# Decolonial Post-Tribal Interpretation: Proto-Tribal Socio-Economic Contestation in 3 Reigns 12:24p-t

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*ABSTRACT*

*This article reflects on the socio-economic and tribal dimensions of both 3 Reigns 12:24p-t and the post-1994 South African transition. Mahmood Mamdani's recent book, Neither Settler nor Native, provides an analysis of political decolonisation in post-apartheid South Africa, in which he identifies two areas of failure within the significant gains made during South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy—socio-economic justice and tribalisation. These two areas are the unfinished business of our substantive decolonisation of the political. In this article, I use Mamdani's analysis as an exegetical dialogue partner, probing the socio-economic and tribal dimensions of 3 Reigns 12:24p-t and identifying this text as a proto-tribal text which documents the emergence of tribal economics. Methodologically, this article establishes a to-and-fro tripolar movement between the contemporary South African context and the biblical text.*

**Keywords**: Decolonial, Post-Tribal, 3 Reigns 12:24p-t, Socio-economic, Mamdani

## A    INTRODUCTION

All must be born again, politically.

This is an important legacy of post-apartheid South Africa—the argument that political rebirth is possible. South Africa's political rebirth has been partial; racial identity has been depoliticized; even as tribal identity has remained an obstacle to political equality. But even partial rebirth is something.[1]

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[1]   Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2021), 195. This article celebrates the retirement of Prof G.F. (Gerrie) Snyman. In particular, I honour his refusal to elide his whiteness and his sustained commitment to engage with whiteness as a site of struggle in post-apartheid South Africa. May his work continue into retirement.

These words are from the final paragraphs of Mahmood Mamdani's analysis of the South African case study, "Settlers and Natives in Apartheid South Africa," in his book *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities*. Mamdani presented an oral form of his chapter on South Africa as his contribution to the Tambo Foundation Anniversary Lecture Series in 2020, entitled "Lessons of the South African Transition of 1994." [2] His analysis of South Africa's post-apartheid political history forms the contextual site within which I locate an analysis of 3 Reigns 12:24p-t.

Mamdani's provocative analysis identifies two areas of failure within the significant gains made during South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy—socio-economic justice and tribalisation. These two areas are the unfinished business of our substantive decolonisation of the political. In this article, I use Mamdani's analysis as an exegetical dialogue partner, probing the socio-economic and tribal dimensions of 3 Reigns 12:24p-t.

## B    FROM CITY-STATE CAPTURE TO NATION-STATE CAPTURE

As I have indicated in a recent article,[3] my interest in 3 Reigns 12:24p-t arose from pedagogical work with students in a third year biblical studies module. In this module, we identified particular contemporary contextual struggles, brought an analysis of these struggles to particular biblical texts, identified the contending voices concerning these struggles in and behind the text and then grappled with how we might appropriate the potentially redemptive voices and their resources. Our hermeneutical practice acknowledged and worked with the biblical text as contentious text and so understood that our appropriation was partial (in both senses) as we sought to make a biblical-theological contribution to potential social transformation. Each year, the contextual topics would shift, as our context shifted. However, two topics were constant and were used to give the students a sense of the hermeneutical shape of our pedagogical process. Ancient and contemporary economic struggles and gender struggles always formed in the first few weeks of our module.

We began the module with the economic realities of apartheid (prior to 1994) and then post-apartheid (after 1994) South Africa, given that the overwhelming majority of students were black students from poor communities. In order to assist the students to understand the notion of an ideologically and theologically (ideo-theologically) contested Bible, I first introduced students to Walter Brueggemann's early work in which he distinguished between a Mosaic-

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[2]  "Lessons of the South African Transition of 1994," Tambo Foundation Anniversary Lecture Series: Celebrating 10 years of Thought Leadership, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7DKfAyuz64.

[3]  Gerald O. West, "In Search of an Economic Remnant of Resistance: 3 Reigns 12:24p-t," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78/1 (2022). While there is some overlap with the argument in that article, in this article, my emphasis is quite different but the two articles could be read as companion pieces.

prophetic and a Davidic-consolidatory trajectory within and behind the entire Bible.[4] Brueggemann offered students an accessible understanding of intrinsic contestation not only between texts but within a text. Second, we then moved to a more complex understanding of ideo-theological contestation within a text, taking up the work of Itumeleng Mosala and his analysis of Micah,[5] drawing on Robert Coote's analysis of Amos[6] in which he identifies a range of contending voices including the poor exploited classes, the prophet who re-presents the poor exploited classes, the scribes who re-represent the prophet and the ruling elites who co-opt all these voices for their own political economy. Brueggemann's and Mosala's analyses were especially useful because each of them focused on the economic.

An example of the exercises I gave students was to read 1 Kgs 11-14 in its final form (in English translation, Hebrew for those with access and their own vernacular translations) and to ask them to identify two intertwined narratives, one with a religious and ethnic ideo-theology and one with an economic and political ideo-theology. Students throughout the many years of my teaching had no problem with discerning each of these narratives, even if they differed in the detail of each narrative thread. The narrative unit they always agreed on as being most clearly about economic concerns was 1 Kgs 12:1-16 (or -18 /-19). They were intrigued to notice, however, that even this narrative unit incorporated religio-ethnic elements (15b, 17, 19). This example gave us the opportunity to recognise contestation with the larger narrative of 1 Kgs 11-14 and even within the narrative unit of 1 Kgs 12:1-19. Students were amazed that the division of the united Davidic kingdom, according to this narrative unit, was clearly as a result of economic oppression.

In my last decade of teaching (2009-2019), during the years of Jacob Zuma's presidency and the immediate aftermath, the 1 Kgs 12:1-19 narrative unit generated extensive discussion about what was beginning to be referred to as 'state-capture.' Students readily identified the counsel given by "the young men who grew up with him" (1 Kgs 12:10) as the counsel of the generation who most benefited from Solomon's city-state-capture and who were determined that the political-economy of Rehoboam's city-state remained captured for their ongoing political and economic benefit. Representing as they did a number of different African nation-states, the students lamented how colonial economies of

[4]   Walter Brueggemann, "Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel," *JBL* 98/2 (1979); Walter Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, I: Structure Legitimation," *CBQ* 47/1 (1985), 28–46; Walter Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology II: Embrace of Pain," *CBQ* 47/3 (1985), 395–415.
[5]   Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 101–153.
[6]   Robert B. Coote, *Amos among the Prophets: Composition and Theology* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1981).

extraction have been co-opted by post-colonial African ruling elites. Students were unanimous about the potential usefulness of this narrative unit as a resource with which to challenge the "theology" of the church,[7] so that a more "prophetic" church might add its voice to the national public debate.

Our focus in this biblical studies module then shifted to other texts and other topics but my own interest in this text deepened as I explored the variant renderings of the story in 2 Chr 10:1-18, 3 Reigns 12:1-18 and 3 Reigns 12:24p-t. I was intrigued as I became aware of a persuasive argument by Adrian Schenker that LXX 3 Reigns 12:24a-z likely represents a narrative form that is "prior" to the Masoretic 1 Kgs 11-12; 14.[8] I went on to present a paper along the lines of Schenker's analysis at the 2021 Association for the Study of the Septuagint in South Africa (LXXSA) Conference, where colleagues pushed me to situate 3 Reigns 12:24p-t more fully within a plausible socio-context. In the published version of the paper,[9] I therefore do go on to argue that the stark economic contours of 3 Reigns 12:24p-t suggest that this narrative unit may retain a narrative of the inter-class contestation which contributed to the collapse of the united monarchy, which had been reworked repeatedly to fit more ethno-religious agendas, whether through redaction or translation. Significantly, 3 Reigns 12:24p-t contains none of the elements my students and I identified as attempts at ethno-religious co-optation. This variant version is entirely economic in its focus.

In that article, I made it clear, as I do in this article, that my interest in this variant version of the story of the division of the United Kingdom is in order to return this variant to communities of Christian faith who are themselves struggling to survive economically within a nation-state that has been captured, macro-economically by what Sampie Terreblanche refers to as "democratic capitalism"[10] and nationally by what the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into State Capture and others[11] describe as "state capture." The Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal,

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[7]  Theologians Kairos, *Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa: The Kairos Document* (Braamfontein: The Kairos Theologians, 1985). Similarly, with "prophetic."

[8]  Adrian Schenker, "Jeroboam and the Division of the Kingdom in the Ancient Septuagint: LXX 3 Kingdoms 12.24 az, MT 1 Kings 11-12; 14 and the Deuteronomistic History," in *Israel Constructs Its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research* (ed. Albert de Pury, Thomas Römer, and Jean-Daniel Macchi; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 230.

[9]  West, "In Search of an Economic Remnant."

[10]  Sampie Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa, 1652-2002* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002), 15. See also Gerald O. West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 449–463.

[11]  Pieter Labuschagne, "Patronage, State Capture and Oligopolistic Monopoly in South Africa: The Slide from a Weak to a Dysfunctional State?," *Acta Academica* 49/2 (2017).

where I have worked for more than thirty years, is overt about the Bible itself as a site of contestation not only in terms of its interpretation /reception but also in terms of its production.[12] Increasingly we have sought for opportunities and developed interpretive processes within the local communities we work with to be more overt about biblical texts as representing contending voices. Thus, 3 Reigns 12:24p-t offers us both an example of such intra-text contestation (read alongside 1 Kgs 12:1-18) and potential economic resources for engaging with the post-apartheid nation-state for a more inclusive economy.

Constructing an Ujamaa Centre 'Contextual Bible Study'[13] that would offer such interpretive options has become even more important in contemporary South Africa, for not only has our economy been 'captured' on the macro-economic and national levels, it risks also being captured at the tribal level, as Mamdani warns.

## C    DECOLONISING THE POLITICAL

In the final paragraph of his analysis of South African decolonisation Mamdani argues that South Africa's contribution to decolonising the political was "a reframing of political identity so that formerly opposed identities could live together in the new political community." "This," he insists, "is the heart of decolonizing the political." [14] Mamdani is thoroughly historical in his comprehensive analysis of "the modern nation-state,"[15] which includes the modern African nation-state (Sudan) and the post-apartheid South African nation-state. Mamdani refuses "the European story" of the modern nation-state, offering in its place an alternative story that traces "the founding moment of the modern state," not to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 "instead to 1492." "That year," he continues, "marked the beginning of the nation-state." [16] Two Iberian-led developments, he argues, gave birth to the nation-state—ethnic cleansing at home in Europe and the taking of colonies overseas. "In this story," he continues:

> Modern colonialism was not something that states started doing in the eighteenth century. Modern colonialism and the modern state were born together with the creation of the nation-state. Nationalism did not precede colonialism. Nor was colonialism the highest or the final stage in the making of a nation. The two were co-constituted.[17]

If the nation-state was born "amid ethnic cleansing and overseas

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[12] Gerald O. West, "Reading the Bible with the Marginalised: The Value/s of Contextual Bible Reading," *STJ* 1/2 (2015):241–242.
[13] West, "Reading the Bible with the Marginalised."
[14] Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making*, 195.
[15] Ibid., 1, 329.
[16] Ibid., 1.
[17] Ibid., 1–2.

domination,"[18] how may it be born again? This question guides Mamdani's provocative analysis and eloquent prose, as he analyses the contours of the nation-state, using five case-studies—the United States, Germany, South Africa, Sudan and Israel/Palestine.[19] Each example serves a different role in the book[20] with the South African case study playing the pivotal role of pointing to the possibility and shape of political rebirth. The chapter on South Africa is used as a fulcrum, providing Mamdani with what he refers to as "the South African moment." [21] "If the United States is the founding settler-colonial regime," he argues, "then South Africa is at the frontier of decolonization." He explains that, "Over the years, anticolonial resistance has come in two forms, one mimicking colonial logic [the United States, Germany, Sudan, Israel / Palestine], the other undermining it [South Africa]. It is the latter," he continues, "that informs my vision of the nonnational state we might aspire to after colonialism." [22]

He elaborates on this South African moment when he argues that it "unfolded in three phases":

> The first was the turn from resisting within the terms set by apartheid governance to redefining these terms. The second was a shift from demanding an end to apartheid to providing an alternative to apartheid. Third was a shift from representing the oppressed black majority to representing the whole people.[23]

His analysis of these three phases is historical and detailed. For example, he offers incisive and counter normative analysis of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA)[24] and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).[25]

Central to his analysis throughout this book is his understanding of 'decolonisation' and again the South African moment offers resources. "When South Africans threw off apartheid and replaced it with nonracial democracy, they began the process of rethinking and restructuring the internal political community. I call this process," says Mamdani, "the *decolonization of the political*." While the South African contribution to his analysis of the decolonial is significant, he regularly reiterates what he sees as a "mixed" outcome to the South African moment. He explains that, "On the positive side, one kind of permanent minority has unraveled: that based on race. The solidarity fostered by black consciousness and the radicalization of whites in the labor movement made

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[18] Ibid., 2.
[19] Ibid., 4.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., 31, 162.
[22] Ibid., 31.
[23] Ibid., 162.
[24] Ibid., 176.
[25] Ibid., 180.

this possible." "However," he continues, turning to the negative, "the ethnic tribe, the other category naturalized by apartheid, remains a source of political identity driving what South Africans call 'xenophobic' violence. The target of the xenophobic violence in South Africa is not the racial stranger but the tribal stranger." "Even as South Africa has consciously moved away from a race-based nation-state project," he elaborates, "it has maintained the logic that equates African or native political identity with tribe."[26] South Africa has not quite decolonised the political construction of 'settler' and 'native.' South Africa has yet to move decisively in the decolonial direction beyond "tribalism."[27]

Mamdani's emphasis throughout is on *political* decolonisation. He understands this as a two-sided process:—"externally, the assertion of political independence from the colonial power and a claim to membership in community of states in the world at large; internally, the reimagination and redefinition of the political community." [28] The South African anti-apartheid struggle again offers useful resources. In Mamdani's analysis,

> The anti-apartheid struggle is a radical attempt to imagine a postcolonial political community that is neither a return to the imagined precolonial nation nor a continuation of the colonial condition. Rather, the post-apartheid political community attempts to recognize and reckon with the changes wrought by colonialism.[29]

Decolonisation requires, concludes Mamdani, "dreaming up a political community that undoes the organic link between state and nation that has gelled over the past five centuries."[30] The South African moment offers Mamdani hope, involving what he refers to as a "triple shift,"

> [f]rom demanding an end to apartheid to offering an alternative to apartheid; from majoritarianism—representing the oppressed black majority—to representing the whole people; and from resisting within the terms set by apartheid to redefining the very terms of how South Africa should be governed.[31]

Mamdani is aware that, "The end of legal apartheid and the introduction of nonracial democracy have not solved every problem in South Africa" but, he insists, "they have at last given South Africans the tools to solve these problems." "Reform of the political order," he adds, "is a necessary step in the struggle for social justice,"[32] a struggle that continues.

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26  Ibid., 32.
27  Ibid., 5.
28  Ibid., 34.
29  Ibid., 189.
30  Ibid., 334.
31  Ibid., 345.
32  Ibid., 347.

For those of us grappling with notions of 'decolonial' biblical studies and theology as well as those of us engaged with various notions of 'public theology,' Mamdani's thesis and analysis offers us pause, inviting us to reflect more fully on how we understand the South African nation-state and its political community. Specifically, Mamdani has identified two domains that demand further decolonial work, detribalisation and socio-economic justice.

## D    DECOLONIAL SOCIAL (ECONOMIC) JUSTICE

Though Mamdani does not focus on economic decolonisation, he is attentive to the economic dimensions of what he refers to as "social justice." In lauding the South African political "moment," Mamdani recognises that, "The post-apartheid transition involved serious compromises, undoubtedly, and they have set back the quest for social justice." However, he continues, what this political transition gained was "the dismantling of juridical apartheid and the introduction of majority-rule electoral politics at the national and provincial levels in exchange for concessions to white economic privilege."[33] Mamdani is aware of contemporary South African analysis in which "the focus is on the deficits of CODESA" [34] but he turns our attention to what he sees "as the most far-reaching and far-sighted transition to political independence in the colonial world," South Africa's "political revolution."[35]

In a subsequent article, in which Mamdani responds to specific criticisms of his analysis in *Neither Settler nor Native*, he explains more fully how he understands the gains of South Africa's political revolution in socio-economic terms. Mamdani begins his response by stating that his project in this book is to ask:

> [t]hat we deepen our understanding of political decolonisation beyond freedom from external political domination, to include an internal aspect, rethinking and remaking the political community by depoliticising and redrawing internal political boundaries ('race' and 'tribe') that were drafted during the colonial era.[36]

Mamdani's substantive point "is that, the more deracialised and detribalised the political community, the less likely will its response to demands for social equality be along racial and tribal lines."[37] We should see "the rebirth," Mamdani continues, "as the beginning of political decolonisation, but not the end of decolonisation," for he accepts that, "Without social justice, the gains made in the political domain will not endure." However, he argues, "any move

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[33] Ibid., 179.
[34] Ibid., 188.
[35] Ibid., 189.
[36] Mahmood Mamdani, "*Neither Settler nor Native*: A Response to My Critics," *CODESRIA Bulletin Online* 20 (2021):4.
[37] Mamdani, "Neither Settler nor Native: A Response," 4.

towards deracialisation and detribalisation is sure to improve the chances of waging a struggle for social justice than what they were under apartheid."[38] He summarises his argument:

> My claim is that a successful struggle for social justice will need to cut across the political divides imposed by race and tribe. Without political equality, the mobilisation for social justice will be fragmented along lines of race and tribe.[39]

## E   DECOLONIAL DETRIBALISATION

Having made a case for the significance of political decolonisation for socio-economic justice in post-apartheid South Africa, Mamdani turns to what he understands to be the substantive failure of the South African political transition. "South Africa faced," he argues, reiterating his analysis, "a dual political challenge in 1994," which he describes "as 'deracialisation' and 'detribalisation'." [40] However, he continues, if we consider this dual legacy of 1994, "only 'deracialisation' gives us ground for optimism, the same cannot be said of the failure to detribalise. The outcome of this failure, called 'xenophobic' violence, highlights the depth of the challenge confronting the unfinished political transition. That this violence is more against the 'tribal' rather than the 'racial' other should be reason for sober reflection." [41]

In Mamdani's analysis the post-apartheid transition failed "to address fully half the political architecture of apartheid—tribal political identity." [42] "This political identity, created and politicized by settlers and maintained under apartheid," in his analysis,[43] "has only been deepened since transition. There has been no attempt to historicize tribe; instead it has been made to seem a natural part of African lives."[44] While the transition "succeeded in reforming the central state, organized around race, as political identity . . . it did not reform the local state organized around tribe as a political identity."[45] CODESA not only gave protection to certain white economic interests including white land, it also "sanctioned customary law– the same law apartheid incorporated," [46] restricting access to particular land to members of a particular tribal political community.

Though Mamdani does not probe in any detail the economic dimensions of tribal political identity beyond the ownership of land, he does reflect in detail

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[38]  Ibid.
[39]  Ibid.
[40]  Ibid.
[41]  Ibid.
[42]  Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making*, 191.
[43]  Ibid., 12, 28–29, 146–147, 60–62.
[44]  Ibid., 191.
[45]  Ibid., 190.
[46]  Ibid.

on its xenophobic economic outcomes. As I have already indicated, in Mamdani's terms, "The target of the xenophobic violence in South Africa is not the racial stranger but the tribal stranger."[47] Mamdani sees a direct link between the post-1994 transition legitimisation of "tribe as a category of identity" and post-1994 xenophobic violence.[48] He returns to provide further detail to his analysis in the article responding to his critics. The post-apartheid elections in 1994 posed the question, he notes, of who had the right to vote. "At stake," he argues, "were the political rights of hundreds of thousands, maybe over a million, migrant workers who had over decades come from neighbouring territories: Mozambique, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Malawi and others."[49] As Mamdani regularly does, he then recounts the contribution of worker movements to the South African transition. Migrants, he insists, "had been pivotal in worker mobilisation since 1973 and were among the driving forces of the trade union movement that followed, starting with FOSATU." Significantly, the African National Congress (ANC) "had historically been in solidarity with migrants," with the 1955 Freedom Charter boldly proclaiming "that 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it'—to all its residents, not just to its citizens." [50]

While migrants voted in 1994, Mamdani notes, "following 1994, Chief Gatsha Buthelezi and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) took control of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Step by step, they chipped away at the rights of non-citizen residents, disenfranchising them." Furthermore, he continues, "They told black South Africans that their rightful gains in the post-apartheid era were being usurped by non-citizen residents pouring in from across the country's borders. They thus set citizens against residents." "This is why," he concludes, "when post-apartheid violence erupted, its target was the tribal stranger, not the racial stranger. 'Xenophobic' violence is testimony to the two-sidedness of citizenship: just as it empowered some (citizens), it excluded others (migrants)."[51]

Mamdani does not refer to the 2021 July "unrest" (or "insurrection")[52] but this too could be understood as a form of tribal economics with disaffected members of the ruling party believing that their tribe no longer had a controlling interest in state resources. Chris Makhaye adds that the Radical Economic Transformation (RET) faction within the ANC, particularly within KwaZulu-Natal, could be understood to be "an ethnic chauvinistic project." [53] Similarly,

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[47]  Ibid., 32.
[48] Ibid., 190–191.
[49]  Mamdani, "Neither Settler nor Native: A Response," 4.
[50] Ibid.
[51]  Ibid.
[52]  Des Erasmus, "Cyril Ramaphosa: 'Attempted July Insurrection' Left Two Million Jobless and Wiped R50bn from the Economy," *Daily Maverick*, 1 April 2022, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-04-01-cyril-ramaphosa-attempted-july-insurrection-left-2-million-jobless-and-wiped-r50bn-from-the-economy/.
[53]  Chris Makhaye, "Dons Have KZN in Their Grip — and Don of Dons Jacob Zuma

Operation Dudula, which started a few months after the July riots, is clearly about the tribal economic dimensions of its agenda.[54]

I accept that these South African examples of tribal economics, whether in the guise of tribal customary law, tribal trust land, xenophobia, the July unrest or Operation Dudula demand a more nuanced analysis.[55] However, Mamdani's analysis prompts us to reflect on how we do decolonial de-tribalised biblical interpretation.

## F      DECOLONIAL DETRIBALISED BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

> The state form inherited from apartheid was bifurcated—the central state was racialised and the local state was tribalised. The reforms of 1994 moved towards deracialisation but not detribalisation. The beneficiaries of that reform had no problem accepting that race should rightfully be depoliticised but not tribe; far too many believe that tribal (customary) rights are part of an age-old African culture and not part of the legacy of apartheid.[56]

Mamdani's response to his critics, cited in the above paragraph, foregrounds the politically and economically constructed dimension of the 'tribal.' Similar work has been done within South African decolonial biblical scholarship. In a previous article, I have analysed how South African forms of decolonial biblical interpretation have been attentive to social class distinctions within both ancient 'Israelite' and African indigenous cultures.[57] What has been especially useful about this kind of intersectional analysis has been its attentiveness to the class dimensions within ancient 'tribes.' Hulisani Ramanstwana, for example, has analysed how "the landlessness of the Levites was a result of the social construction of tribal ranking among the Israelites tribes in which the Joseph tribes assumed the position of power and privilege." On this basis, "they became more landed than the rest of Israel tribes, this at the expense of Levites—the landless."[58] What I argue in this article is that Mamdani's

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Has     the     Tightest     Grip," *Daily     Maverick*,     18     April     2022, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-04-18-jacob-zuma-kzn-zandile-gumede-have-in-their-grip/.

[54] Chris Makhaye, "Operation Dudula Launch March in KZN a Damp Squib," *Daily Maverick*, 11 April 2022, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-04-11-operation-dudula-launch-march-in-kzn-a-damp-squib/.

[55] See, for example, Clayton Hazvinei Vhumbunu, "The July 2021 Protests and Socio-Political Unrest in South Africa: Reflecting on the Causes, Consequences and Future Lessons," *Conflict Trends* 2021/3 (2021):3–13.

[56] Mamdani, "Neither Settler nor Native: A Response," 5.

[57] Gerald O. West, "A Decolonial (Re)turn to Class in South African Biblical Scholarship," *OTE* 34/2 (2021).

[58] Hulisani Ramantswana, "Decolonial Reflection on the Landlessness of the Levites,"

analysis of a contemporary post-colonial context prompts us to interrogate the textual unit 3 Reigns 12:24p-t, which offers us a 'glimpse,' borrowing a hermeneutical concept from Mosala,[59] of a kindred context in which the struggle for socio-economic justice takes precedence over tribal claims. Are there resonances between the emergence of tribe-based economics in ancient 'Israel' and the emergence of tribe-based economics in post-colonial and post-apartheid South Africa?

If Schenker and I are correct and there is substantive evidence to support the argument,[60] then 3 Reigns 12:24p-t represents the earliest narrative account of the economic realities underlying the division of the ancient 'Israelite' United Kingdom. The *New English Translation of the Septuagint* translates this text in English as follows:

> [24p]And the people said to Roboam son of Salomon, "Your father made his collar heavy upon us and the food of his table heavy. And now if you will ease up on us, then we will be subject to you," and Roboam said to the people, "Yet three days, and I will answer you a word." [24q]And Roboam said, "Bring in the elders to me and I will take counsel with them what word I should answer the people in the third day." And Roboam spoke in their ears as the people sent to him, and the elders of the people said, "Thus the people spoke to you." [24r]And Roboam rejected their advice, and it was not pleasing before him, and he sent and gathered those who had been brought up with him and spoke to them the issues, "And the people sent to me, saying these things." And those who had been brought up with him said: 'Thus you shall speak to the people, saying, "My smallness is thicker than my father's loins, my father chastised you with whips, but I will rule you with scorpions'." [24s]And the word was pleasing before Roboam, and he answered the people according as the lads who grew up with him advised him. [24t]And all the people as one man said, each to his neighbor, and all cried out, saying,
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> "There is no part of us in Dauid,
> neither inheritance in the son of Iessai;
> to your coverts, O Israel,
> for this person is not for a ruler or for a leader."[61]

This narrative has no awkward grammar, asides or interpellations (as in the other variants); it is clear, concise and coherent.[62] In narrative terms, "the

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*JTSA* 158 (2017):73–74.

[59] Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 40.

[60] Schenker, "Jeroboam and the Division of the Kingdom," 227–229, 48–49; West, "In Search of an Economic Remnant,"

[61] Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 310.

[62] There is some overlap in what follows with my analysis in West, "In Search of an

people" are the primary agents, making economic demands on the son of Solomon. There is no talk of making him king (as in the other variants), simply a statement of systemic economic injustice. The people identify two specific components of economic exploitation—ἐβάρυνεν τὸν κλοιὸν αὐτο¬ ἐφ᾽ ἡμᾷς καὶ ἐβάρυνεν τὰ βρώματα τ⌐ς τραπέζης αὐτο¬ (he made burdensome his collar on us and he made burdensome the food of his table). The monarchic economic elite are the subject of both sentences and the verb is repeated in each sentence. What connects the two sentences is an analysis in which there is a direct systemic relationship between the objects of the sentences, "his collar on us" and "the food of his table." The economic logic of the sentence is clear—an economy of extraction has led to the exploitation of the people. The food of the king's table is directly related to the exploitation of the labour of the people. The references here almost certainly include both state conscripted corvée labour, what Norman Gottwald refers to as "Solomon's ill-fated indulgence in corvée labor"[63] and the emergence of what Marvin Chaney refers to as "agricultural wage labor." [64]

The contestation is resolutely and consistently on class conflict between an economic elite and the exploited workers. The extractive dimension of what Boer refers to as "the sacred economy" is emphasised here, specifically the tribute regime of extraction.[65] Boer is insistent, however, that it is the "regime of allocation" within the "theo-economics" of such ancient Near Eastern economic systems that predominates.[66] The people's confirmation that "if you will ease up on us, then we will be subject to you" (24pb) indicates that the people recognise the deity's role in allocation through the power of those delegated to make decisions concerning allocation[67] including the king. The people also recognise, however, that such delegated power is not absolute. The power of the king, in this case, must demonstrate a just allocation and extraction regime. The reason for the people's resistance in this narrative is that Salomon has 'captured' the state for the benefit of the ruling class; the state does not serve the people.

The response of "those who had been brought up with him" (24r), Roboam's royal court-based age-mates, is further evidence of a state that has been captured to serve the needs and luxury desires of the emerging second-

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Economic Remnant."

[63] Norman K. Gottwald, "The Rise of the Israelite Monarchy: A Sociological Perspective," in *The Hebrew Bible in Its Social World and Ours* (ed. Norman K. Gottwald; Atlanta: The Society of Biblical Literature, 1993), 134.

[64] Marvin L. Chaney, "Bitter Bounty: The Dynamics of Political Economy Critiqued by the Eighth-Century Prophets," in *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (ed. Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsley; Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), 260.

[65] Roland Boer, "The Sacred Economy of Ancient 'Israel'," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament: An International Journal of Nordic Theology* 21/1 (2007):41–43.

[66] Boer, "The Sacred Economy of Ancient 'Israel'," 39.

[67] Ibid., 39.

generation monarchic ruling class.[68] While "the elders of the people" (οἱ πρεσβύτεροι το¬ λαο¬) (24qd) reiterate that "the people" collectively have spoken, refusing to countenance Roboam's attempt to divide "the people," Roboam finds the counsel he wants from among the generation which benefits from systemic economic exploitation. The contours of the conflict become clear in Roboam's response (24r). In rejecting the elders implied advice that he hear the demands of the people, it is clear that Roboam has already rejected the people's demand for economic reform. Unable to use their own elders against them, Roboam turns to those who have a vested interest in the economic system, "those who had been brought up with him." Like Roboam, they are the beneficiaries of economic extraction. They put into words what Roboam wants to say to the people—there is a contrast between voices that are "not pleasing" and voices that are "pleasing" (24r-s). An element of what might be called econo-patriarchy is at work here, whereby the subordinate court-based males derive their own related internal versions of hegemonic masculinity from the dominant masculinity, thereby affirming the dominant form.[69] "The lads" (τὰ παιδάρια) provide Roboam with a hyper-masculine logic with which to justify the logic of economic exploitation. He is a bigger and better 'man' than his father (24r). His econo-patriarchy will be more virulent than his father's.

The implied reader hears the direct speech of "the lads who grew up with him" as the final spoken words of the ruling elite. The narrator does not grant Roboam direct speech as the narrative comes to its conclusion. The narrator elides his voice, reporting on his behalf. The narrative effect is that the implied reader has a clear sense of the narrative point of view. This point of view is confirmed by the voice of the people (24t). Roboam "is not for a ruler or for a leader." The final word is given to the people. Significantly, before the people speak, it is reported that they caucused: "all the people as one man said, each to his neighbor." In this version of the story, "the people" are an organised formation with their own internal organisation and discipline. They speak only after they have caucused. When the people hear Roboam's refusal to instituted economic change, they caucus and then revolt, rejecting Roboam as both a ruler (ἄρχοντα) and a leader (ἡγούμενον) (24t). The form of the verb (participle present middle accusative masculine singular) suggests that the people's verdict is that Roboam does not have the capacity to lead. The narrative concludes with

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[68]   Chaney, "Bitter Bounty."

[69]   For a fuller analysis of this term, see Gerald O. West, "Trans-Textual and Trans-Sectoral Gender-Economic Reading of the Rape of Tamar (2 Sam 13) and the Expropriation of Naboth's Land (1 Kgs 21)," in *Faith, Class, and Labor: Intersectional Approaches in a Global Context* (ed. Jin Young Choi and Joerg Rieger; Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2020), 113–116. For notions of contestation between masculinities, see R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender & Society* 19.6 (2005):834–835, 844, 848; Jon-Michael Carman, "Abimelech the Manly Man? Judges 9.1-57 and the Performance of Hegemonic Masculinity," *JSOT* 43/3 (2019):311–116.

a three-fold collective judgement (24ta)—the recognition of and resistance to an exploitative economic system (24tb); the call to their own organisational system (24tc) and the rejection of a form of leadership that is incapable of hearing the cry of the people for a reformed economic system (24td).

Significantly this narrative unit has no indications of ethno-religious co-optation, evident in the three other variants of the narrative (1 Kgs 12:1-18;[70] 2 Chr 10:1-18; 3 Reigns 12:1-18). The contestation is resolutely and consistently on an ancient class conflict between exploited workers and an economic elite. This version of the narrative most clearly reflects a story that recalls what Gunther Wittenberg refers to as "the theology of resistance in Israel,"[71] which, according to his analysis, has its emergence in David's "attitude towards Judah after Absalom's death," whereby he realised that "he needed Judah as his power base." The result was that the northern tribes "had to bear the brunt of many innovations from which Judah seems to have been largely exempt." [72]

Thus, 3 Reigns 12:24p-t represents a coherent prophetic fragment, stark in its economic analysis and the consequences of the failure of the state to serve all its people. In narrative terms, 3 Reigns 12:24p-t demonstrates how the Davidic-Solomonic state has become tribalised. The tribal response of Roboam generates the potential for further tribalisation:

> "There is no part of us in Dauid,
> neither inheritance in the son of Iessai;
> to your coverts, O Israel,
> for this person is not for a ruler or for a leader."[73]

Though the tribal elements have yet to fully emerge in 3 Reigns 12:24p-t, they are interpolated into this text in later redactions and translations as this text (in its Hebrew and Greek version) is reused in contexts in which the tribal has become a dominant feature of later monarchies and a distinctive feature of the post-exilic context. A clear sign, for example, of the tribalising of the economic is the awkward insertion of "Jeroboam" into the other variant versions of this story, minimally in 3 Reigns 12:15b and more extensively in 1 Kgs 12:2-3, 12, 15b and in 2 Chr 10:2-3, 12, 15b. Furthermore, in interpolating "Jeroboam" in 3 Reigns 12:15b, 1 Kgs 12:15b and 2 Chr 10:15b, this ethnic marker of a tribal king is given religious legitimation. The ethnic dimension is particularly evident in two further interpolations in 1 Kgs 12:17 and 2 Chr 10:17: "But as for the sons

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[70] For a 'tribal' analysis of this text, see Eraste Nyirimana, "The Tribal Dimension in the Division of the Kingdom of Israel: A Contextual Study of 1 Kings 12:1-24 from the Perspective of the Struggle for National Unity in Rwanda" (Ph.D. diss., University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2010).

[71] Gunther H. Wittenberg, "King Solomon and the Theologians," *JTSA* 63 (1988):23.

[72] Wittenberg, "King Solomon and the Theologians," 23.

[73] Pietersma and Wright, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, 310.

of Israel who lived in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them."

This article is not the place for charting the redaction and translation relationships between these texts in detail. Others have done some of this work already, for example, Schenker[74] whose analysis and arguments I find compelling, given my focus on the narrative unit 3 Reigns 12:24p-t. As I have indicated, my own analysis would, like Schenker's, locate 3 Reigns 12:24p-t as prior to the other versions of this variant. Furthermore, having read a draft of my earlier article in which I offer my analysis of the priority of 3 Reigns 12:24p-t,[75] Mark Brett has pointed me to potentially corroborating analysis. Thomas Römer, for example, puts forward a threefold argument. First, he argues that, "Whether or not one adheres to the theory about the existence of a 'Deuteronomistic History,' there is no doubt that the story of the Israelite and Judahite monarchies is written from a Judahite or Southern perspective." [76] Second, he argues that "the Deuteronomistic editors of 2 Kgs 14:23-24, 28-29 (vv. 25, 26-27 are later additions) are surprisingly short-spoken about Jeroboam II. They only mention his deed and strength and refer to the annals of the kings of Israel." He then provides an analysis through which he concludes: "This extremely short comment about the Israelite king with the longest rule might be explained by the fact that the Deuteronomists transferred events that happened under Jeroboam II to Jeroboam I."[77] Third and finally for my purposes, Römer, drawing on the work of Angelika Berlejung,[78] argues that, "1 Kings 12 in its present form cannot be placed under Jeroboam I. It is a polemical fiction that transfers an event from the time of Jeroboam II."[79] He concludes:

> Even though the Judean perspective in which the Hebrew Bible was finally compiled tried to evict or transform Northern tradition and despite the Deuteronomistic attempt to downplay the reign of Jeroboam II, these tradition[sic] resisted, enabling us to know more about the 'censored kingdom of the North.'[80]

It would seem from this kind of analysis that Jeroboam I is largely a construct of later ethno-religious ideological and theological agendas. My argument is that the absence of Jeroboam and the absence of an overt reference to both 'Israel' and 'Judah' (as in 1 Kgs 12:17 and 2 Chr 10:17) in 3 Reigns 12:24p-t offers us a glimpse of an economic struggle against exploitation at the moment when it begins to take on an ethnic, tribal countenance. The final poetic

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[74] Schenker, "Jeroboam and the Division of the Kingdom"; Adrian Schenker, "Jeroboam's Rise and Fall in the Hebrew and Greek Bible," *JSJ* 39/3 (2008).

[75] West, "In Search of an Economic Remnant."

[76] Thomas Römer, "How Jeroboam II Became Jeroboam I," *HBAI* 6/3 (2017):372.

[77] Römer, "How Jeroboam II Became Jeroboam I," 374.

[78] Angelika Berlejung, "Twisting Traditions: Programmatic Absence-Theology for the Northern Kingdom in 1 Kgs 12: 26-33 (the "Sin of Jeroboam")," *JNSL* 35/2 (2009):24.

[79] Römer, "How Jeroboam II Became Jeroboam I," 376.

[80] Ibid., 382.

exclamation in 24tb foreshadows what is to come, setting up an economic contestation between "Dauid" and "Israel" but an economic contestation which resolutely remains within a prior contestation between "the people" whose voices we hear at the beginning and end of the narrative unit (24p and 24t) and an economic elite.

Mamdani's astute analysis prompts us not only to recognise the emergence of a tribe-based economic elite – emerging under David, established under Solomon and consolidated under Rehoboam – in ancient 'Israel' but also in post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa.

## G   CONCLUSION

My purpose in this article has been to identify a proto-tribal text which documents, it could be argued, the emergence of tribal economics within ancient 'Israel.' As with all my exegetical work, I establish a to-and-fro tripolar movement between contemporary South African context and biblical text.[81] Here, I have used Mamdani's provocative analysis of the South African post-colony as a heuristic vehicle to link the question of post-1994 socio-economic justice and a post-apartheid resurgence of tribal economics. Mamdani's analysis also invites us to consider how our decolonial return to culture – "delinking from Euro-Western categories" and "relinking" with African cultures, in the words of Ramanstawana,[82] deals with the tribal. How does one relink with African culture while recognising Mamdani's concerns about re-tribalisation?

These are important questions but others are better placed than I am to engage them. My focus in this article and in the work that lies ahead is on the economic dimensions of the decolonial project. Mamdani, like the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and Abahlali baseMjondolo, provides a prophetic reminder of the economic domain of the South African post-colony. South Africans, particularly the unemployed and under-employed, experience the reality of Mamdani's analysis. Another question that this article raises is how such economic sectors of South Africa would read 3 Reigns 12:24p-t. The Ujamaa Centre plans to use 3 Reigns 12:24p-t as the basis for a Contextual Bible Study, building on the work we have already done on the realities of 'racial capitalism' (in Lebamang Sebidi's sense of the term)[83] in South Africa's

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[81] Gerald O. West, "African Biblical Scholarship as Tri-polar, Post-Colonial, and a Site-of-Struggle," in *Present and Future of Biblical Studies: Celebrating 25 Years of Brill's Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Benny Tat-siong Liew; Leiden: Brill, 2018), 247–254.

[82] Hulisani Ramantswana, "Decolonising Biblical Hermeneutics in the (South) African Context," *Acta Theologica* Supplement 24 (2016):189–190.

[83] Lebamang Sebidi, "The Dynamics of the Black Struggle and Its Implications for Black Theology," in *The Unquestionable Right to Be Free: Essays in Black Theology* (ed. Itumeleng J. Mosala and Buti Tlhagale; Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1986), 31–32.

colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid contexts.[84] What will the unemployed youth we work with the make of this text, having to grapple with a non-canonical textual variant but a text that is resolutely economic in its emphasis within the aftermath of attempts at state capture and in the midst of forms of economic tribalisation?

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[84]  See for example, Gerald O. West and Sithembiso Zwane, "Re-Reading 1 Kings 21:1-16 between Community-Based Activism and University-Based Pedagogy," *JIBS* 2/1 (2020).

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