

Hiram's Relations with Solomon Viewed from the Perspective of the Relation between Africa and Foreign Powers: A Postcolonial Reading of 1 Kings 5:1-18.

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ABSTRACT

In a world that has become a global village some countries are seeing their sovereignty significantly curtailed because of the interest they represent for external powers. Small countries often see their stability jeopardised by interference of external powers interested in conflict. The present essay argues that external interests are part of the factors that jeopardised national unity in monarchic Israel. The article proposes a dialogical discussion between the socio-political context of Israel's monarchical period and the contemporary context in African countries. It contends that in Israel, like in many African countries, external interference has often been the factor determining the outcome of internal conflicts. Such interference aims more at promoting the interests of the intervening powers than it is rooted in a genuine concern for the powerless countries and their people. The discussion of the socio-political effects of foreign intervention in African countries, using the case of Rwanda as an example, is followed by an examination of foreign intervention in monarchical Israel which focuses on Hiram's involvement in Solomon's empire. Before engaging this contextual dialogue, the essay begins with a brief description of the postcolonial approach guiding the discussion.

A THE POSTCOLONIAL APPROACH

Postcolonial criticism forms part of many ideological approaches to biblical study so called because they seek to explore how biblical texts might be interpreted when they are read from particular ideological perspectives. Postcolonial criticism specifically offers interpretation from the perspective of people who have been subjected to the oppression of colonialism. It seeks to recover the silenced voice of those who were dominated by an imperial power.¹ Biblical scholars who use postcolonial criticism make intellectual use of the experiences of those who have been colonised in the past and those who are marginalised

¹ Mark A. Powell, ed., *Methods in Biblical Interpretation: Methods for Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 10.

by neocolonialism in the present.² Thus, studies in this area emerge from the reality of the actual lived experiences of particular forms of colonialism or imperialism and are devoted to analysing ancient biblical texts in light of social, economic, cultural and political contexts that have been shaped by imperialism.³ The present essay adopts a postcolonial reading of 1 Kgs 5 that, in the light of African contemporary realities, seeks to point out and challenge the colonial and imperialistic dynamics present in the text and its context. Special focus is on Hiram's intervention in Solomon's empire. The article seeks to evaluate the extent to which his interference contributed to internal conflict that culminated in the disruption of the United Monarchy in Israel.

The present essay deliberately starts, not with the analysis of the selected text, but with the condition and experience of African people, who were subjected to domination and oppression by the colonial powers and continue to suffer marginalisation imposed by neocolonialism. The relation between Hiram and Solomon described in 1 Kgs 5:1-18 is then scrutinised in the light of social, economic and political realities wrought by imperialistic domination, exploitation and oppression. The experience of colonialism and neocolonialism in Rwanda and in Africa in general guides the reading of the selected text with the aim of retrieving the silenced voice of the exploited people in Israel.

B EXTERNAL POWERS SUPPORTING OPPRESSIVE REGIMES IN RWANDA

Historians and politicians generally agree to the fact that colonialism greatly contributed to the sharpening of ethnic distinction in Rwanda preparing the ground for social conflicts that marked the history of the country and culminated in the 1994 genocide. The Europeans who came to colonise Rwanda found a country characterised by social disharmonies which they did not create but which they harnessed and exploited to reach their own interests. Besides issues related to access to political power and to administration privileges then monopolised by one social group, the Tutsi, two institutions deeply affected relations among Rwandan pre-colonial social groups. One of such institutions was the cattle clientship, *Ubuahake*, a contract by which a Hutu client entrusted himself to a Tutsi patron, who would grant him some privileges in terms of usufruct on cattle and land in exchange for commodities and services regularly offered by the Hutu servant.

Those who hold appositive view of *Ubuahake* perceive it as a personalised relationship between a client and a patron involving the exchange of cer-

² Gale A. Yee, *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2007), 166.

³ Gerald O. West, "Doing Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation @Home: Ten Years of (South) African Ambivalence," *Neot* 42 (2008): 147-164.

tain commodities and services. To them this was a contract between Hutu (servants) farmers who offered the products of their farms and the Tutsi (patrons) who offered cows and milk. This institution, they claim, had even facilitated social mobility across fluid occupational categories.⁴

Ubuhake is, however, mostly perceived as exploitative and generative of hierarchical differences between Tutsi and Hutu of Rwanda. It is seen as an entrenched form of quasi-slavery, enabling the Tutsi masters to exploit the poor, downtrodden Hutu. The abuses that could result were better described by a certain group of Tutsi who opposed it in the following statement:

The Buhake system is the means par excellence through which the Batutsi have managed to maintain and safeguard their ascendancy over the masses. The indefinite duration of contractual ties it creates at each echelon of the hierarchy implies a constant obligation to obey the dominant caste; through pure and simple spoliation an instant remedy is found against the danger of over-rapid social mobility or the emergence of competitive centres of power, while intrigues and dilation, both of which are encouraged by the system, maintain the omnipotence of the powerful by fostering rivalries among the weak.⁵

A sister institution, *Uburetwa* on the other hand, consisted of the compulsory and non-paid labour. *Uburetwa* was introduced in Rwanda in the late nineteenth century by King Kigeli IV Rwabugiri.⁶ Initially, the peasants were requested to work one day per week, but later this was increased by the chiefs to three days. *Uburetwa* undermined the livelihood security of Hutu commoners and made their survival more difficult. In certain regions of the country both men and women would sell their labour to survive, even though the common pattern was for only men to do the *corvée*,⁷ while women would work for the family.⁸ Both *Ubuhake* and *Uburetwa* are often perceived as instruments of mass exploitation.

The Germans were the first colonial power in Rwanda arriving in 1894. The Germans stayed only for ten years but their short stay contributed to social conflict in Rwanda through their indirect rule policy. This policy consisted of

⁴ Johan Pottier, *Re-imagining Rwanda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 110.

⁵ Christophe Ruhara, Chrysologue Rwamasirabo and Gratien Sendanyoye, "Le Buhake: Une Coutume Essentiellement Munyarwanda," *Bulletin de Jurisprudence des Tribunaux Indigènes du Rwanda Burundi* 3 (May 1947): 103-136, quoted in René Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi* (London: Pall Mall, 1970), 40-41 (footnote).

⁶ Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Building Nations: Transitional Justice in the African Great Lakes Region* (Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, 2005), 73.

⁷ A French term for non-paid and compulsory labour.

⁸ Pottier, *Re-imagining Rwanda*, 13.

maintaining unchanged the traditional administration structure which was rather used by the colonial administration to control the country through local officials who became the executive instruments of the colonial power. This approach aimed at avoiding resistance and eventual confrontation from the local population that could have resulted from any attempt to displace traditional rulers. In his report of November 1905, Captain von Grawert, then Resident of Burundi, elucidated the rationale behind the indirect rule:

The deal is: unqualified recognition of the authority of the sultans from us, whether through taxes or other means, in a way that will seem to them as little a burden as possible; this will link their interest with ours.⁹

In a Tutsi-led kingdom, where high-status individuals were from the Tutsi group, these early colonisers found it easier subcontracting local control to Tutsi chiefs. The indirect rule policy reinforced the power of members of the Tutsi elite, some of whom, secure in the white man's support, acted as rapacious quasi-warlords.¹⁰

In addition to their favouring the Tutsi over the other two groups, namely, the Hutu and the Twa, Germans provided the Tutsi regime with military assistance that enabled them to conquer more Hutu kingdoms who had so far resisted the Tutsi expansion and remained independent.¹¹ With the military support of the German colonisers, the king was able to extend his control to the peripheral regions, especially in the north of the country, where some Hutu polities had maintained their autonomy *vis-à-vis* the central state.¹²

Although German control was not for a long period, their influence had long-lasting effects. As Prunier has recorded, the colonial policy of indirect rule left considerable leeway to the Rwandese monarchy and acted in direct continuation of the pre-colonial transformation toward more centralisation, annexation of the Hutu principalities and increase in the Tutsi chiefly power.¹³ Germans may not be held responsible for creating ethnic categories in Rwandan society. Both *Ubuhake* and *Uburetwa* were practiced in Rwanda before their arrival. However, their support for the Rwandan traditional political

⁹ Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi*, 49.

¹⁰ Gerard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 25.

¹¹ Count von Gotzen, the then Governor of German East Africa, believed that German policy must be to support the traditional chiefs in such a manner that they will be convinced that their own salvation and that of their supporters depend on their faithfulness to the Germans. See Linda R. Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide* (London: Zed Books, 2000), 9.

¹² Randall Fegley, *Rwanda* (vol. 154 of *World Bibliographical Series*; Oxford: Clio Press, 1993), xx, xxi.

¹³ Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 25.

structure without challenging its exploitative character resulted in the reinforcement of Tutsi hegemony. Blinded by their interests, the Germans participated in the oppression of the masses by unconditionally supporting a regime that abused them. The Germans have a share of responsibility in social conflicts that resulted from social injustices that they failed to challenge. It is this kind of responsibility that the present seeks to highlights with respect to Hiram's intervention in Israel under Solomon. If the Germans are criticised for contributing to the oppression of the Hutu, more criticism is directed at the Belgians, who took over from Germans and stayed longer.

Like the Germans, the Belgians believed that Indirect Rule would make the implementation of their colonial policies and practices easier. They preferred to maintain the institution of kingship in order to use the king as a legitimizer of their policies.¹⁴ Ryckmans, the first Belgian Resident of Burundi, put it in these words:

The presence of the king, the only one capable of conferring a legal, customary investiture upon a candidate of our choice, makes it possible for us to go forward without running the risk of being faced with a fatal impasse, without having to make an impossible choice between a rebellious legitimacy and an impotent submission.... It is therefore not because of a pure love for tradition or local colour that we keep the native kings. Let their powers be curtailed if necessary but let none challenge their existence and outward prestige.¹⁵

Far from questioning the exploitative and oppressive character of *Ubu-hake* and *Uburetwa*, the Belgian strategy consisted of maintaining traditional political institutions in order to manipulate them. Maintaining traditional institutions helped them to appear legitimate before the people and their determination to achieve their own goals required suitable personnel fitting into their vision. It was therefore in their own interests that they made the monopoly of power in the hands of the Tutsi an unquestionable *status quo*. To this end, the Belgians spread the "Hamitic Hypothesis"¹⁶ that claimed that the Tutsi ruling

¹⁴ Pierre Ryckmans, "Le Problème Politique au Rwanda-Urundi," *Congo* 1/3 (1925): 410. Quoted in Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi*, 66.

¹⁵ Ryckmans, "Le Problème Politique au Rwanda-Urundi," 410. Quoted in Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi*, 65.

¹⁶ The "Hamitic Hypothesis" is a theory whose name is derived from the biblical character, Ham, the son of Noah, who attracted his father's curse upon his family for failing to show respect to his father when he saw him drunk and naked. As part of this curse, Ham's descendants through his son Canaan, were condemned to become slaves of Shem and Japhet, the two brothers of Ham. Through an interpretation of this biblical story, it was explained how the Tutsi were Hamites descendants of Ham, and how they found themselves in Africa where they were supposed to endure their fate as an inferior race. Yet, it is reported that when the English explorer, John Henning Speke visited the region of Central Africa in 1859 he was amazed at the high level of culture

classes were a superior race. Their physical traits, the refinement of their feelings and their intelligence were rare among primitive people and they were rather closer to the noble Europeans.¹⁷ For these reasons, the Tutsi were born to lead. Further efforts were therefore made to preserve and strengthen Tutsi hegemony. This was achieved by facilitating the territorial expansion of the Tutsi political hegemony, by a rigorous control over all education opportunities and by the introduction of judicial machinery designed to perpetuate the subjection of the Hutu caste.¹⁸

In theory the Belgians' support of the traditional Tutsi hegemony in Rwanda was justified by the latter's inner qualities they discovered in this social group. But among themselves the foreign colonisers reminded each other that it was not because of a pure love for tradition or local colour that they kept the native kings,¹⁹ but that the traditional structure would rather provide a familiar décor, permitting them to act behind the scenes without alarming the people.²⁰ A similar agenda was behind the missionaries championing of the thesis of Tutsi supremacy. This is clear from Monsignor Classe's words:

The question is whether the ruling elite will be for us or against us; whether the important places in native society will be in Catholic or in non-Catholic hands; whether the Church will have through education and its formation of youth the preponderant influence in Rwanda.²¹

When the Tutsi became a threat to the interests of the Belgian colonisers, their alleged superior qualities and their abilities to rule became a thing of the past. As the missionary saw a Hutu counter-elite rising, they knew that their former protégés could not for long guarantee the preponderant influence they wanted; therefore, they abandoned the "Tutsi born to lead" theory, which was no longer serving their interests and supported the new potential leaders, the Hutu.

that he found there, the administrative structure and the intricate social order with aristocrats and vassals. He was convinced that such culture could not have originated from "savage Negroes." He concluded that the Tutsi ruling classes were a superior race compared to the Bantu groups around them.

¹⁷ Melvern, *A People Betrayed*, 8.

¹⁸ Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi*, 73.

¹⁹ Lemarchand, R. *Rwanda and Burundi*, 65. Citing Ryckmans, "Le Problème Politique au Rwanda-Urundi," 410.

²⁰ *Rapport sur l'Administration Belge* (Bruxelles: Ministère des Colonies, 1948), 63. Quoted in Jean-Pierre Chrétien, *The Great Lakes of Africa: Two Thousand Years of History* (New York: Zone Books, 2003), 267.

²¹ Jean-Pierre Chrétien, *The Great Lakes of Africa: Two Thousand Years of History* (New York: Zone Books, 2003), 273. Citing Leon Classe. *Pastoral Letter*, 16 July 1927.

Like the colonial powers in Africa, as it is argued below, Hiram was not involved in Israel's affairs out of his concern for the well-being of the people of Israel. Like them, Hiram had his own agenda and this was the priority over the plight of the people who paid the price for the accomplishment of his plans. His involvement in the internal affairs of Israel in the time of Solomon that resulted from the establishment of diplomatic and trade relation between him and Solomon was more or less like the involvement of some rich powers into the affairs of developing countries in Africa and elsewhere in postcolonial times. The intervention of France under Mitterrand in Rwanda under Habyarimana is just one of many such examples in Africa.

C FRENCH INVOLVEMENT IN RWANDAN POLITICS AND SOCIAL LIFE

If the Tutsi monarchy initially enjoyed the support of the Belgian colonizers and the Catholic missionaries, the best-known supporter of postcolonial Hutu regime in Rwanda was President Mitterrand of France. Mitterrand is often said to have unreservedly supported Habyarimana's regime before, during and after the Genocide, providing his friend with France's economic, political and international diplomatic support,²² in a way that parallels Hiram dealing with Solomon. Mitterrand's support to Habyarimana continued even when the regime was internally opposed and indicted of nepotism, sectionalism and tribalism. An accord of military co-operation signed in 1975 permitted Habyarimana to receive the support of 750 French soldiers a few months after the Rwandese Patriotic Front invaded Rwanda in October 1990.²³ During the Genocide, as the RPF was gaining ground, the hunt for the Tutsi was still carried on, and the presence of the UN peacekeepers was scaled down, France unilaterally launched *Operation Turquoise*, officially designated as a humanitarian intervention to protect civilians and hinder a mass flow of refugees. Those who view France's move more in a negative light believe that French soldiers came to Rwanda to protect not so much the civilians at risk, although they certainly did this, as to keep the pockets of Habyarimana's defeated troops beyond the RPF'S reach.²⁴

France's intervention in Rwandan internal affairs seems not to have been merely based on personal friendship between the two heads of state. In Verschave's analysis, France replaced Belgium, the former colonial power, in the Great Lakes Region through business, commercial and economic interests, francophonie²⁵ and personal relations.²⁶ A year after Habyarimana took power

²² Tharcisse Gatwa, *The Churches and Ethnic Ideology in the Rwandan Crises 1900-1994* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), 191.

²³ Gatwa, *The Churches and Ethnic Ideology*, 192.

²⁴ Pottier, *Re-imagining Rwanda*, 39.

²⁵ "Francophonie" refers to a special relations between France and a number of French-speaking countries.

Rwanda was integrated into the French-speaking countries grouped in OCAM (Common Organisation for Africa and Madagascar), of which Habyarimana was to become the chairperson. This community of French-speaking countries has continued to provide France with a forum through which it exerts its geo-political influence. Chrétien has suggested that, in coming to Habyarimana's rescue, Mitterrand intended to defend the *status quo* in France's Francophone "backyard," now threatened by an Anglophone eruption.²⁷

Beside France's own hegemonic agenda, its presence in Africa is sometimes perceived as a geo-strategic and political plan agreed upon between the European and North American powers, France being perceived as playing the part of a policeman for the West to preserve Western interests in Africa.²⁸ Seeing France as a representative of Western interests may be too simplistic, however, since the interests of these powers do not always converge. It was noted that in the case of the Great Lakes conflicts, divergences between France and the United States (U.S.) were serious enough to hinder some United Nations' decisions on this conflict. Prunier has recorded such an incident, when the issue of the Rwandan invasion of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (D.R.C.-then Zaire) was discussed; whenever France was ready to apply pressure on Rwanda, this was blocked by the U.S.. Similarly, whenever the U.S. wished to put pressure on Zaire, this was blocked by France.²⁹ The present situation where the United States and the United Kingdom's pressure on Bashar-al-Assad of Syria is blocked by Russia and China seems not to be much different. It is not easy to tell which of these two camps cares more about the misery of the Syrian people. What is clear is that the interests of these intervening countries diverge and this divergence is a great contributor to the prolongation of the war in Syria.

With converging or more often diverging interests, the western powers have always intervened in Africa not merely with a humanitarian concern, but, as Bah sees it, because they had political and economic interests to protect or pursue.³⁰ A more recent example is seen in a trip undertaken a few months ago by the then United States Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, a trip that took her and a strong business delegation accompanying her to seven African countries

²⁶ Gatwa, *The Churches and Ethnic Ideology*, 191. Citing François-Xavier Verschave, *Complicité de Génocide? La Politique Française au Rwanda* (Paris: Découvertes, 1994), 10-12.

²⁷ Chrétien, *The Great Lakes of Africa*, 321.

²⁸ Gatwa, *The Churches and Ethnic Ideology*, 191.

²⁹ Gerard Prunier, *From Genocide to Continental War: The Congolese Conflict and the Crisis of Contemporary Africa* (London: Hurst & Company, 2009), 33.

³⁰ Alhaji M. S. Bah, "The Making of the Rwandan Genocide and the Future Protection of Civilians in Africa," in *Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime in Africa: From Slavery Days to Rwandan Genocide* (ed. John, Laband; South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007), 268.

in August 2012. In her address to a university audience in Dakar, Senegal, Clinton declared that the United States was committed to a model of sustainable partnership that adds value, rather than extract it from Africa. Unlike other countries, she continued, America will stand up for democracy and universal human rights even when it might be easier to look the other way and keep the resources flowing.³¹ Clinton's remarks were interpreted as a swipe at China, which eclipsed the United States as Africa's biggest trading partner. China is often criticized for turning a blind eye to dictatorships and internal repression in its partnership with African states such as Angola, Ethiopia, Sudan and Zimbabwe.³²

It is first and foremost business interests that drive the Chinese into competition in their bid to take advantage of African resources and trade opportunities. It was similar interests that seem to have motivated external interference in Israel. Such interests can be noted in Achish's generous hospitality and support to the rebel David whom he wished to use against his own people (1 Sam 29). The same can be said about Pharaoh's³³ hospitality to the rebel Jeroboam amidst conflicts between Israel's northern tribes and the regime of David's house in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 11:26-40). Such kind of support to rebellion in Israel finds parallels in contemporary Africa and this can be an object of a different paper. The focus of the present essay is on Hiram and his intervention in Israel's politics and the resulting social conflicts that culminated in the division of the Kingdom.

D SOCIO-POLITICAL EFFECTS OF HIRAM'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE SOLOMONIC EMPIRE

Solomon may have entered into treaties with many of his neighbouring nations but the external involvement in Israel's internal affairs under him is noted especially in his alliances with Hiram of Tyre (1 Kgs 5:1-18). It is reported that upon hearing that Solomon had succeeded his father to the throne, Hiram sent messengers to him (1 Kgs 5:1). Apparently, this diplomatic act was a regular courtesy in the Ancient Near East.³⁴ In this passage, it is stated that Hiram's

³¹ David Smith, "Hillary Clinton kicks off African tour with swipe at China." *Mail & Guardian* (August, 2012): n.p. Cited 02, 08, 2012. Online <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-08-02-hillary-clinton-kicks-off-african-tour-with-a-swipe-at-china>.

³² David Smith, "Hillary Clinton kicks off African tour with swipe at China." *Mail & Guardian* (August, 2012): n.p. Cited 02, 08, 2012. Online <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-08-02-hillary-clinton-kicks-off-african-tour-with-a-swipe-at-china>.

³³ Probably Shishak, the founder of the 22nd Egyptian dynasty. See Abraham Malamat, "A Political Look at the Kingdom of David and Solomon and Its Relation with Egypt," in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays: Papers Read at the International Symposium for Biblical Studies, Tokyo, 5-7 December 1979* (ed. Tomoo. Ishida; Tokyo: Yamakawa-Shuppansha, 1982), 189-204.

³⁴ John Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1970), 151.

move was grounded on his past relation with Solomon's father, David. The phrase פִי אֲהָב הִיא חִירָם לְדוֹד פֶּלְתִּים has been translated "for Hiram was ever a lover of David" (KJV), or "for Hiram always loved David" (ESV) surmizing an affective relationship between the two monarchs. Cogan reads this not as an expression of endearment but as a term for the treaty relationship between the two kingdoms. Relationships at this level often have more to do with diplomacy and business than with feelings. The NIV translation "because he had always been on friendly terms with David" seems to support Cogan's understanding, and so does Gray who understands the exchange of greetings mentioned here as a convenient prelude to negotiations for mutual advantages.³⁵ The accession of a king was an occasion for diplomatic exchanges between courts.³⁶

Apparently Solomon's rise to power corresponded to the time when, under Hiram I, King of Tyre, the Phoenicians had established a vast colonial empire throughout the Mediterranean world.³⁷ Hiram had been a contemporary of David and it seems that in the process of the extension of his empire, David had never conquered the Phoenician coast and Hiram was not his vassal. The relationship between the two was that of peaceful independence coexistence.³⁸ Hiram had entered into friendly relations with David soon after his establishment in Jerusalem as king over all Israel, and had supplied the materials and artisans to build his palace (2 Sam 5:11).³⁹ Hiram's involvement in David's

³⁵ Gray, *I & II Kings*, 151.

³⁶ Mordechai Cogan, *I Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: The Anchor Bible, 2000), 226.

³⁷ Bernhard W. Anderson, *The Living World of the Old Testament* (London: Longman, 1988), 78.

³⁸ Herbert Donner, "The Interdependence of Internal Affairs and Foreign Policy During the Davidic-Solomonic Period," in *Study in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays* (ed. Tomoo Ishida; Tokyo: Yamakawa-Shuppansha, 1982), 214. Cogan has observed that it would have been in the interest of both monarchs to establish "brotherly" relations. Solomon's kingdom sat astride several major trade routes (the westward-bearing road from Eliat through the Negev to the Mediterranean coast, and the King's Highway running north through Transjordan to Damascus and beyond). Their accessibility was a principal factor in Hiram's recognition of Israel's new king, for Tyre was the major player in international commerce in that age. Solomon in turn, benefited from the tax and custom duties generated by the use of these roads. See Cogan, *I Kings*, 232.

³⁹ Relations between Israel and Tyre proved to be enduring; they continued to be excellent for more than a century, first between Tyre and the United Kingdom, and then between Tyre and Israel, which had borders with it. It was only with Jehu's *Coup d'Etat* and the overthrow of the dynasty of Omri, when the ruling house was exterminated and the queen mother, Jezebel, a princess of Tyre, was killed, that relationships were unilaterally broken off. See Alberto J. Soggin, *A History of Israel: From the Beginnings to the Revolt of Bar Kochba, A.D. 135* (London: SCM, 1985), 57.

construction projects may have meant more than technical support, however. At this time David was not in a strong position. It was a time when he was in great need to establish his legitimacy after he had usurped the thrones of both Judah and Israel from the existing royal line of Saul.

The Hebrews, who originally had "judges" not kings, had instituted kings in their bid to conquer southern Phoenicia. They had noted that the Phoenicians and Philistines were more effective in battle as they had kings who provided strong central leadership. They decided to adopt the kingship system that they saw around them (1 Sam 8:5, 20). Saul, the first king of Israel and Judah, was killed in battle along with three of his sons, but legitimate heirs to the throne survived. First in line was Ishbaal, another of Saul's sons. After Saul's death, David, under the protection of the Philistines and the support of his kin people, succeeded in taking power in his home region of Judah in the south, while the commander of Saul's army, Abner, made Ishbaal king of Israel in the north. David ruled as king of Judah for seven and a half years, from his capital city, Hebron while Ishbaal ruled as king over the Hebrews' northern kingdom, Israel, which covered the hill country of Samaria, until he was assassinated by two of his army officers. It was after Ishbaal's murder that David became king over Judah and Israel. Although there was still a legitimate heir to the throne, Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son and Saul's grandson, nobody made a claim on behalf of Mephibosheth. If it is unlikely that this legitimate heir to the throne being crippled in both feet (2 Sam 9:13) could ever have reigned,⁴⁰ Mephibosheth had sons who could have challenged David and/or his successors in the future.

David was aware that the legitimacy of his regime was questionable and had attempted to remedy this by claiming and insisting that he was the legitimate husband of Saul's daughter, Michal.⁴¹ Moreover, he was wise enough to

⁴⁰ It seems that the Hebrews, new to king-making, had adopted the Phoenician rule that kings had to be without blemish. For example, a later king of Judah, Uzziah, was not allowed to continue ruling when he contracted leprosy: *The Lord struck Uzziah with a dreaded skin disease that stayed with him the rest of his life. He lived in a house on his own, relieved of all duties, while his son Jotham governed the country.* (2 Kgs 15:5). So it is improbable that the people would have accepted a physically handicapped king.

⁴¹ James W. Flanagan, "Chiefs in Israel," in *Community, Identity and Ideology: Social Science Approaches to the Hebrew Bible* (eds. Charles E. Carter and Carol L. Meyers; Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 6; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 324. Flanagan, following Jobling, argues that David's marriage to Michal and his insistence that she be returned before negotiations with Abner could begin must be viewed in the light of the intrigues and indeterminacy that was caused by the deaths and disabilities in Saul's house. The daughter's importance for David's rise within the north can hardly be overestimated. In ways similar to the case of Zalophehad's

forestall future palace coup attempts by taking Saul's grandson, Mephibosheth, into his own home and treating him like one of his own sons. Despite all these maneuvers, however, it seems that there were people in Israel who continued to perceive David as a usurper. Those who openly expressed such perception included the Benjamites Ziba (2 Sam 16:5-14) and Sheba (2 Sam 20). It was in circumstances like these when David was concerned about consolidating his position that Hiram offered his friendship to him (2 Sam 5:11-12). This meant much to David that Hiram, probably the most powerful and richest monarch in the region at the time, recognised David's legitimacy as king of Judah and Israel. The biblical narrator captures the significance of Hiram's support to David in these words: "David knew that the Lord had established him as a king over Israel..." (2 Sam 5:12). His recognition would have had probably the same significance as that of a Western or any powerful country today recognising the regime of a self-appointed African leader, by establishing diplomatic relations and an embassy, or especially by providing financial, military or diplomatic support.

Hiram provided more than diplomatic support to David. He also provided assistance in building a palace (2 Sam 5:11-12) and this was a boost toward increasing David's power and consolidating his regime. As for Hiram, he was not primarily much concerned about Israel's internal politics, about whether the people, especially the northern tribes wanted David or not, about who was legitimate and who was oppressed, he was rather anxious to conciliate the new power which now held command of the vital trade-routes through Palestine and could supply important agricultural commodities to supply the limited resources of the narrow Phoenicia littoral.⁴² These are the kinds of interests that brought and still bring powerful countries to Africa. Hiram's strategic interests had not changed at the time of Solomon's access to the throne. He was quick to signify to the new leadership in Israel that he was still interested in maintaining the relations that existed between the two countries in the time of David.

Solomon may have needed diplomatic support even more than his father did. His access to the throne is described as a palace *coup*, the kind of *coups d'état* that marked post-independence Africa and seems to linger to date in some parts of the continent. Conscious that the legitimacy of his regime was questioned, Solomon did what many of our leaders do today namely, getting rid of any possible challenger. He killed his rival brother Adonijah together with Joab, the powerful supporter of the opposition; he killed Shimei who had dared to question the legitimacy of his father David. He also banished Abiathar, the priest who was associated with the opposition (1 Kgs 2:13-46). In all this,

daughters, in Numbers 27 and 36, the issue was inheritance and succession rights of brotherless daughters. See Flanagan, "Chiefs in Israel," 323.

⁴² Gray, *I & II Kings*, 151.

Solomon displayed all the characteristics of an insecure head of state anxious to consolidate his grip to power by all means. The biblical narrator states that it was after the series of politically motivated assassinations and exclusion that "the kingdom was established in the hands of Solomon" (1 Kgs 2:46). It was in a time when Solomon was much concerned about asserting his legitimacy and consolidating his regime that Hiram approached him. Hiram's diplomatic move was good news in Jerusalem and Solomon would not miss the opportunity.

In his response, Solomon does not waste any time in informing Hiram about his intention to pursue the relation of cooperation between the two countries. As reported in 1 Kgs 5, Solomon does not simply return the diplomatic greetings, he already presents a request. With this request, Solomon recognises his situation of need, which puts him in a weaker position. In the ensuing conversation, Solomon is portrayed in a position similar to that of a leader of an African state seeking assistance from an advanced country overseas in order to execute a project. Solomon needs foreign aid to carry out the strategic plans that he has for his country. He submits a proposition including first the background and motivation of the project (1 Kgs 5:3-5), then a request specifying the assistance needed (6). Hiram, the assisting party, approves the request but not before he has formulated his counterproposal and named his price (8-9), just as most foreign partners do.

E BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION OF SOLOMON'S PROJECT

The introduction of the proposal with "You know" (1 Kgs 5:3) surmises that Hiram had certain knowledge of this project which dated from the time of David. Hiram is said to have been involved in similar projects executed by David (2 Sam 5:11) with whom he is reported to have maintained good relations (v. 1). Hiram's good relations and previous deals with David may have allowed him to be much informed about the project including the reasons why David was not able to accomplish it (1 Kgs 5:3). In the traditions of the Chronicler, David may have informed Hiram that this project would be executed by his son and successor as it is reported that he had already acquired cedar trees from the Sidonians (1 Chr 22:4) in preparations for the future realisation of the project. Hiram is therefore portrayed as a close ally of David's house, a sponsor who intends to maintain his relations with the regime. In today's African context, he may be perceived as a geo-political strategist anxious to keep his presence and influence in the region so vital for the economy of his own country.

Hiram's assumed pre-knowledge of the project spares Solomon from the need to describe it in details. All he does is to point out that the time has come to execute the project long placed on hold because the hindrances that prevented David from working on it are no longer there for Solomon. The conditions are now conducive for the project to go ahead since there is peace, and

there is neither adversary nor evil occurrence (v. 4). Such assurances sound like those which are normally given to a potential donor or sponsor, promising that the project will succeed and the investment will not be wasted. Having motivated his project, Solomon now proceeds with the presentation of his request to Hiram clarifying the kind of help that he needs.

F SOLOMON'S REQUEST

The assistance sought by Solomon consisted first of building materials, more precisely, the cedars. The cedar tree, *תְּרֵן* of Lebanon, known as *Cedrus Libani Barrel*, grew profusely on the western slopes of the Lebanon Mountains East of Tyre. It was renowned for its beauty and impressive height which, in some instances has reached thirty metres.⁴³ Cedars were very old trees with hard, beautiful wood that was excellent for construction since it was not readily subject to decay or insect infestation.⁴⁴ This wood was in demand throughout the Ancient Near East for construction of ships, building, and furniture because of its superior quality.⁴⁵ Solomon knew about the high quality of this wood that had been used to build his father's palace (2 Sam 5:11). His request is therefore not about any building material but specifically about cedar wood. (1 Kgs 5:6).

Hiram had the monopoly of what Solomon lacked and desired not only in terms of building materials but also in terms of expertise. During their stay in Egypt the Hebrews may have had opportunity to learn the art and science of building, but at this time all those who left Egypt had died.

The Hebrews who arrived in Canaan were tent dwelling nomads with very little skills or knowledge in the building industry. They were hardened in the desert and in battle but lacked the know-how to build palaces worthy of kings or a Temple worthy of God. By the time they captured Jerusalem they have had very little newly acquired capabilities other than fighting wars with the Canaanites. Up till this point in time the Ark of the Covenant, the Tablets of the Law and the Pentateuch of Moses were treasured in a tent, the tabernacle.⁴⁶

When David was chosen king and, thereafter Solomon, they were in need of artisans, architects, craftsmen, builders and building material especially wood and precious metals to build a temple and a palace. The best known and most gifted people to fulfil the king's needs were the Phoenicians who had a

⁴³ Cogan, *I Kings*, 228.

⁴⁴ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor, 1985), 498.

⁴⁵ Cogan, *I Kings*, 228.

⁴⁶ David Skinner, "Phoenician Design of King Solomon's Temple," n.p. Cited 24 August 2012. Online <http://phoenicia.org/temple.html#ixzz2MbD2d9J4>.

proven record of their building skills in their Temple of Melqart in Tyre.⁴⁷ Hence, David sought and received Phoenician know-how and materials. Solomon had seen the house built by the Phoenicians for his father and he may have seen or heard about the Temple of Melqart. He knew whom to turn to for assistance in building projects and Hiram's move was for him a good opportunity to present his request. Hiram was happy to do business with Solomon but his counterproposition may indicate that he expected this to happen on his own terms, like today's assisting powers normally do.

G COUNTERPROPOSITION

Solomon's suggestion was apparently that his own under skilled men would work alongside the Phoenician experts in cutting down and transporting the cedars from Lebanon to Israel. Hiram countered with his own proposal: his men would cut the trees, haul them down from Lebanon to the sea and ensure that they were to be delivered at a designated port in Israel (1 Kgs 5:6). Hiram's counterproposal (1 Kgs 5:6) may be perceived as a sign of generosity as he undertook to take charge of the entire work of cutting and transporting the trees. His attitude may also be interpreted as a deliberate strategy aimed at keeping close watch over the Phoenician monopoly in forestry.⁴⁸ That Hiram's approval of Solomon's request was not motivated by sheer generosity is made clear by naming the price he expected for his service.

H TERMS

In terms of his trade agreement with Solomon, Hiram provided building materials and technicians to Solomon who paid for these services with a regular provision of natural produce (1 Kgs 5:11). It was observed that the quantity of grain provided by Solomon according to biblical records (1 Kgs 5:11) could be estimated to almost twice Solomon's yearly receipt. This caused some scholars to wonder whether Israel could have been as fruitful as to provide for the needs of two royal houses in addition to the common consumption and this for a period of twenty years.⁴⁹ The biblical tradition seems to acknowledge that the load was too heavy on Israel and at the end Solomon resorted to selling to Hiram a part of his territory (1 Kgs 9:11). Since this concession was not part of the initial agreement, it is reasonable to conclude that Solomon resorted to this option in order to settle a large debt that had accumulated over years.

⁴⁷ Historians refer to it as one of unmatched magnificence in the Eastern Mediterranean. It was said to have two great columns one of gold and the other covered with precious stones. Herodotus sang its praises when he visited Tyre. Its name was changed to the Temple of Heracles when he visited - much like the name of the Columns. David Skinner, "Phoenician Design of King Solomon's Temple," n.p. Cited 24 August 2012. Online <http://phoenicia.org/temple.html#ixzz2MbD2d9J4>.

⁴⁸ Cogan, *I Kings*, 228.

⁴⁹ Cogan, *I Kings*, 229.

The treaty between the two monarchs apparently covered the construction of a lavish complex of structures erected in Jerusalem, north of the old Jebusite city wall, of which the Temple was the most important.⁵⁰ Beside the Temple, these projects in which the Phoenicians were involved included the building of the palace, which should have been an impressive edifice, if the time of thirteen years spent on it (1 Kgs 7:1) is anything to go by. Other buildings included a fortresses, the "House of the Forest of Lebanon" (1 Kgs 7:2; 10:17, 21) so called because of the massive cedar pillars that supported it,⁵¹ a judgment Hall, the "Hall of the Throne" (1 Kgs 7:7) and a palace for Pharaoh's daughter (1 Kgs 7: 8). In addition to help for his building projects, Solomon also had help from Tyre in manning and equipping of his trading fleet.⁵²

Surely the relations between the two kingdoms were profitable to both parties. As Donner has convincingly argued, however, in the bilateral alliance between the two monarchs, it was Solomon who was in a position of weakness. In Donner's estimate, Hiram's activities in Solomon's commercial expeditions and in the construction of the temple betray the dependence of Israel on Tyre, for in both cases Solomon was plainly not in a position to do without Phoenician know-how and the transfer of a whole district was no triumph for Solomon's foreign policy.⁵³ Donner's point is that Hiram's involvement in Solomon's business was not a result of him being Solomon's vassal; he entered into this relationship, motivated by the political and commercial advantages he drew from the situation.⁵⁴ The cost of these advantages was paid for by the Israelite labouring masses.

Solomon's enormous projects required a considerable supply of labour force which was not readily available to him. He therefore resorted to compulsory labour. In the time of his father, David, forced labour seems to have been reserved for the conquered people (2 Sam 12:31). Solomon who no longer had a great supply of such people imposed forced labour first on the Canaanites who were left in the land (1 Kgs 9:15-21), and subsequently, forced labour was extended even to the Israelites. It is reported in 1 Kgs 5:13-18 that Solomon conscripted a crew of 30,000 men out of all Israel. He sent them in shifts of 10,000 each for a month at a time in Lebanon and two months off at home. Their task was to cut, haul and ship timber from Lebanon. He recruited 70,000 carriers and 80,000 stonemasons. This army of workers worked under the supervision of 3300 foremen with Adoniram for general overseer. Understood in the light of total population of Israel of the time, these figures suggest a

⁵⁰ John Bright, *A History of Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 196.

⁵¹ Bright, *A History of Israel*, 197.

⁵² Henk Jagersma, *A History of Israel in the Old Testament Period* (London: SCM, 1982), 116.

⁵³ Donner, "The Interdependence of Internal Affairs and Foreign Policy," 208.

⁵⁴ Donner, "The Interdependence of Internal Affairs and Foreign Policy," 208.

severe sap of manpower. Other work could be done only by skilled craftspeople from the cities of the Phoenician coast that required payment and feeding.⁵⁵ These scores of thousands were fed from state stores or forced to bring food from home.

It was observed that Solomon implemented his building projects with no problems unlike his father who had faced dissuasive opposition (2 Sam 7). Jagersma suggested that Solomon had his way in this because he was far more of an absolute ruler than David. This already emerged in the way he came to power without the people having any say. This could mean that at this time there was no opportunity to express opposition to, or criticism of the buildings.⁵⁶ Solomon may have ruled as a despot, this did not worry his sponsor Hiram so much, as long as Phoenician interests were secured.

Solomon burdened the people not only with his building projects, the same people needed to support the army. Solomon is not remembered as a warrior probably because unlike his father, he was not much involved in wars and conquest. The task before him was not further to expand the realm, which had reached maximum dimensions under David, but to maintain amicable relationships externally, and with his own vassals, so that Israel might develop her potentialities in peace.⁵⁷ Solomon was far from lacking in military science, however. He seems to have been much preoccupied about maintaining and defending the empire he inherited from David. It is reported in 1 Kgs 9:15-19 that he used forced labour also to build fortified cities which were made into military bases. Bright describes the strategic positions of these cities as follows:

These included, aside from Jerusalem itself, a chain of cities along the perimeter of Israelite heartland: Hazor in Galilee, facing the Aramean possessions; Megiddo, near the main pass through the Carmel range; Gezer, Beth Horon, and Balaatah guarding the western approaches from the plain; and Tamar, south of the Dead Sea, facing Edom. Disposed at these points, Solomon's army could be marshalled quickly for defence against invasion, for quelling internal uprising, or for operation against rebellious vassals.⁵⁸

These military bases hosted sections of the army that included charioteers, mercenaries and a drafted infantry. According to biblical record, Solomon's army counted 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses (1 Kgs 10:26). Chariots cost 600 shekels each and trained horses, 150 shekels (1 Kgs 10:26-29). This description means that Solomon maintained a considerable army unlike his father who was satisfied with a small chariot corps and garrisons he inherited

⁵⁵ Robert B. Coote, *In Defence of the Revolution: The Elohist History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 52.

⁵⁶ Jagersma, *A History of Israel in the Old Testament Period*, 116.

⁵⁷ Bright, *A History of Israel*, 191.

⁵⁸ Bright, *A History of Israel*, 192.

from the Philistines. David had used voluntary tribal infantry that supported itself through normal subsistence. The chariot had not been used much in Israel partly because of the rugged terrain, partly because its employment presupposed a military aristocracy that Israel lacked.⁵⁹ Solomon's army was differently organised. He seems to have adopted the extensive use of the chariot from the Canaanite city-states now absorbed in Israel. The maintenance of this army was an additional charge for the people. All the combatants and army personnel were supported on food provided by the people. The expense of Solomon's army is shown in the following description:

Each vehicle required three horses, so chariot and team came to 1,050 shekels. Then there were the accessory costs; crews, maintenance personnel, weapons, spare parts, housing for personnel, storage areas and repair shops, stables and fodder. Frequent disassembly and lubrication with olive oil were essential. The corps thus consumed a large quantity of the basic foodstuffs of Palestine. The horses required months of training, then ongoing practice and grooming by skilled personnel. The chariot army all told required an outlay on the order of 1, 470.000 shekels, leaving aside the expense of upkeep and renewal.⁶⁰

Solomon's lavish support of the cult and the opulence of his palace was another source of strain for the people. According to the biblical record, each day Solomon and his men and their families ate thirty cores of flour, sixty cors of meal, thirty oxen, a hundred sheep and goats, unspecified amount of deer, gazelles, roebucks and fowl and unspecified quantities of wine and oil (1 Kgs 4:22-25). To this should be added the annual payment in kind to Hiram for his timber: 20,000 cors of wheat and 20 cors of pressed oil.⁶¹ The burden of maintaining Solomon's regime and his dealing with Hiram weighed heavily on the people who were required to pay heavy taxes and *corvée*.

The biblical narrative depicts Solomon's reign in a rather positive light, however. It is reported, and it is possible, that under him Israel enjoyed considerable security and prosperity. Solomon may have enriched himself through trade and industrial monopolies. Many individuals may have acquired wealth in Solomon's service or through personal efforts.⁶² But the biblical tradition does not totally cover up the other side of the picture. A careful reader notes that Solomon's golden age was not all gold. To some it brought wealth, to others slavery. Its price to all was an increase in the powers of the state and a burden

⁵⁹ Bright, *A History of Israel*, 192.

⁶⁰ Coote, *In Defence of Revolution*, 52.

⁶¹ Estimated to 3,640 kilolitres of wheat and 420 kilolitres of oil. See estimate in the footnote for 2 Chr 2:10 (Life Application Study Bible) that adds also 3,640 kilolitres of barley and the same quantity of wine.

⁶² Bright, *A History of Israel*, 196.

quite without a precedent in Israel.⁶³ It appears that many people endured the cost of Solomon's opulence more than they enjoyed the benefits of his prosperity.

During Solomon's days Jerusalem became increasingly affluent. The wealth of the world flowed to Solomon's court and was reflected in the glory of the capital city. But bureaucracy grew as well. The nation's wealth was no longer based on the land and what it produced. Increasingly the government controlled the wealth of the land, and taxes drained wealth from the people and funneled expenditure through the central government. The glory was a superficial thing; prosperity was not for the people as much as it was at the expense of the people.⁶⁴

Solomon's regime became unpopular not only because of his expectations from the people in terms of taxation and forced labour but also because of the people's frustration over his inequitable delivery of services. The people's feeling that they were not receiving an equitable share in the benefits of their hard labour exacerbated the bitterness of the exploited masses. The distribution of power and privileges may have involved aspects of tribalism and sectionalism.

I SECTIONALISM AND TRIBALISM IN SOLOMON'S ADMINISTRATION

Aspects of tribalism and sectionalism in Solomon's administration were pointed out by Halpern, who contended that King Solomon's military, administrative and economic policies were dictated by sectional Judahite interests. Halpern looks at sectionalism as the main cause of the schism and suggests that partisan conflicts in the United Monarchy are traceable back to the time of David, especially from the time of the revolt of Absalom. Among the issues mentioned to underline Solomon's sympathies with Judah at the expense of the northern tribes are his attitude toward the revolts in the territory and the sale of Cabul, but especially his administrative reforms.⁶⁵

Solomon's innovations that could attract northern antipathy were firstly his administrative policy. All of Israel, excluding Judah, was divided into twelve districts, over which Solomon appointed governors. This arrangement may have allowed Solomon through the representative of his regime to control the *corvée*, taxation and military levy. Lemche refers to this as an administra-

⁶³ Bright, *A History of Israel*, 199.

⁶⁴ Larry Richards and Lawrence O. Richards, *The Teacher's Commentary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1987), 247.

⁶⁵ Halpern, Baruch, "Sectionalism and Schism," *JBL* 93 (1974): 519-532.

tive apparatus used to squeeze the population for both revenue and labour.⁶⁶ While Judeans favoured by the crown had no problem with the royal power, northern leaders grumbled that the wealth of the capital did not sufficiently extend to them. During David's reign and much of Solomon's, the law of spoil and tribute meant that the tax burden for the royal building projects were minimal, or perhaps even non-existent, if David's failure to complete a census is any indication.⁶⁷

Halpern notes a contrast between Solomon's treatment of the revolts in the earlier captured territories. He suggests that while Solomon did not waste any time in quelling the revolt led in the south by King Hadad of Edom (1 Kgs 11:14-22), he seems not to have shown the same enthusiasm in defending the north from the revolt of Rezon, who went as far as seizing Damascus, then Solomon's provincial capital (1 Kgs 11: 23-25). In Halpern's opinion, Solomon's inability or unwillingness to deal properly with the Damascus insurrection may have been felt by the northern tribes as reflecting his preoccupation with, and predilection for, the affairs of Judahite defence.⁶⁸ Also significant to the northern tribes was the alienation of the plain of Akko, the Cabul region, given by Solomon to Hiram of Tyre (1 Kgs 9:10-14). It seems that the proceeds of this sale of a northern land were used for the fortification of the south. This discrimination may have been part of the reasons for the attempted coup by Jeroboam (1 Kgs 11:27).

Solomon's administrative arrangement helped him not only to pursue his policy of "stripping the north to clothe the south," but also to seize control of all political and economic machinery, at the expense of northern tribal elders.⁶⁹ Beyond the collection of revenues involved in his administrative reforms, Solomon sought further to weaken tribal loyalties by replacing tribal leaders with his own appointees responsible to an officer of his cabinet. The challenging attitude of the tribal leaders at the time of Rehoboam's coronation at Shechem (1 Kgs 12:1-5) is sometimes understood in this context. They united against a regime that ignored them and usurped their authority. The presence of Solomon's sons-in-law among the twelve governors (1 Kgs 4:11; 15) may betray elements of nepotism in this administration. Under the leadership of Ephraim, the northern tribes stood their ground and resisted a regime that had become not only exploitative and oppressive but also totalitarian and exclusivist. They rejected a regime that was frustrating their ambition of having a sig-

⁶⁶ Peter N. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 139.

⁶⁷ Mordechai D. Coogan, *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 267.

⁶⁸ Halpern, "Sectionalism and Schism," 522.

⁶⁹ Halpern, "Sectionalism and Schism," 530.

nificant role to play in the leadership of the country and a significant share in the benefits.

If Solomon is responsible for the social conflicts that characterised his regime, the support he received from Hiram was significant enough in helping him to implement administrative and social policies that were found to be unpopular. Hiram's political and economic involvement in Israel surely influenced the way Solomon related to his people. He may not be perceived as a coloniser of Israel, at least not the way the western powers were to African countries. He came invited and he was not directly involved in the administration of Israel as the colonial powers were in colonised countries. Like the colonial powers, however, Hiram participated in, and benefitted from internal structures and policies that exploited and oppressed the local people. As with the European colonisers of Africa, he had a share of responsibility in this exploitation and the conflicts that resulted. In his pursuit of his interests and the interest of his own country, he did not care much about supporting a regime that oppressed the people. This is just what the powerful countries have often done in Rwanda for example, and elsewhere in Africa and this is what they continue to do.

J CONCLUSION

The endemic problems of poverty, conflicts and instability observed in various parts of Africa are rightly blamed on poor leadership. Most often these problems are internally originated. They result from the scramble for the control of power and the distribution of resources by warring social groups who fail to find an equitable formula on power and resources sharing that would be acceptable by all. It was noted, however, that external involvement in socio-political problems in Africa plays a key role in the escalation of such problems into open conflicts. The role of external powers in internal conflicts is rarely acknowledged because most of the intervening powers generally present more noble motives to justify their interference. Internal conflicts are not fuelled only by those who provide arms and ammunitions to the warring groups. Most often this is done through economic and diplomatic support that renders oppressive regimes too powerful to be easily challenged by the oppressed people. This was the case in colonial Rwanda when the colonial powers had vested interests in the system that exploited the Hutu masses, and so it was when Mitterrand supported the Habyarimana Regime even when it was internally indicted for dictatorship. Postcolonial powers continue to do the same supporting unpopular regimes in Africa rendering them too powerful to be easily challenged internally.

If China can be rightly indicted for turning a blind eye to oppression and abuses perpetrated by its partner regimes in Africa, at the other end stand countries that are notorious for magnifying and exploiting the mistakes of some

selected African leaders who do not serve their interests as a pretext for intervention against them. Gaddhafi of Libya, Gbagbo of Ivory Coast and Mobutu of Congo are among those whose fall helped by the intervention of external forces produced conflicts of which the respective people are still suffering the consequences. Surely such African leaders are neither necessarily African heroes nor are they innocent victims of imperialism, but those who help to remove them are not necessarily champions of justice, either, as they wish to be perceived to be. It was noted that sins can even be fabricated to justify the removal of an annoying leader as it was the case with Saddam Hussein of Iraq. Moreover, dictators in countries that are less attractive economically, strategically or otherwise can abuse the masses as they like, these powers would not care so much. So Mugabe of Zimbabwe may have observed: I don't care what Blair and Bush say, they will never come here, since there is no petrol in Zimbabwe!

This article has argued that Hiram of Tyre provided to Solomon's regime the kind of diplomatic and economic support that new colonial and imperialistic regimes continue to provide to some African unpopular regimes and for the same purpose. By doing so Hiram contributed to the social conflicts that culminated in the division of the Kingdom of Israel. The endemic problems of poverty, conflicts, and instability in Africa are not totally African, they have an international dimension. Any lasting solution to the complex African problems must consider this dimension.

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