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# THE CONCEPT OF “THE HOLY SEED” AS A COPING STRATEGY IN EZRA-NEHEMIAH AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

## ABSTRACT

In a study describing the problems experienced by former political exiles who have returned to South Africa since 1990, Majodina argues that the psychological study of reintegration of refugees/exiles deserves a place in mainstream psychological research and not remain on the fringes. One of her basic assumptions is that coping plays a key mediating role in the reintegration process. Taking cue from her deliberation, this article aims to investigate the role played by psychological coping in the return of Judean exiles from Babylon in Ezra-Nehemiah. It examines these coping strategies in light of Tajfel's and Turner's theories of the Social Identity Approach (SIA) to give intelligibility to the ideologies that transpire. The article also presents Majodina's Social Coping strategy to provide background for the discussion of implications for South Africa. The discussion culminates in the examination of implications of this discussion for South Africa. Where necessary, some South African neighbouring countries may be referred to, in order to illuminate the discussion.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (2014:6) reported that, in 2013, the southern African region recorded over four million migrants, the largest number of whom is found in South Africa, followed by the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Zimbabwe. Displacement of people certainly impacts

negatively on democratisation and sustainable development. For this reason, forced migration of people and their ultimate integration into either their host countries or their countries of origin deserve a high-priority status in the agenda of southern Africa, in general, and South Africa, in particular. Against this background, this article takes Majodina (1995:223) seriously when she states that the psychological study of reintegration of refugees/exiles deserves a place in mainstream psychological research and must not simply remain on the fringes. As a biblical scholar, I extend Majodina’s remark to the study of the Bible, specifically the Old Testament. The study of the Old Testament in Africa needs to draw the study of refugees/exiles into its mainstream. Accordingly, this article aims to explore the integration process of the Second Temple Judeans on their return from the Babylonian exile to Yehud. The article raises two questions:

- What coping strategies did the Judean returnees use during their reintegration into the Judean community, and how did these strategies impact on their well-being?
- Considering the state of the well-being of those returnees, what are the implications for the reintegration of former exiles/refugees in South Africa?

The emphasis will be specifically on refugees. To complete the above task, the article explores the Book of Ezra-Nehemiah. To underscore the argument, a comparison is made with the Book of Chronicles, by employing a literary-ideological method. A literary-ideological approach is a two-pronged method of analysis. On the one hand, it tussles with the content of the text to discern meaning, in order to grasp the author’s message. This is the literary part thereof. On the other hand, it investigates the ideology/theology that underlies the author’s message. This exercise is motivated by the reasoning that all biblical texts are ideological. This investigation of ideology helps perceive the social influence intended by the text. To supplement this method, psychological theories are utilised to grant some intelligibility to the ideologies discernible in the books. The article thus comprises three major sections. The first section explains the psychological theories to be employed; the second deals with the books of Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles, and the third section focuses on the implications for southern Africa.

## 2. INSIGHTS FROM PSYCHOLOGY

As indicated in the introduction, this section outlines theories that will help us make sense of what is taking place in the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative from a psychosocial point of view.

## 2.1 Social Identity Approach (SIA)<sup>1</sup>

In the late 1970s, Tajfel and his former student, John Turner, developed the Social Identity Approach (SIA).<sup>2</sup> This approach involves a series of interrelated social-psychological processes described as social categorisation,<sup>3</sup> social identification, social comparison, and psychological distinctiveness (Tajfel 1978:61). The premise of this approach is that, when individuals cannot attain self-esteem on their own, they form social groups or categories (social categorisation). They then construct their identity on the basis of their membership of that social category (social identification). This is followed by their construction of social boundaries to compare their new social group/category with other surrounding social groups/categories (social comparison). They then distinguish their social group from the surrounding social groups (psychological distinctiveness). The group distinguishes itself from other social groups and portrays others as inferior. The group then feels superior, thus gaining self-esteem for the individual members. This kind of identity formation is discriminatory in nature, because discriminatory strategies help distinguish the group from other groups.

## 2.2 Majodina's Social Coping Framework (SCF)

The phenomenon in Tajfel's theory of forming groups to attain self-esteem is what Majodina would describe as a coping strategy. According to Baron and Byrne (2003:541), coping is

responding to stress in a way that reduces the threat and its effects; it includes what a person does, feels, or thinks in order to master, tolerate, or decrease the negative effects of a stressful situation.

It "includes those behaviours and thoughts that are consciously used by an individual to handle or control a stressful situation" (Majodina 1995:224). According to Majodina, there are two categories of coping strategies, namely problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies. Problem-focused strategies deal with the source of the problem, whereas emotion-focused strategies regulate the emotions of the person facing the problem. For example, let us take a workplace scenario. If an employer continues to pile work on an employee to such an extent that it causes emotional stress, there is a problem. A problem-focused strategy would be to address the

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1 The designation Social Identity Approach (SIA) instead of Social Identity Theory (SIT) is meant to show awareness that Social Categorisation Theory (SCT) is a cousin theory of SIT rather than its component, although such distinction is not a priority in this discussion.

2 Turner (1996:2) himself claims to be a former student of Tajfel.

3 This is specifically associated with Turner.

employer and request him/her to reduce the workload. That addresses the source of the stress and controls the situation. However, an emotion-focused strategy will not address the employer; instead, it will try to control the employee's emotions so that, despite the workload, the employee prefers to feel less anxious and less angry and seeks ways to increase his/her positive feelings (Baron & Byrne 2003:545). Unfortunately, in many instances, emotion-focused strategies cannot be sustained permanently. There are situations, however, where an emotion-focused strategy is the only resource at hand. We thus need first to assess the situation and explore alternative responses. Problem-focused strategies are preferable and emotion-focused strategies should only be the last resort. Exiles and repatriates also employ these coping strategies in order to survive the problems of their exilic or repatriation situations, respectively. This article focuses on the integration of repatriates and the coping strategies involved in dealing with the challenges of repatriation.

Refugees involved in voluntary repatriation are not returning home. They are, in fact, returning to their country of origin, but no more. This can be emphasized by the difficulties in adjustment” (Warner 1994:170).

This statement seems to be a proper remark to introduce this discussion. Reinforcing this argument, Ghanem (2003:9) contends that the concern for refugees, once they have returned to their countries of origin, has seldom gone beyond issues of legal, material and physical security. This exhibits a persistent lack of attention to the psychosocial dimensions of reintegration. When people return from exile, their integration can either be fulfilling or not. The outcome of integration depends basically on the nature of the problems encountered and the coping strategies employed. Majodina observed that problem-focused strategies contribute positively to the quality of life. Emotion-focused strategies contribute negatively to psychological well-being. She made these observations when she investigated the problems experienced by former political exiles who had returned to South Africa since 1990. However, limiting ourselves to Majodina's exclusive contribution in this discourse will save us time and space. She calls for the broadening of the traditional understanding of coping needs. As far as she is concerned, to limit coping to problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies does not help the integration process. She discerns a need to incorporate a third dimension of coping, namely social coping. Social coping strategy refers to the active involvement of those who remained behind to provide the necessary social support for the integration of the returnees. Such social support is the physical and psychological comfort provided by the hosting community (Baron & Byrne 2003:548). Accommodation, financial

support, employment, as well as a hearty and hospitable reception are a few examples of the social support needed. According to Majodina, social support yields the most positive results for integration. However, social support is not without challenges. The welcoming community should be capable to offer the needed support. For example, a community suffering from high unemployment is not capable of assisting with employment for the returnees. According to Majodina, “in the South African case, the problem of internal displacement has far outweighed that of people who have returned from exile”. She urges that

[s]ince institutionally based intervention is not always effective, repatriation programmes need to enhance the provision of support to communities where returnees go. This in turn requires that more research focus be given to how communities restructure themselves after being disrupted by movements of people in and out (Majodina 1995:225).

The reintegration of repatriates should not merely focus on the repatriates alone, but “repatriation programmes need to enhance the provision of support to communities where returnees go” (Majodina 1995:225). Using Gaim Kireab’s insights, she argues that

repatriation assistance is by its very nature developmental. Return to situations of conflict necessitates this developmental approach as it often coincides with the resettlement of internally displaced people” (Majodina 1995:225).

A combination of problem-focused strategies and social support can provide the best possible results of reintegration. A combination of social support and emotion-focused strategies, when there is no alternative problem-focused strategy, can still improve the results. These assertions suggest that a social support coping strategy needs to be a basic principle for the repatriation and reintegration of exiles. This can even help prevent potential conflict between the returnees and those who remained behind. Their relationships thus become crucial. This information should suffice to proceed to examining the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative.

### 3. REINTEGRATION IN EZRA-NEHEMIAH

This article assumes that, in order to have a reasonable grasp of the dynamics of reintegration in Ezra-Nehemiah, we need to know something about the coping strategies employed during the exile. To make sense of those coping strategies, we must know something about the processes that unfolded during the exile. In addition, the concept of the “empty land”

that is significant for this discussion needs to be put into perspective. Once we have dealt with these two issues, we can fruitfully proceed to the process of integration in Ezra-Nehemiah.

### 3.1 Coping strategies during the Babylonian exile

Knoppers (2011:31) rightfully describes the situation of the Babylonian exile as

the destruction of Jerusalem, the burning of the temple, the end of the Davidic kingdom, and the exodus of the people from the land

Jerusalem, temple, Davidic king and land are all strong identity markers of Ancient Israel. After losing all these identity markers, some community members were taken to a foreign land. Indeed, they faced severe humiliation as well as loss of identity and self-esteem. Under such circumstances, a coping strategy was desperately needed. By a coping strategy I mean behaviour or thoughts to handle or control such a stressful situation, in order to decrease its negative effects. Tajfel’s SIA might help us put the severe humiliation, loss of identity and self-esteem into perspective.

The siege and later exile were a humiliating experience for both the exiles and those who remained behind. Their dignity, pride and self-esteem were destroyed.<sup>4</sup> A remark by McGregor (1994:738) is appropriate at this juncture: “[D]eprivation, like calamity, does not always bring out the best in people... Desperate circumstances sometimes evoke desperate actions...”. The same can be said about the time of the exile. To reconstruct their self-esteem, those who remained behind blamed the entire disaster on those who were taken to exile. Ezekiel 11:15 attests to this claim when those who remained behind are quoted as saying to the exiles: “Be far from the Lord; to us this land has been given as a possession” (רַחֲקוּ מֵעַל יְהוָה לָנוּ הִיא נְתַנָּה הָאָרֶץ לְמוֹרָשָׁה).<sup>5</sup> In quoting Rainer Albertz, Farisani (2008:79) also echoes this sentiment. He states that the Babylonians divided Judean land among those who remained behind, the majority of whom were positive about it, theologically justifying it, and viewing the exile as judgement on the exploitative upper class and thus a *de facto* liberation from debt for them. Commenting on Ezekiel 11:15, Blenkinsopp (1990:63) states:

The allegation advanced by those who remained in Judah is that the deportees have, in effect, been expelled from the cult community (on

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4 Cf., for example, Lamentations 1:1-7.

5 The verb רַחֲקוּ is qal, imperative, second person, masculine, plural. However, footnote 15e of the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia suggests reading as perfect and thus other translations translate it as “They are far ...”.

account of sin, in effect, understood), and that they have therefore forfeited title to real estate. To understand the force of this allegation we must recall the intimate association between deity, cult and land in antiquity. Deities had their own jurisdictions coterminous with territory of their devotees.

By contending as such, those who remained behind re-demarcated the social borders to exclude the exiles. In order for them to feel better about themselves, they distinguished themselves from the exiles by attaching the blemish of the siege and exile to the deportees.<sup>6</sup> Echoing Moshe Weinfeld, Knoppers (2011:36; 2015:18) describes the situation as follows: “Exile is a curse and so Israel in exile will become a curse”. So reasoned those who remained behind, and such a portrayal definitely impacted negatively on the exiles’ self-esteem. The most unfortunate result of this situation was the straining of relations between the exiles and those who remained behind. The incipient hostility was becoming a great threat to the exiles’ esteem. Being in a foreign land and still be vilified back home is a great stress-inducing circumstance. In terms of Tajfel’s SIA, such a situation calls for action to recover self-esteem. A coping strategy was desperately needed. This was a great challenge for them. A strategy that would deal directly with the source of the problem, a problem-focused strategy, was to reason with those who remained behind that they were one people. However, under the circumstances, emotion subjugated reason on both sides. In that case, an emotion-focused strategy was the alternative. The result was that the exiles developed bitterness toward those who remained behind (Snyman 2010:128). According to Rom-Shiloni (2011:146),

the exiles in Babylon continued to negotiate their status in relation to Judeans remaining in the land of Israel, rather than in relation to ‘proximate others’ – the diverse national groups present in Babylon.

In response, to salvage their prestige, they also embarked on the same process of re-demarcating social borders. They did at least two things. First, they re-interpreted the exile as Sabbath of the land and thus a sanctification ritual.<sup>7</sup> As purified people, they then understood themselves as the only remnant of Israel to continue the covenant relationship with YHWH. Secondly, they depicted the land of Judah as desolate, waiting for them to return.<sup>8</sup> By that, they deleted those who remained behind from the history of Israel. A new social group called *בְּנֵי הַגּוֹלָה* (children of the exile), *יִשְׂרָאֵל* or *בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* (Israel or children of Israel), *כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל* (all Israel) and

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6 Ezekiel 11:15; 33:24.

7 2 Chronicles 36:21.

8 Cf. Ezekiel 33:27-28 and 2 Chronicles 36:21.

other related designations came into existence.<sup>9</sup> In this article, all these designations are subordinated under the umbrella designation זֶרַע הַקֹּדֶשׁ (Holy Seed). A new social category known as the “Holy Seed” came into being. This new social group was “holy” *vis-à-vis* those who remained behind and “commit abominations” in Judah.<sup>10</sup> Comparable to those who remained behind, this group perceived itself as superior and thus bestowed self-esteem on its individual members. The self-understanding as the “holy seed” provided the self-esteem needed. In both categorisation processes, by those who remained behind and by the exiles, the unique social categorisation noted in Tajfel’s SIA was in operation. They both employed coping strategies in the face of blemished self-images. It is important to mention another of Majodina’s observations at this juncture. She mentions that, when exiles have to cope with the tough challenges of being exiles, they create a distorted perception of home as an empty land created by the Judean exiles, because, in fact, the land was not empty between the Babylonian exilic period and the return.<sup>11</sup> It was simply a coping strategy for them. Given the intense animosity between the two groups, a problem-focused coping strategy was not feasible. Under the circumstances, they opted for an emotion-focused coping strategy of the “Holy Seed”. Taking into account that the “empty land” is an important factor in this discussion, let us examine it in more detail.

### 3.2 The concept of “empty land”

Stipp (2010:103-154) presents an interesting discussion on the concept of “empty land” in the Book of Jeremiah. He does not associate the origin of this concept with a conflict between exiles and those who remained behind.<sup>12</sup> However, Stipp makes profound observations for our discussion. This article underscores the roles of the Egyptian exiles and the Babylonian exiles concerning the future of Judah. The Egyptian exiles defied the divine order to remain in the land and thus initiated the process of their own extinction. Stipp observes that, according to the author of Jeremiah, after the emigration to Egypt, “not a single Judean was left in Judah”. In fact, “... there were practically no Judeans left in the entire world apart from Babylonia and Egypt”. That is how the land became empty. The only remnant, the Jews in Babylon, had to be more compliant, loyal to the

9 זֶרַע הַקֹּדֶשׁ (men of the people of Israel) Ezra 2:2, Neh. 7:6; עַם יְהוּדָה (people of Judah) Ezra 4:4; שְׂבִי יְהוּדָיָא (elders of the Jews) Ezra 5:5; 6:7, 8, 14, and so forth.

10 Ezekiel 11:18.

11 Cf. 2 Kings 25:12; Jeremiah 39:10, 52:16; Lipschits 2005:119.

12 This article, however, does find a depiction of animosity between the exiles and those who remained behind in Jeremiah.



Babylonians and, in the course of time, they would be released and return to Judah. Stipp (2010:152-154) concludes as follows:

This idea probably made a major contribution to forming a unique self-image of the Babylonian exiles, and in the long run gave birth to the conviction, witnessed to in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, that all postexilic Judeans were “sons of the *golah*” descended from the deportees.

Ben-Zvi also provides an interesting discussion on the empty land issue. He presents it as a metanarrative that even the “Benjaminites and other non-returnee groups that constituted the vast majority of the population” accepted (Ben-Zvi 2010:159). He thus argues that this myth was not precipitated by the conflict between the exiles and those who remained behind. Instead, it had much to do with discursive and ideological needs. The fact that the exile was the result of God’s wrath against the abominations of the Judeans called for the purification of the land for a safe future. The myth provided that condition. Ben-Zvi (2010:page no.?) argues that his “study focuses on early Yehud, before the putative time of Ezra or Nehemiah and well before the time of the writing of Ezra 1-6 and Ezra-Nehemiah”. Neither does he base any argument in his discussion “on the assumption that the world depicted in Ezra-Nehemiah reflects the historical circumstances of the shared discourse of literati in the pre-late Persian period” (Ben-Zvi 2010:156, fn. 3).

This article, on the other hand, finds evidence of a division between the exiles and those who remained behind in the metaphor of the “good and bad” figs in Jeremiah 24 and in the debate on descent from Abraham and possession of the land in Ezekiel 11:14-21 and 33:23-29. This division was explained in the previous section which culminated in the exiles perceiving themselves as the only representatives of the Judeans. Although not arguing from the same premise with Stipp, this article shares his view that the idea of Babylonian exiles as sole representatives of Judah “made a major contribution to forming a unique self-image of the Babylonian exiles”. It also agrees with him that, in the long run, it gave birth to the conviction witnessed to in the books of Ezra-Nehemiah that all postexilic Judeans were “sons of the *golah*” descended from the deportees.

Carrol’s (1992:79-93) discussion of the “empty land” myth resonates with the spirit of this article. According to Carrol, the “empty land” myth must be viewed as the production and property of the Judeans who were in exile in Babylon, who had the imperial court as their original power-base, and creation of the temple community as the forging of a power-base in the Judean territory. Most of the Hebrew Bible literature, he argues,

must be regarded as the documentation of their claims to the land and as a reflection of their ideology. The representation of the people(s) of the land must also be seen as the depiction of the losers in that particular ideological struggle (Carrol 1992:85).

These people(s) of the land occupied space which was only geophysical, but

not part of the symbolic geography whose ideology underwrites so much of the Hebrew Bible. Hence their symbolic invisibility in the text and their irrelevance for any discussion of the empty land myth (Carrol 1992:83-84).

Carrol describes the “empty land” myth as “a construct derived from the ideology of pollution-purity values in the second temple community”, which ignores the social reality of the people working and living on the land, because they do not belong to the community of the Babylonian returnees which he calls the sacred enclave (Carrol 1992:90). This article will adopt this line of thought pattern as it examines the Book of Ezra-Nehemiah.

Different from Ben-Zvi,<sup>13</sup> the following section will base its argument on Ezra-Nehemiah. This article understands Ben-Zvi as sceptical of

the assumption that the world depicted in Ezra-Nehemiah reflects the historical circumstances of the shared discourse of literati in the pre-late Persian period.

Despite that, this article is inspired by Warrior’s (1991) argument that, even if we could correct historical facts in the narratives, that would still not resolve the narrative problem. People who read the narratives read them as they are, not as scholars and experts would like them to be read and interpreted. History is no longer with us, but the narrative remains (Warrior 1991:3).

Ezra-Nehemiah has in the past been read by activists of discriminatory ideologies, such as the Nazis in Germany and proponents of apartheid in South Africa, to justify their actions. And it may well be that there will be such readers in the future again (Cezula 2015:117).

As indicated in the previous section, to cope in exile, the exiles employed the concept of the “holy seed” as a coping strategy. This resulted from interpreting the exile as Sabbath and thus depicting the Judean land as empty and, in the process, deleting those who remained behind. Lastly, it is helpful to note that the exiles were not a homogeneous group. Some were exclusive and some were somewhat inclusive, as we will observe

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13 This is mentioned, because he is specific about it (Ben-Zvi cf. 2007:156, fn. 3).

below. Let us now proceed to examine the employment of the “holy seed” coping strategy during reintegration in Ezra-Nehemiah.

### 3.3 Coping strategies during reintegration in Yehud

Now that we have discussed the exilic challenges and accompanying coping strategies and the concept of the empty land, let us proceed to examine the life of the returned exiles in Ezra-Nehemiah. Specifically, we will examine the psychological well-being of the returnees.

In Ezra 3:3, the exiles “established the altar on its foundations, even though they were in terror<sup>14</sup> of the local peoples”. The fact that they were in terror of the local people depicts a negative state of psychological well-being. Living in fear is not a sound mental state. In Chapter 4, it is reported that, when the returnees rejected the offer of help to build the temple by the so-called enemies, “... the people of the land<sup>15</sup> discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build”.<sup>16</sup> Again, we encounter an atmosphere permeated by fear. Being discouraged and made to fear diminishes psychological well-being. In addition, the people of the land “bribed counsellors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia”.<sup>17</sup> From the time of Cyrus until the time of Darius, this atmosphere exerted emotional/mental strain. It is also important to note that this state of affairs led to the exiles taking approximately nineteen or twenty years to rebuild a smaller and less splendid temple,<sup>18</sup> while King Solomon took seven years to build a bigger and more splendid one.<sup>19</sup> In Chapter 9, when Ezra heard that the holy seed had mixed itself with the peoples of the lands, he tore his garment and his robe, pulled the hair out from his head and beard and sat appalled until the evening offering.<sup>20</sup> This is not an enviable psychological

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14 The Hebrew noun used is *אִימָה* translated as terror or dread.

15 Farisani (2008:75-76) agreeably explains the identity of the “people of the land” as the Judean remainees.

16 Ezra 4:4.

17 Ezra 4:5.

18 Ezra 3:8 states that, in the second year after their coming, they started construction. That is approximately 536 BCE. Ezra 6:15 states: “[T]his house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king”. That is approximately 516 BCE. The difference between these years is twenty.

19 “And in the eleventh year, in the month of Bul, which is the eighth month, the house was finished in all its parts, and according to all its specifications. He was seven years in building it” (1 Kgs 6:38).

20 Ezra 9:3.

state to be in. In Chapter 10, this situation led to a meeting to break the so-called mixed marriages.

If anyone did not come within three days, by order of the officials and the elders, all his property should be forfeited, and he himself banned from the congregation of the exiles.<sup>21</sup>

Threats do not signal an ideal attitude. All men of Judah came and they

... sat in the open square before the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of the heavy rain.<sup>22</sup>

This is an emotionally destabilising situation. In Nehemiah 4, during the rebuilding of the wall, Nehemiah expressed a feeling of being despised.<sup>23</sup> In Chapter 6, Nehemiah reports that people and prophets within his community were hired to frighten him.<sup>24</sup> It seems that the atmosphere of a looming danger was quite prevalent during the integration process of the Second Temple. In Chapter 13, the final chapter of Ezra-Nehemiah, Nehemiah is very angry and throws Tobiah's household furniture out of the chamber into the courtyard of the temple.<sup>25</sup> Finally, Nehemiah is quarrelling with the nobles of Judah over Sabbath<sup>26</sup> and with the people involved in the so-called mixed marriages. He cursed them and beat some of their men and pulled out their hair.<sup>27</sup>

The reconstruction of the temple and the wall were great achievements for the Ezra-Nehemiah exiles. However, their psychological well-being was not what one would envy. This point is expressed by Usue (2007:830):

On the one hand, they are restored to religious, political and economic freedom. On the other hand, they are threatened from within and from without, hence their desperation in the midst of restoration.

This was all because of the hostile relationship between the exiles and those who remained behind. This state of affairs leads me to conclude that the integration of the returned exiles into their country of origin was not smooth. It was strongly infused with anxiety. This should suffice to imagine the psychological well-being of the “holy seed”. Let us now examine this reintegration process.

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21 Ezra 10:8.

22 Ezra 10:9.

23 בָּנִיהַ [Nehemiah 4:4 (Heb. 3:36)].

24 הָיוּ מִקְרָאִים אוֹתַי (Nehemiah 6:14).

25 Nehemiah 13:8.

26 Nehemiah 15-17.

27 Nehemiah 25.

In accordance with McGregor's remark earlier, the exile did indeed not bring out the best in both those who remained behind and the exiles. However, during the return, circumstances could have been different. The context changed and a problem-focused coping strategy could have been employed. Problem-focused strategies try to remove the source of anxiety. Emotion-focused strategies, on the other hand, do not remove the source of anxiety, but instead regulate emotions and thus cannot be sustained permanently. The "holy seed" coping strategy was a discriminatory emotion-focused strategy. As indicated earlier, a problem-focused coping strategy in this situation would be forging unity between the groups. Let us then investigate how reconciliation and thus unity would have been possible the second time around.

Ezra 3:10-13 narrates as follows: "... When the builders laid the foundation<sup>28</sup> ... the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard far away."<sup>29</sup> The ensuing verses in Ezra 4:1-2 state that, when other Yahwists in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem heard about the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, they came to offer help. However, Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' houses rejected the offer. This was an opportunity to reconcile and to cease hostility, which was the primary source of anxiety. It was an opportunity to change the coping strategy and employ a problem-focused one. The returnees chose to adhere to the emotion-focused coping strategy of the exile, namely the "holy seed" identity and thus the "empty land" myth. In my doctoral dissertation, I have described this scenario in the following sense:

The rejection of the "people of the land" set the tone for the rest of the reconstruction of the temple. The "people of the land" reacted to their exclusion. They engaged in social action which expressed their disapproval of their exclusion (Cezula 2013:196; Farisani 2002:127).

Rom-Shiloni (2011:129-130; 2009:14) would explain this circumstance as Ezra-Nehemiah not marking the beginning of the internal polemic in Yehud, but rather carrying on and transforming a long-lived polemic initiated in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century. Again, during the building of the wall by Nehemiah and his fellow returnees, another opportunity for negotiation presented itself. The so-called enemies requested a meeting with Nehemiah four times.<sup>30</sup> On the fifth time, they sent a message that spelt out allegations and requested a meeting. Commenting on the invitations of Nehemiah by Sanballat who was Tobiah's colleague, Grabbe (1998:187) mentions that

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28 Ezra 3:10.

29 Ezra 3:13.

30 Nehemiah 6:2-4.

... the invitations to meet, which Nehemiah interpreted as ruses to do him in, could have been genuine efforts to come to some sort of *modus vivendi*.

However, for Nehemiah, this was simply a ploy to do him harm. This article argues that this was a missed opportunity, and I conclude so for two reasons. First, the account is Nehemiah’s version and thus cannot be treated without suspicion.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, Nehemiah was a political-cum-religious figure, so the overall theology/ideology of the book Ezra-Nehemiah should not be divorced from him, as it is ethnically exclusive and the ethnic “other” included those who remained behind. To reinforce the argument that the Ezra-Nehemiah returnees missed an opportunity to reconcile, I will now briefly examine another strand of the Babylonian exilic ideology.<sup>32</sup>

31 Because this is only Nehemiah’s version of the story, this conclusion takes into account investigations made by some scholars on Nehemiah. Eskenazi (1988: 146) mentions: “Wordplay in Nehemiah’s memoirs, especially Nehemiah 2, reveals much about his frame of mind. There is a striking repetition of the words *בנות* and *עך* ‘good’ and ‘evil’. They echo throughout the Nehemiah story and are most frequent in the early sections (esp. 2:1-10) ... These indicate Nehemiah’s polarized views of reality. Nehemiah sees the world in terms of good or evil, friend or foe ...”. Grabbe (1998:159) argues: “He is representing Sanballat and Co. as if they were a gang of thieves and cut-throats, instead of regional dignitaries and Persian officials. One cannot help wondering if the danger from Sanballat was purely a figment of Nehemiah’s overheated imagination. Grabbe (1998:159) further argues that “[h]e simply did not try to get along with the local people. They either did it his way or they were his enemies. No wonder that when he left the province to return to Babylon for a period of time, people were quick to abandon the more extreme of his reforms (Nehemiah 13)”. Blenkinsopp (2009:115) argues: “Nehemiah is presented not only as a member of the upper-class *golah* segment of the population but also as an exponent of the rigorist legalism which characterised Ezra and his associates. This quasi sectarian orientation, with its roots in the eastern diaspora and its orientation heavily dependent on Deuteronomistic theology and the teaching of Ezekiel and his school, was a significant factor in Nehemiah’s conflictual relations with the lay and especially the priestly aristocracy in the province. His ejection of Tobiah from the temple precincts and ritual purification of the space he had occupied (13:4 -9) is one pointer in this direction.” Grabbe (2004:307; 1998:172) describes as follows: “The various measures instigated by Nehemiah – whether the repair of the wall, the opposition to Sanballat and other ‘foreigners’, the ban on mixed marriages, or even the regulations about the Sabbath – were not just miscellaneous ad hoc decisions. Rather, they seem to have been part of a complete programme. In that sense, Nehemiah was very much a reformer. His goal seems no less than to make Judah into an isolated puritanical theocratic state. This programme is nowhere explicitly laid out in the book, but the whole thrust of the book is towards this goal.”

32 Rom-Shiloni (2009:14-15) identifies three categories of exiles, namely the early exiles who excluded even the 586 exiles, those who included all exiles and

In agreement with Rom-Shiloni (2011:128), I base my “understanding of Babylonian exilic ideology as comprising the ideologies reflected in the literature written (and/or compiled) both by exiles in Babylon and by repatriates in Achaemenid Yehud”. According to her, “the geographical spectrum encompasses both literature produced in exile (Ezekiel and Isaiah 40-48) and repatriate literature written in Yehud (Isaiah 49-66, Haggai and Zechariah 1-8, Ezra-Nehemiah)” (Rom-Shiloni 2011:129).<sup>33</sup> To her list I add Chronicles which I will now briefly examine.<sup>34</sup> In fact, the Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah provide a unique comparison in terms of post-exilic literature of the Hebrew Bible. In my earlier discussion of Ezra-Nehemiah, the discriminatory coping strategy of the “holy seed” was linked to the myth of the “empty land”. Whilst this myth is not explicitly stated in Ezra-Nehemiah, the silence on the presence of non-exile Judeans in Judah is its manifestation.<sup>35</sup> This is explicitly announced in Chronicles.<sup>36</sup> As implied earlier, according to Ben-Zvi (2010:156),

The dominant metanarrative about the past and its related social memory that developed in Yehud was one that stressed total exile, an empty land, and a (partial) return.

He continues to explain as follows:

... the concept of “Empty Land” was deeply interwoven with a significant number of other central metaphors, and metanarratives associated with the concept of “Exile.” A result of this high connectedness was that people could not easily reject the “Empty Land” motif without rejecting so many central motifs and ways of thinking about the past binding the community together; after all Yehudite Israel was a text and memory centred community (Ben-Zvi 2010:163).

One metanarrative that could be affected is the notion of exile being the result of the sinfulness of Judeans that triggered YHWH’s wrath. Because the land was defiled, it would be pointless to return to the land that was

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those who envisioned a reunification between Exiles of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Judean Exiles in Babylon.

33 In the later paper, she included strands of Babylonian exilic ideology found in Jeremiah. (Note: The paper published in 2011 was, in fact, written before the one published in 2009.)

34 In my dissertation, I discuss the dates of both Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles. For Ezra-Nehemiah I suggest any time from 433 BC to 400 BC and for Chronicles from 400 BC to 330 BC, probably 350 BC (Cezula 2013:86-89).

35 The simple categorisation of exiles and the “people(s) of the land(s)” does not give recognition to those Judeans who remained behind.

36 2 Chronicles 36:21 (... All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfil seventy years).

not cleansed. Thus, the “empty land” myth was historically incorrect, but became theologically correct. This article rather associates the spirit in Ben-Zvi’s explication of the “empty land” myth with the Chronicler, which is even later than Ezra-Nehemiah as far as the period covered by Ben-Zvi is concerned. Albeit arguing from another understanding of the “empty land” idea, Jonker (2007:712-713) expresses this spirit satisfactorily when he states that 2 Chronicles 36 preached that

the old divisions of the past have been restored by the Sabbath rest of the Exile, and that a New Israel emerged who had the opportunity of a fresh beginning under Persian rule.

While the “empty land” myth was attached to the discriminatory “holy seed” identity in Ezra-Nehemiah, we can attach it to the ethnically inclusive concept of “all Israel” in Chronicles. For Chronicles, “all Israel” was linked to the twelve-tribe notion.<sup>37</sup>

The twelve-tribe theme in Chronicles is presented as a socio-political reality on the one hand and as an ideal that formed the basis of the Chronicler’s vision of a restored Israel on the other (Cezula 2013:175; 2015:130)

By default, the evocation of the twelve-tribe notion glosses over the differences of the exile. Among the three categories of exiles Rom-Shiloni identified, Chronicles can be categorized as the third category that “envisioned a reunification between Exiles of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Judean Exiles in Babylon” (Rom-Shiloni 2009:15).<sup>38</sup> Schweitzer (2005:121) describes Israel in Chronicles as follows:

As many scholars have noted, “Israel” is: the community of YHWH centered (*sic*) around the Temple, and open to those from the “Israel” of Judah, the “Israel” of the northern tribes who worship YHWH, and (though far less recognized) the “Israel” of those not genealogically Israelite but also part of this community.

This perspective<sup>39</sup> in Chronicles in terms of social relations is the reason why this article argues that circumstances could have been different during

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37 In what is referred to as the *Sondergut*, the concept of “all Israel” is used no less than three times referring to the Southern Kingdom, no less than six times referring to the Northern Kingdom, and no less than eighteen times referring to the twelve tribes (Cezula 2013:174).

38 Although Rom-Shiloni (2009: 25-26) focuses on Jeremiah, this article focuses on Chronicles for the same reason.

39 For the attitude towards foreigners, cf. Cezula 2016:277-296.



the time of reintegration depicted by Ezra-Nehemiah. Had a reconciliatory strategy, as purported by Chronicles, been employed, it would have dealt with the source of anxiety for that community; the internal conflict. The Chronicler had thus a problem-focused coping strategy for “all Israel”. The relations between the returnees and those who remained behind could have been conciliatory. Community solidarity could have replaced social conflict that would have led to a peaceful reintegration of the exiles. Such an approach even paves the way for Majodina’s social coping strategy. Let us now proceed to examine implications for South Africa.

#### 4. IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

Thus far, the article discussed the two theories of Tajfel and Majodina and the integration process in Ezra-Nehemiah. In this final section, it examines the implications of the above discussion for South Africa. While the above discussion focuses on exiles, this section will use the insights of that discussion to tussle with the situation of refugees.

Currently, in South Africa, xenophobia is a social ill to which we can no longer turn a blind eye. At this point, it is compelling to indicate that the Second Temple context and the 21<sup>st</sup>-century South African context are extremely different in terms of spatial, temporal and socio-cultural settings. Despite that, there are aspects of the Second Temple community life that can be evoked to serve as paradigms for our present circumstances. Currently in mind are the psychological strategies employed then to cope in the midst of challenges of the time and the use of the exile to formulate social attitudes. To be specific, these processes will be scrutinised in an attempt to discern implications for South Africa. However, three developments in some of the southern African countries, in light of which these implications can be discussed, need to be outlined. This is meant for South Africa to be responsive to the phenomena taking place in her surrounding environment and learn what is to be learnt. First, the Southern Africa region continues to experience a significant rise in mixed and irregular migration flows, mostly originating from the Horn of Africa, particularly Ethiopia and Somalia (IOM 2014:6). Secondly, and related to the first, is xenophobia. The intensity of xenophobic feelings varies from country to country, with a marked difference between migrant-sending and migrant-receiving countries. The harshest sentiments are expressed by the citizens of South Africa, Namibia and Botswana, with the citizens of Swaziland, Mozambique and Zimbabwe exhibiting a more relaxed attitude toward non-citizens in their countries (Crush & Pendleton 2007:80). The last development is that, in 2011, Zambia pledged “to integrate some 10,000 former Angolan refugees as well as

possibly approximately 4,000 former Rwandan refugees in a manner that promotes legal status and socio-economic empowerment” (UNHCR 2014:5). According to Simuchoba (2014: online), Zambia is considered a pioneer of “durable solutions” in a region where the management of refugees is still plagued by a number of shortcomings and problems. It is also important to note that one of the two priorities of *The Regional Strategy for Southern Africa 2014-2016* of the IOM is “tackling migration problems increasingly from a regional level rather than a country-by-country approach” (IOM 2014:5). These three developments lead to three remarks that will propel us to examine the implications. The first remark is that the challenge of migration is with us and cannot be stopped at will as if a radio is switched off. The second is that migration unfortunately leads to xenophobic activities in some areas, especially South Africa, which are a human rights hazard and inhibit democracy and development. That augurs very badly for the reconstruction of South Africa. The last remark is that, if Zambia’s pledge proves to be progressive, other southern African states, South Africa in our case, might find themselves put on the spot to follow suit.<sup>40</sup> If that should become the case, the implications of the Second Temple perspectives on community integration become relevant.

The first implication is that enmity among people who share the same land, migrants included, has had repercussions for the communities concerned. Psychological ill-being becomes the order of the day and social reconstruction/development gets inhibited. These conditions were apparent in our examination of the integration process in Ezra-Nehemiah, which employed emotion-based coping strategies. It is with regret to report that Julius Streicher of *Der Stürmer* newspaper quoted Ezra in his defence for his anti-Semitic activities at the Nuremberg trials. Referring to Ezra 9-10, he stated: “When, after centuries, the Jewish lawgiver Ezra discovered that notwithstanding many Jews had married non-Jewish women, these marriages were dissolved.” Likewise, Prof. Dr. E.P. Groenewald, professor of New Testament exegesis and theology at the University of Pretoria, defended apartheid as follows: “To Israel the Lord instructs that there should be no mixing with foreign nations ... So writes Nehemiah” (Cezula 2015:151-152). Both of these statements defend ideologies that are notorious for gross violations of human rights. The Book of Ezra-Nehemiah is still read nowadays. The South African community is warned against hostility among communities sharing the same land.

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40 We must note that Zambia is not free from xenophobic tendencies. Simuchoba (2014 Online) reports remarks such as these: “‘How can you give citizenship to Angolans? How many Zambians have been given citizenship in Angola?’”.

The second implication is that old divisive concepts can be transformed into new uniting concepts. It might be important to remember a remark by Jonker (2007:705), echoing Rainer Albertz, that there are no objective descriptions in the Old Testament of the exilic period – we only have theological interpretations. The concept of the “empty land” in Ezra-Nehemiah was based on the exilic hostilities and thus led to the marginalisation of some sections of the community. As indicated earlier, this entailed a narrow-minded emotion-based coping strategy. On the other hand, a similar concept in Chronicles is based on the sanctifying power of the exile and thus buried the hostilities of the exilic times. It demonstrated consciousness and acknowledgment of the plurality of its social context. It was broad-minded and evidenced a problem-focused strategy, because the problem was that the exiles and those who remained behind shared the same space and it could not be solved by insisting that the other group does not deserve to be acknowledged. With a reconciliatory approach, it was uniting divided people. South Africans need to probe the concepts they use and transform the destructive ones into constructive concepts. For example, instead of viewing the word “foreigner” from the threats it poses, it can also be viewed from the benefits it brings.

The last implication is that the concept of exile, which is very influential in the Second Temple literature, can also be utilised in South Africa to foster community solidarity *vis-à-vis* social conflict. During South Africa’s liberation struggle, some of her activists fled to exile. They fled to already liberated countries within the subcontinent and beyond. Those exilic times can inform the relations with non-citizens in South Africa. During those exilic times, the spirit of helping one another during times of hardship prevailed; hence, there are streets and settlements in South Africa named after African leaders and towns as a gesture of appreciation to those people and those countries.<sup>41</sup> That is the spirit that should determine the mood in these times of migrations in Africa. Governments and opposition parties together can initiate big campaigns similar to the election campaigns to inculcate this spirit. This can be done to bolster development in the continent. The caveat is: Only authorities, which are sincere in their commitment to service delivery to the host communities first, can run such campaigns successfully. As Majodina indicated, host communities cannot provide social support of which they themselves are deprived.

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41 For example, in Durban, Northway Street changed to Kenneth Kaunda Road; Warwick Avenue to Julius Nyerere Avenue; Broadway to Swapo Road; Aliwal Street to Samora Machel Street. In Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality, there is Sam Nujoma Street. The former Southern District Municipality in North West changed to Dr Kenneth Kaunda District Municipality. In Cape Town, townships are named Samora Machel, Harare, Lusaka, and so on.

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