at Jezreel, where Naboth's vineyard was located. Sweeney reports that:

The site of Jezreel is identified with Zerín/Tel Yizra'el, located fifteen kilometres east of Megiddo at the eastern entrance to the main Jezreel Valley between Mount Gilboa to the south and Givat ha-Moreh to the north. This location is strategic, both because the rich farmland of Jezreel constitutes the breadbasket of ancient Israel and because its low-lying plains from the highway that links the Transjordan with coastal plain . . . Excavation points to extensive building and fortification in the mid-ninth century B.C.E., which indicates that it was built up by the Omride dynasty . . .⁶³

From the above description of Jezreel, it is clear that Naboth's vineyard was situated in a fertile area. This is possibly another reason Ahab was also attracted to the land, that is, besides the close proximity to his property. The fertility of the land on which Naboth's vineyard was planted explains in part why Ahab eventually abused his power to acquire property outside his own tribal territory (Manasseh). Obviously, one is also aware that Ahab was influenced by Jezebel.

⁶¹ Lemaire, "West Semitic Inscriptions," 288, 290–291.

⁶² André Chouraqui, *The People and the Faith of the Bible* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975), 63.

⁶³ Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 247.

In the article, "Jezreel: Before and After Jezebel," Franklin provides archaeological findings from the excavation in Tel Jezreel, in the Jezreel Valley. In line with Sweeney, she claims that the excavations point to the involvement of the Omride dynasty at the site of Jezreel. But Franklin further relates findings of what she calls, "Phase III, the enclosure phase at Jezreel," which "correlates with the post-Omride dynasty period and the 8th century B.C.E. casemate-walled acropolis of Building Period II at Samaria and with the stable and courtyard complexes of Stratum IV at Megiddo."⁶⁴ Inferences from the findings show that someone else other than Ahab later occupied the land which was seized from Naboth. Could it be that that late occupant was from Naboth's family? Franklin concludes that the Jezreel enclosure is most likely a Jeroboam rather than a Jezebel initiative.⁶⁵ In other words, archaeological findings indicate that a person from the Jehu dynasty later occupied Naboth's land. If Franklin's claim is reliable, as I am inclined to assume, then archaeology suggests that after killing Ahab and his family Jehu probably did not redistribute the repossessed fertile land to Naboth's family but rather claimed it and subsequently passed it to his sons. This possibility shows that not all the land was redistributed to the original farmers in the Jehu revolution. As argued here, some land, obviously fertile in quality, was kept by those in power, for instance, the members of the Jehu dynasty.

We have already noted that Mesha regained his land and was elevated from poverty, but there is no evidence that Jehu restored Bashan to its original owners. Moreover, archaeological findings show that Naboth's land was not returned to his family. Instead, the one who assumed power, in this case Jehu, appropriated the land for himself and his family. This act shows that in a process of revolution and redistribution of land, some fertile land may not be restored to the poor rightful owners. Instead, such land is retained by those in power, as evident in the Bashan case. In 2 Kgs 10:32–33, we read about the conquest of the portion of land east of the Jordan. According to Galil, there is no evidence that Jehu restored to Israel Bashan, which is the portion that was under Aramean control.⁶⁶ As in the case of Mishor, the portion of land which was seized by Ahab was restored to Mesha.⁶⁷ Arguably, there are possible

⁶⁴ Norma Franklin, "Jezreel: Before and After Jezebel," in *The Archaeology* (vol. 1 of *Israel in Transition: From Late Bronze II to Iron IIa (c. 1250–850 B.C.E.)*); ed. Lester L. Grabbe; New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 45, 51.

⁶⁵ In all probability, this could only be Jeroboam II, the great grandson of Jehu who initiated and built the enclosure.

⁶⁶ Galil, *Chronology of the Kings*, 48.

⁶⁷ For Galil, the return of Mishor to Mesha does not provide evidence of the return of land to Israel. See Galil, *Chronology of the Kings*, 48. Nevertheless, the land which was seized by Ahab was at least returned to someone else, who was also a victim of the evils of the Omri dynasty.

instances in which seized land was not returned to the original owners but retained by those in power.

Thus, we cannot be certain of the relevance of the lessons from the Jehu revolution without attempting to draw parallels between the Omri dynasty and the South African context. We also need to take into consideration the possibility that those in power such as the political élites seek to increase their assets instead of redistributing to the poor wealth accruing from the productive use of land. In the following section, the parallels and possibilities will be discussed in order to make a case for socio-economic redress in South Africa.

E SOCIO-ECONOMIC REDRESS IN 1 KINGS 21:1-29 AND LAND DISCOURSE IN SOUTH AFRICA

1 Parallels between the Omri Dynasty and the South African Context

There appear to be parallels between some events in the Omri dynasty, as reflected in 1 Kgs 21:1–19, and the land discourse in South Africa. For the purpose of this discussion, four similarities are observed. First, in both the Omri dynasty and the South African context, the exploitation of the weak by the powerful, land dispossession, and the entrenchment of poverty are observable. For example, just as Naboth lost his land, black South Africans also lost their land in the colonial and apartheid era. Second, privatisation of productive land by the political élites through the entrenchment of privatisation policies at the dawn of democracy in South Africa is evident. In the same way, Omri and Ahab privately owned land in order to advance their self-interest. Third, foreign relations seemed to shape the local use of productive land during the Omri dynasty and a similar situation has been noted also in South Africa. Under the Omride rule, the alliance with the Phoenicians demanded, for example, high production from the Israelites which proved detrimental to the small farmers. Likewise, in South Africa, the incorporation of the agricultural sector into the global market in the context of the American led neo-liberal economic globalisation is detrimental to the previously disadvantaged emerging black farmers. Fourth, a noticeable failure to redress land dispossession and socio-economic injustice is detected in 1 Kgs 21:1–29 as well as in the South African situation. That failure is noticeable not only in Elijah’s protest and prophecy but also in South Africa. The legacy of colonialism and apartheid in terms of the land issue, coupled with poverty and inequality, continues to haunt poor black South Africans.

Clearly, not only does 1 Kgs 21:1–29 provide a background for the acknowledgement of socio-economic injustice in South Africa, it also offers clues for redressing the injustice. We should recall that Nzimande also recognises the relevance of the story of Naboth’s vineyard to the South African discourse on justice and land. Notwithstanding her claim that justice is absent in the story, the positive reception of 1 Kgs 21:1–29 is noteworthy. For

Nzimande, Naboth's predicament reminds the post-colonial and post-apartheid South African reader of land dispossession and the powerlessness of the weak in the hands of the mighty. Land loss deprives many black South Africans of the means to economic survival and wellbeing. Furthermore, the role of Jezebel a Phoenician figure in Naboth's land loss is used to critique the capitalist exploitation of globalisation in South Africa which confirms the resemblance between the Phoenician influence on Israel and the impact of the neo-liberal economic globalisation on South African economy. As a result of the Phoenician influence, Omri and Ahab, both members of the élite class, exploited Naboth who is an embodiment of the lower class. The act of exploitation helps to confirm the view that the story of Naboth opens a window for the critique of the exploitation of the lower class (mostly black South Africans) by the élite class (predominantly white corporate and black political élites).⁶⁸ Sadly, in South Africa, the élite class continues to get richer at the expense of the lower class which continues to experience persistent poverty.

Although Nzimande's study is significant, it is limited in certain respects. Her claim that justice is absent in the story of Naboth's vineyard leaves her readers without clues to address the issue of socio-economic redress and land redistribution, in both the OT and the South African contexts. To address this limitation, Jehu's revolution will be highlighted against the South African background in the next section.

2 Socio-Economic Redress in South Africa

The observation of the failure to redress socio-economic injustice in 1 Kgs 21:1-29 leads us to consider Jehu's revolution and the clues for socio-economic redress in South Africa in the story. The return of land to the original owners which we have gleaned from both the Mesha Inscription and the Tel Dan Inscription constitutes land redistribution and therefore socio-economic redress. If we consider that the return of land was brought about by Jehu, it can be said that Jehu's revolution produced socio-economic redress and land redistribution. Thus, a case for the redress of the colonial and apartheid legacy in South Africa in terms of land dispossession and its attendant poverty fits perfectly with Jehu's revolution. South Africans who support the idea of land redistribution and redressing socio-economic injustice will also identify with Jehu's revolution and its gains. Thus, the portrayal of socio-economic redress and the restoration of seized land in Jehu's story could empower a marginalised South African reader who is by and large poor and landless, and is set against the black political élites and the white farmers who continue to reap the agricultural wealth of the country.

One cannot turn a blind eye on the challenge that the method employed by Jehu poses to the South African reader. Jehu waged war with the Omri dyn-

⁶⁸ Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel," 252.

asty and subsequently reclaimed the land to address the socio-economic injustice of his time. Not only is this violent method disturbing, it is also not life affirming or empowering. The fact that Jehu did not restore Naboth's land to his family also indicates a trend of power abuse by the élites which cannot be applauded. In a South African context which decries violence and espouses democracy, Jehu's elimination of the Omri dynasty through violence will not be condoned. However, if the elimination of the Omri dynasty is understood in a broader sense, that is, beyond the literal killing of Omri's family, it may not be far-fetched to argue that Jehu's revolution could be relevant to South Africa's pursuit of socio-economic redress and land redistribution. Understanding Jehu's revolution in the sense beyond the literal killing of the Omri family members would entail:

- Attaining socio-economic redress in the form of land redistribution;
- An end to the tendency of the rich political élites (Omri dynasty as well as Jehu dynasty) to use their power to accumulate more wealth at the expense of the poor peasants;
- The end of the declaration of the labour of small farmers as uneconomical and unproductive, which forced them off their land;
- The end of ownership of land mostly by the foreign élites.
- The termination of private ownership of land; and
- Cancelling the debts of poor Israelites.

Engaging with the story of Jehu's revolution in order to advance the call for socio-economic redress in South Africa challenges the capitalist and self-enriching tendency inherent in the privatisation of productive land. The effort to address the inability of the previously disadvantaged emerging black farmers to purchase land and use it productively by foreign bodies that plough capital into South Africa to fund such farmers and to invest in their sustainable growth makes sense. However, a point that is glossed over in OT scholarship regarding the tendency of the political élites to accumulate more wealth is the ineffectiveness of the conversation between Elijah and Ahab. The failure to redress socio-economic injustice in terms of land redistribution in 1 Kgs 21:1–29 is partly due to Ahab's vested interest in Naboth's productive land. Terreblanche has observed that the South African élites exhibit some affinity with the Israelite élites who tended to hinder socio-economic redress because of their vested interest in the productive land. He doubts that socio-economic injustice would ever be redressed in South Africa because of the vested interest of the black political élites and of the white corporations in the wealth of the country.⁶⁹ Alt-

⁶⁹ Terreblanche, *Lost in Transformation*, 128–129.

though he offers no evidence to support his observation, it is important to note that Jehu's revolution could be viewed as the only way that opened up to redress socio-economic injustice and land dispossession at that time.

However, in the South African context, one is uncertain about the type of revolution that can uproot persistent socio-economic injustice relating to land seizure. What is certain is the disturbing *status quo* on socio-economic injustice and the legacy of colonialism and apartheid regarding the land that remains in the hands of the descendants of the former British colonists. After all, the main concern of this article is how to attain socio-economic justice in the area of land redistribution. If the land confiscated from black South Africans was restored or equitably shared by both white and black citizens, then black people would be emancipated from the persistent poverty they currently experience. Clearly, this is easier said than done. Perhaps a consideration of the elimination of "the Omri dynasty" in the broader sense, that is, beyond the literal killing of "Omri's family" would be the best direction for redress in South Africa.

F CONCLUSION

On the one hand, this article set out to establish whether a socio-economic reading of 1 Kgs 21:1-29 and of the events in the Omri dynasty offers possibilities for socio-economic redress in South Africa. On the other hand, with the seeming failure of Elijah to redress the dispossession of Naboth of his vineyard, it considers whether aspects of Jehu's revolution could offer suggestions for socio-economic redress in South Africa. Reading 1 Kgs 21:1-29 in the light of the South African situation reveals the absence of socio-economic redress and land redistribution under the Omri dynasty. Therefore, it is argued that a reading of the story of Jehu's revolution offers clues for socio-economic redress in South Africa. Thus, the kind of revolution that can uproot the persistent socio-economic injustice in relation to land is what is needed in South Africa.

Efforts to redress the legacy of colonialism and apartheid that is symbolised by socio-economic injustice and landlessness (with regard to productive land) must include land redistribution. However, the pursuit of land redistribution and socio-economic redress which involves violence and shedding of blood is not advocated in this article. The investigation of a strategic and peaceful means of uprooting the self-enriching political élites and the American led neo-liberal economic globalisation would be a significant subject for further research. One must admit nonetheless that this article is one-sided when it comes to its view of Jehu because it does not highlight possible negative elements in the Jehu revolution. Such negative elements could serve as caution in any effort to redress socio-economic injustice and promote redistribution of land.

To conclude, the land issue in the post-apartheid South Africa needs to be settled once and for all. The previously disadvantaged black South Africans need not continue to struggle to obtain the productive land that their forefathers lost to their white counterparts. A negotiation that seeks to redress the socio-economic injustice which is inherited from the land dispossession Act of the colonial and apartheid South Africa is of paramount importance.

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