Verbum et Ecclesia
ISSN: (Online) 2074-7705, (Print) 1609-9982

Confronting xenophobia in South Africa and the concept of foreigner in Deuteronomy as an act of 'othering'

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Dates:
Received: 05 June 2022
Accepted: 01 Sept. 2022
Published: 13 Oct. 2022

How to cite this article:
Pietersen, D., 2022, 'Confronting xenophobia in South Africa and the concept of foreigner in Deuteronomy as an act of "othering"', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43(1), a2608. https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v43i1.2608

This article explored the theme of xenophobia and 'othering' (violently targeting African immigrants in particular) as a complex and highly relevant theme in South Africa in order to move towards addressing it for the sake of unity in Africa. This research article has adopted a sociological lens that critically examines the issue of xenophobia within a 21st-century South African context. It then considers Deuteronomy and its context from a literary approach to understand how the book deals with ethnic exclusion, also known as xenophobia. South Africa, because of its history, has seen xenophobic sentiments manifest themselves in a particularly violent manner in its short democratic history. Xenophobic violence is seen as an ever-present fibre built into the make-up of South African culture, which is always ready to spill over and negatively impact society.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article critically engages the topic of xenophobia and frames it around the theme of other and/or othering others. It then evaluates how the book of Deuteronomy and how the 21st-century African, particularly South African, have misappropriated the issue of immigrants. An African hermeneutic has been implored to explore all this.

Keywords: xenophobia; other/othering; Deuteronomy; South Africa; socio-historical approach; colonialism; immigrants.

Introduction

Xenophobia is defined as the fear or hatred of a stranger (Merriam-Webster 2015). In many ways this definition is casted against the background of the South African context. Hence, the question might be posed: are non-African people from other continents such as Europe also in view by the use of the term of 'xenophobia'? The answer is 'yes'. However, this question is situated from a perception, wrong or right, that foreigners can be of some benefit, unlike the non-South African black foreigner. It is for this reason that the present author prefers to speak of 'xenophobia' instead of 'Afriphobia' because the term 'xenophobia' is the fear of the other; 'Afrophobia' is fear of a specific other, and no specific others are in view here. Also, 'xenophobia' is widely used within the context of South Africa because it comes with a criminal element. Dixon (2006) expands on the term 'xenophobia' used throughout this research:

> The presence of a racial or ethnic group is only the first step in the causal claim of prejudice. The question is whether this threat related to size is due to the competition over available jobs, concerns about the welfare state being undermined, or whether immigrants are perceived to threaten the natural way of life of the majority of the population. (p. 2181)

The issue of xenophobia from the foundation of otherness can be summarised through the words of Richard Kearney. Kearney (2003) surmises that xenophobia comes from:

> [*T*]he experience and interpretation of otherness, or the discernment between others and aliens, which is also a task that concerns our own identity, is not predetermined but rather we have two choices in this regard (1) to try to understand and accommodate our experience of strangeness, or (2) to repudiate it by projecting it exclusively onto outsiders. (p. 4)

To frame xenophobia as the foundation of 'othering', people project strangers as a demonised enemy, but sometimes they are even perceived as gods that are untouchable because they pose a threat to South Africans' security. This can be seen as a fundamental denial of human beings' right

Note: Special Collection: African Hermeneutics.

to exist. Others refer to it as an irrational or unreasonable hatred or fear of a stranger, but Nothwehr (2008) argues otherwise when he notes that:

> Xenophobia may have a rational basis to it, such as when it refers to a worker whose job is threatened by the intrusion of migrants whom he labels as outsiders and therefore fears. It may also take an irrational form… But to call a person xenophobic does not necessarily say anything about the rationality of that condition. (p. 7)

Xenophobia is also not a uniquely South African phenomenon. Other examples of xenophobia around the world have included the Jewish Holocaust in Germany, where one group (the Aryan race) did not want to be 'polluted' by those they viewed as outsiders, the Jewish community, and then sort to remove them from society (Anon 2015). Another example is the 2009 violence against Indians in Melbourne, Australia (Khorana 2021). And in our own continent, we have witnessed the growing xenophobic sentiment against most African immigrants. All these incidents can have racial, tribal or even religious overtones, but they are all characterised by a mistrust of those who are considered outsiders.

Methodology

This research adopted a sociological lens, with the concept of 'otherness' that critically examines the issue of xenophobia within a 21st-century South African context. It then examines Deuteronomy and its context from a literary approach to understand how the book deals with ethnic exclusion, also known as xenophobia.[1] South Africa, because of its history, has seen xenophobic sentiments manifest themselves in a particularly violent manner, raising critical questions about what has motivated this ill feeling. The sociological and literary approach helps to unearth these answers because it is situated within the synchronic framework. These two methodologies are foregrounded in this study, and it is based on Gottwald's (1999) work and approach to reading biblical texts and speaking to a contemporary context; he gives credence to why one is able to use the sociological lens in conjunction with methods like the literary method and others. He posits:

> By combining traditional literary, historical, and theological methods of enquiry with more unaccustomed sociological methods, I shall attempt to reconstruct the origins and early development of that remarkable ancient socio-religiously mutant people who called themselves Israel. Such a study is necessarily not only a study of social totality but a study of radical social change that was also liberating social change. (p. xxii)

This synchronous usage not only helps researchers of biblical texts to go behind the text but also allows for one to come in front of the text as it appears in its final shape and to engage it from one's personal contextual viewpoints (Gorman 2005:13; Mbonu 2013:107; Murphy 1981:83–96; Steck 1995:21). This is eloquently expressed by Clines (1997):

> Biblical studies have to be truly critical, not just about lower-order questions like the authorship of the biblical books or the historicity of the biblical narratives, but critical about the Bible's contents, its theology, its ideology. (p. 25)

And because xenophobia is such a deep-rooted, pervasive ethical issue, its implications for interpretation, either good or bad, must be engaged with. It cannot simply be ignored, as much as sensitive readers of biblical texts of this kind may attempt to. To this end, Fiorenza (1999) affirms that:

> If scriptural texts have served – and still do – to support not only noble causes but also to legitimate war, to nurture anti-Judaism and misogyny, to justify the exploitation of slavery, and to promote colonial dehumanisation, then biblical scholarship must take responsibility not only to interpret biblical texts in their historical contexts but also to evaluate the construction of their historical worlds and symbolic universes in terms of religious scale of values. If the Bible has become a classic of western culture, then the responsibility of the biblical scholar cannot be restricted to giving the readers of our time clear access to the original intentions of the biblical writers. It must also include the elucidation of the ethical consequences and political functions of biblical texts and their interpretations. (p. 28)

This idea of ethical implication brings to the fore the debate that xenophobia is rooted in colonial history, which South Africa has been deeply impacted by. Wiredu (1998) summarises this debate as follows:

> By decolonisation, I mean divesting African philosophical thinking of all undue influences emanating from our colonial past. The crucial word in this formulation is 'undue'. Obviously, it would not be rational to try to reject everything of a colonial ancestry. Conceivably, a thought or a mode of enquiry spearheaded by our erstwhile colonisers may be valid or in some way beneficial to humankind. Are we called upon to reject or ignore it? That would be a madness having neither rhyme nor reason. (p. 17)

To consider this debate seems sensible. But this cannot be made to be an excuse for the violent acts committed against 'others' who are not like us – 'the trap of constructing an onto-theological figuration of the self, same or subject'. It is Kearney's work that helps to engage the 'other' and avoid falling into the familiar trap of the figuration of oneself while excluding the other. To this end, Kearney (2003) writes:

> We need to be able to critically discriminate between different kinds of otherness while remaining alert to the deconstructive resistance to black and white judgements of Us versus Them. We need, at crucial moments, to discern the other in the alien and the alien in the other. (p. 67)

This critical engagement allows for one to be open and encounter the 'other', to see how ultimately there is connectedness between 'us' and 'them', terms often encountered in the South African xenophobia discourse.

1.The author understands xenophobia to be inclusive of the experience of strangers and every associated lived experience of the following: 'discrimination (as in certain immigration policies or acts of separating natives from foreigners), suspicion or other unwelcome invaders, but then mainly scapegoating (as in xenophobic, racist or anti-Semitic practices)' (Aden 2017). In addition, on a methodological level, it is important to acknowledge that biblical texts were written in a period different from the present South African epoch. The term 'xenophobia' did not exist in the ancient biblical world in its fullest form in the way we have it in South Africa. However, the author argues in this article that the term 'xenophobia' exists in the book of Deuteronomy. The text employs terms like 'alien' and 'stranger'. In relation to how these concepts were used, the author relates them to the South African context, by focussing on terms such as 'othering' and 'otherness'. Sometimes, the use and reference to 'African immigrants' and the ill-treatment are also used in this research.

Xenophobia as a phenomenon

The first thing to note is that xenophobic sentiment is not a new phenomenon. It existed in South Africa before 1994 (Khorana 2021). In December 1994 and January 1995, an armed gang in the Johannesburg township of Alexandra destroyed homes and took suspected illegal migrants to a police station, demanding that they be removed from the country (Democracy and Governance Programme HSRC 2008:19).

The targeting of black Africans in the xenophobic attacks is rooted in the historical prejudices that exist in South Africa. Paul Zeleza notes in the HSRC (2008) report that:

> … This racialised devaluation of black lives is what we are witnessing in South Africa today in the xenophobic violence against African immigrants perpetrated by fellow Africans whose own lives were devalued during the long horrific days of apartheid. Racialised superiority and inferiority complexes continue to stalk us. (p. 15)

In other words, there is a general attitude of superiority that South Africans in general have against other Africans, which can be seen in our general affiliation with Europe rather than Africa (with many South Africans calling themselves 'the Europe of Africa'). This has resulted in the dehumanising of black African migrants which has escalated over time. What has made this situation worse was the general isolation of South Africa from the rest of the continent during apartheid which has resulted in an ignorance about Africa in general.

The violent nature of the attacks can be attributed to how particular areas in our country address their grievances. For example, there is a strong correlation between the areas where xenophobic attacks have occurred and the places that are notorious for violent forms of protest, such as service delivery protests (Democracy and Governance Programme HSRC 2008:6). This explains why the looting and violence has been localised to certain informal settlements and townships.

Possible causes of xenophobic attacks

Influx of foreign nationals into South Africa

The following commentary from a participant in a xenophobia focus group at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) captures well the common South African reaction to the influx of foreign nationals into the country (Democracy and Governance Programme HSRC 2008):

> We were against these people from the onset. That's when terms like *makwerekwere* (derogatory term for foreigners) came about. We were against them in a light manner, but now people are getting angry. That is why they beat them up. Their numbers are growing and some have babies this side. It's as if this is their hometown; this violence happened because people are getting angry. This thing has always been there, but it wasn't as strong as it is now. We never said we are happy to live with them, but it was a light thing, so people resorted to violence because of the realisation that the situation is getting serious. (p. 2)

The negative attitude of South Africans towards foreigners has increased over the past two decades, with a large influx of Africans into the country. It is no surprise that xenophobic attacks occurred in 1995 with the influx of Nigerian and Congolese immigrants, in the late 2000s with the influx of Zimbabwean immigrants and recently with the influx of Somalian and Ethiopian immigrants. The impact of this influx was mostly felt in informal settlements where the urban poor live and these have been the places where violent attacks often occur.

Perception of crime related to foreigners

There is a perception in areas where xenophobic attacks occur that foreigners commit crime and are able to get away with it because they do not have legal documents (Democracy and Governance Programme HSRC 2008:34). Foreigners are perceived to be behind crimes, such as theft, fraud, rape and drug dealing, in South Africa (Bond, Ngwane & Amisi 2008). In 2006, South Africa's most wanted criminal was the Mozambican Ananias Mathe (BBC 2006). There are stereotypes that exist in South African society that Nigerians are drug dealers and pimps and that hijacked cars are taken to Mozambique. There is also a perception that immigrants are able to bribe their way out of persecutions and that they purchase legal documents through corrupt officials in the Department of Home Affairs. These perceptions and people's experiences in their neighbourhoods fuel the xenophobic flames. Mangosuthu Buthelezi (2019), Inkatha Freedom Party president emeritus and traditional prime minister to the Zulu nation, posits:

> I understand the tensions, the complaints and the anger [*against undocumented foreigners*]. I understand that there is validity to the complaints, on both sides. I also understand that wrongs have been committed by both sides. This has not come out of nowhere. But there is a saying in Zulu that you cannot slaughter all the sheep because one sheep has transgressed. In a situation of conflict [*xenophobic*], it is dangerous to tar everyone [*foreigner nationals*] with the same brush. (n.p.)

Competition for scarce resources

This is the most prominent reason for xenophobic sentiments among affected communities (Bond et al. 2008:4). The local unemployed poor perceive foreigners as a threat and to be taking their jobs because they are willing to be paid lower wages. This situation is made worse by employers who are unwilling to pay people the minimum wage, those who want to exploit the poor or those who think that foreigners work harder than locals (Democracy and Governance Programme HSRC 2008:39). This is experienced particularly in jobs that require unskilled labour, such as domestic work, gardening, unskilled construction work and waitressing. There is also a perception that white employers are filling up skilled posts using black African immigrants because they are not willing to train black South Africans (Democracy and Governance Programme HSRC 2008:32). The situation is exacerbated by the high unemployment rate in South Africa, particularly among black South Africans. However, as Buthelezi (2019) asserts:

> What we have seen in the past few days is unacceptable. The attacks on foreign nationals and their businesses are purely xenophobic. It is a violation of human rights and a violation of our Constitution. Our Constitution enshrines the right to freedom from all forms of violence. That right applies to everyone in South Africa, whether citizens or not. (n.p.)

Jealousy caused by foreigners' perceived success in business and in romance

The attitude of jealousy has come about because of the perceived success of African immigrants in sectors where black South Africans were beginning to break into. This has been seen most recently in the acquisition of tuck shops or general dealer shops by Somalian and Ethiopian immigrants, particularly in the townships. In a time period of less than 10 years, almost every township spaza shop is now run by a foreigner who uses more shrewd business practices to control market share. Unhappiness by local South Africans has resulted in looting sprees in the townships that have spread and affected all the major townships in South Africa. Xenophobic attitudes have also resulted in foreign shops becoming easy targets for criminals who observe the community's unhappiness with their presence.

There is also animosity, especially from young adult men, that foreign men are taking South African women from them because foreigners are perceived to be wealthier by women (Democracy and Governance programme HSRC 2008:32).

Government's (lack of) action

While government did not directly cause the xenophobic attacks, their behaviour and perceived lack of action were contributing factors. These factors include, firstly, the government's poor control of the influx of immigrants (both legal and illegal) that has led to increased tensions within affected communities, especially in light of the competition for scarce resources (Democracy and Governance Programme HSRC 2008:29–30).

Secondly, corrupt officials in government departments, such as Home Affairs, Border Control, the Department of Housing and the South African Police Service (SAPS), have resulted in some immigrants obtaining documents illegally using bribes, receiving government housing which they were not eligible for and getting away with crimes through paying bribes (Democracy and Governance Programme HSRC 2008:29–31). All these factors increase the sentiment that government is unwilling to or incapable of dealing with the issue of illegal immigrants and also that foreigners are getting preferential treatment.

Thirdly, the general attitude of denial of the problem by the government has shown a lack of leadership in combating the problem. Up until recently, the government has labelled attacks against foreigners as opportunistic crimes and did not want to label them as xenophobic. The shockingly poor conviction rate of those perpetrating these attacks has demonstrated government's lack of interest in the matter (Laganprasad 2015:4).

Finally, high-ranking officials who have expressed inflammatory xenophobic sentiments have not been publicly reprimanded. These irresponsible statements have helped fuel the negative sentiment against foreigners (Khorana 2021).

Extent and impact of xenophobia in South Africa

The statistics regarding xenophobic attacks in South Africa since 2008 make for sobering reading. According to Jean Misago from the African Centre for Migration and Society (Laganprasad 2015:4), the following incidents have been recorded, such as the killing of at least 62 people in 2008, with 670 wounded, dozens raped and more than 100 000 displaced in xenophobic violence that began in Johannesburg and rapidly spread to Cape Town and Durban. Dishearteningly, since mid-2008, there has been at least one attack almost every month on groups of foreigners. Between mid-2009 and late 2010, at least 20 foreigners were killed and more than 40 seriously injured, while at least 200 foreign-run shops were looted and more than 4000 people were displaced. Statistics also show that in 2011, at least 120 foreigners were killed (five were set alight), 100 seriously injured and at least 1000 displaced. In 2012, there were 140 deaths and 250 serious injuries.

In total, around 357 foreigners have been killed in attacks, and there has been only one successful prosecuted murder conviction in the last seven years (Laganprasad 2015:4). These statistics partly explain why the attacks have been spreading so rapidly because those who perpetrate these crimes feel that they can do it with impunity. This is a shocking indictment on our policing and judicial system.

Understandably, there has been a backlash to the xenophobic attacks by other African countries. They have unanimously condemned the attacks and some have called for the boycott of South African products. This has resulted in the South African government taking the matter more seriously and communicating a clear message, condemning the attacks (BBC 2015). An inter-ministerial committee has been formed to find a solution to the crisis. An imbizo was also held by King Zwelithini condemning the attacks.

Close reading of Deuteronomy on themes[2] such as 'alien', 'foreigner' and 'stranger'

In the Old Testament, it is clear that those who consider themselves to be God's people must treat foreigners or aliens with dignity and love. The way in which the Israelites were to 'other' those different from themselves was made clear. In

2.The term 'foreigner' and related words in Deuteronomy is referred to the Hebrew word *gēr*. These are foregrounded in this study, and it is based on the work of Awabdy (2014).

the law given to his people (Meyer 2014:76), God outlines how foreigners are to be treated:

> For the Lord your God is God of gods and lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Dt 10:17–19)

The foreigner, even though they are outsiders among the people and most susceptible to being abused, must not be deprived of justice (Coetsee 2019:111) because God saved his people from slavery. The divine attempt is to bestow an identity on his people as the highest reference point in a semantic society like Israel, but one that does not display its power in a totalitarian manner (Gerber 2018:156). This society is required to show kindness to outsiders, as is similarly stated by the Deuteronomist a few chapters later:

> You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge, but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this. (Dt 24:17–18)

Even when God asks the Israelites to remove the Canaanites and occupy the land, the motivation is never hatred or fear, but judgement (Gn 15:16). Obedience to God in another Deuteronomistic law is elucidated:

> Let them live among you wherever they like and in whatever town they choose. Do not oppress them. (Dt 23:16)

When it came to justice for the harsh treatment of foreigners, the Deuteronomistic tradition is even clearer:

> Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow (citizen) or a foreigner residing in one of your towns… Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice. (Dt 24:14–17)

This charge continues, 'cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner' (Dt 27:19).

Collins (2004:160) gives a broad overview of how the above texts are placed within a bigger context and that it is important to bear this in mind when trying to engage the topic of xenophobia in the book of Deuteronomy. There are four major literary units in Deuteronomy, namely, some recollection of 'Israel's history (1–11), the so-called Deuteronomic Code (12–26), curses and blessings (27–28) and concluding remarks (29–34)'. Deuteronomy 25, therefore, belongs to the Deuteronomic or Deuteronomistic Code (Pietersen 2021:773a).

Ademiluka (2013:14) adds that the regulations in the code can be divided into three groups: ceremonial laws (12:1–16:17), civil laws (16:18–20:20) and social laws (21:1–26:19). As careful readers of Deuteronomy, we need to regard the text as a living guide with which Yahweh instructed the Israelites from pre-exilic to post-exilic times. It was a time when 'written deposit … defined [Israel's] social order, the codification of her legal principles and juridical procedures, and her self-understanding under the rule of God' (Ademiluka 2013:15). This context needs to be understood by 21st-century readers so that they are not apt to judge it unfairly (Coetsee 2019:125; Jonker 2013:1).

The aforementioned Deuteronomistic texts support the idea that God is against the abuse and mistreatment of foreigners. However, the debate can sway both ways because other texts in the same book seem to explicitly have God instruct Israel to invade and kill humans to achieve an ideology. This ideology, Yahwistic worship, 'is to acknowledge a difference between self and other, without separating them so schismatically that no relation at all is possible' (Kearney 2003:9). This gives way not only to an ethical dilemma but also to contradictions[3] inherent in Deuteronomy.

It is only in human minds, rather than the divine intention, that our behaviour towards those unlike ourselves is seen as 'othering'. Wuench (2014) highlights how the Israelites were required to be open to the strangers in their midst. He claims:

> Do not forget that everything belongs to God. Israel was reminded of the fact that God had given them their land and that it always remained the land of God. They could not sell this land permanently because it did not belong to them. For us, this might mean: your land, your property, your money – everything is given to you by God. Therefore be prepared to share it with others who are in need. (p. 1150)

Interpreting this scripture cannot but leave the reader with a favourable impression of God's compassion towards foreigners. Concerning the character of God, it is hard to ignore the 'humanitarian concern for widows, orphans, slaves and resident aliens' which is 'worthy of commendation' to nation building. The book of Deuteronomy is preoccupied with alleviating the socio-economic challenges of the time, not only for Israel but also for the poor, widow, orphan and foreigner in their midst. This calls for God's people to care for their fellow human beings and empathise with 'others'. As Weinfeld (1972:282–297) has shown, it is 'one of the great repositories of humanistic values in Scripture'.

Notwithstanding this compassionate stance towards the alien, there are also very visible texts in Deuteronomy – 'intended to be used for worship and justice in the eyes of Yahweh' (Mofokeng 1988) – that look down on foreigners. It would seem that Yahweh's justice includes the annihilation of any minority group that would come between him and his people. This justice can be explained within an inferiority and superiority framework. In small numbers, the foreigners who co-inhabited the land of God's people were not seen as a threat from a social, physical and economical point of view. This is evident in Deuteronomy 29, where foreigners seem to be earmarked for menial labour, such as being the 'hawkers of wood and drawers of water'.[4] This gives God and his people a sense of control over foreigners and sets the scene

3.Cf. Deuteronomy 5:17 and 7:2–3, 16.

4.See Deuteronomy 29:11.

for them to be treated inhumanely and really as enemies[5] who would threaten their security and therefore could justify xenophobic attacks. The cause for this violence then gives God and his people the ability to sequestrate themselves from any risk-taking and competition. Foreigners would be at the mercy of God and his people and that could lead to potential harmful influences, to the point where the socio-economic situation would be highly intolerant towards outsiders.

To put it differently (Gerber 2018):

> [*T*]o break the cycle and take seriously the responsibility to think through the relation between the self and the other, that is to discern in our relation to others who may rightfully be judged as the other and the alien. (p. 165)

Clements (1968) goes a step further to suggest that the intolerance of foreigners may speak to the ethnic cleansing that was seen as appropriate behaviour in the Ancient Near East. He says:

> The particular horror of the Deuteronomists was that vestiges of the beliefs and practices of the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Canaan should continue. These are made the object of the strictest prohibitions because of their offensive nature and any participation in them is made a capital crime. It is on this account that the pre-Israelite inhabitants are threatened with extermination. (p. 35)

God gives this kind of power to his people and they are surrounded by the notion that they are superior and deserve to be chosen, you create a hostile environment in which human beings are capable of dealing with 'lesser beings' very harshly – in the case of Moses, as seen in the Deuteronomistic texts, we see how this plays out. When Moses gets an order to deal harshly with foreigners, one can only imagine beyond the detail in the text what perceived superior human beings would be able to do to their lesser counterparts. This enforces the historic themes of master and slave not only in the ancient Israelite context but also in the South African context where we are grappling with 'the question of identity, in breaking the cycle of reinstituting the logic of the coloniser, the Us versus Them' (Gerber 2018:169).

Clearly the Israelites felt it their duty to preserve their ethnic separateness:

> You [*Israel*][6] must exterminate them. You must not make an alliance with them or spare them. You must not intermarry with them. You are to devour all the nations which the Lord your God is giving over to you. Show none of them mercy. (Dt 7:2–3, 16)

This speaks about the divine attributes of God that are constantly held in tension: compassion and mercy for foreigners in Israel's midst balanced against a fierce desire for purity and devotion from his people. Interestingly, an even deeper divide of xenophobic outworking in the past can be ascribed to the architects of a former regime (Bhebhe 2012):

> When the theologians of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa sought to defend apartheid during the first half of the twentieth century, they had recourse to Deuteronomy. Its description of ancient Israel was relevant to their social situation and suited their vested interests. Boer Calvinism was based on the plain sense of the Bible, uninfluenced by any critical handling of the text. In sermons and official church statements, the laws of Deuteronomy were related directly to the South African situation. (p. 119)

Deist (1994:26) posits that this might be 'a naïve reading and application of concepts from the book of Deuteronomy'. He argues that, in particular, the theme of division or segregation could easily be taken out of context and an unbalanced reading of Deuteronomy could be used for selfish gains.

Possible solutions to a complex problem

It would be short-sighted for the government to merely condemn the violence associated with xenophobia without addressing the serious issues that give rise to it, including the act of 'othering' those different from ourselves. After the 2008 xenophobic attacks, a number of recommendations were given by research organisations that were sadly ignored by the authorities. These recommendations are still valid and include the following:

1. A *national discussion* about foreign nationals and immigrants that seeks to clarify the state's policies and approach to immigration. These discussions must include civil society organisations, religious organisations and affected communities and must seek peaceful coexistence and acceptance of cultural differences in society (Democracy and Governance Programme HSRC 2008:47). These discussions must include local community discussions on migration. The talks must be ongoing and constructive so that communities feel that they have a place where they can go to have their grievances heard, without resorting to violence.
2. *Tightening of access at the borders*. Government needs to stem the influx of illegal migrants at the border (Bond et al. 2008:30). This will require resources being increased to strengthen border control. There must be a zero-tolerance stance on corruption at the border. Currently bribery is an open secret at the borders of South Africa.
3. Addressing *high levels of unemployment* in economically creative ways. This involves reducing the levels of extreme poverty in South Africa, such as channelling resources to the poor and increasing grant payments (Bond et al. 2008:30). Inequality in society needs to be addressed because it creates an environment where crime and violence fester.
4. Addressing *high levels of crime* in society, including corruption by officials at Home Affairs, SAPS and the Department of Housing (Democracy and Governance Programme HSRC 2008:51).
5. Addressing *employment conditions* in society by ensuring that all employers adhere to the minimum wage (Democracy and Governance Programme HSRC 2008:50).

5.The word 'enemies' occurs 25 times in Deuteronomy's 34 chapters.

6.The brackets indicate an insertion to offer more clarity.

> The hiring of illegal immigrants must be monitored closely and reduced. Employers must be made aware of the impact of their decision to employ non-South Africans on society as a whole and the tensions that it creates.

Conclusion

South Africa, because of its painful history, has witnessed xenophobic sentiments manifest themselves in a particularly ugly manner. Xenophobic violence is seen as an ever-present fibre built into the make-up of South African culture of 'othering' those different from us, always poised to spill over and negatively impact the nation. In the words of Kearney (2003):

> [*I*]dentity is created through the diacritical and narrative interpretation of the lived experience in our relation to multiple others, instead of a substantialised, isolated and non-accessible notion of the self or the other. (p. 81)

The context of Deuteronomy, from both a divine and human perspective, helps us to see how foreigners are expected to be treated with honour and dignity. Ironically, the same book purports violence against foreigners in the name of 'ethnic cleansing' in which the dignity and humanity of outsiders are undermined by the very same divine force and the people of the divine (Pietersen 2022:6).

The reading of the themes of 'alien', 'foreigner' and 'stranger' in Deuteronomy and understanding these themes against the issue of xenophobia in South Africa and othering others reveal a structural violence. At the structural level, African immigrants and the ill-treatment left solved or being ignored may play into the hands of a stratified culture where real inequality and class domination thrive. Because the African immigrants are structurally weaker, they are vulnerable to violence by all who do not see a problem, who are supposed to protect and support them. That violence tends to be covered up so as not to embarrass our country. So to highlight this topic through the sociological and literary approaches is to present a concerted approach that would engage with the disenfranchisement of African immigrants and to some extent in the South African working class and help to improve their lot from a cultural, economic and spiritual perspective to see that misplaced anger and violence against the foreigners might hurt us all as the people of South Africa in general and Africa in particular. Dignifying others enhances one's own dignity as a people, never mind being a people of God.

In terms of the accent, this work places on the church; the church's role is to preach the gospel that unites 'others' and to model what that unity looks like. They must be part of the dialogue in society and strongly rebuke xenophobic patterns by the government and its citizens. Church leaders must address the underlying discriminatory attitudes in peoples' hearts and show them to be inconsistent with the gospel because they were the 'other' and Christ affirmed them as his own.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

Author's contribution

D.P. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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