

Church and xenophobia: The tension between nationhood and God's mission in South Africa

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The perennial scourge of xenophobic violence in South Africa raises some questions about the nation's hospitality to immigrants. Unexpectedly, Christians are also torn between loyalty to the prevailing anti-immigrant sentiments and the obligation to be hospitable to foreigners. This article, therefore, seeks to explore this tension, and the objective is achieved by surveying pertinent literature.

Having traced the history of xenophobic violence from the dawn of South Africa's independence in 1994 to the present day, the article discusses the involvement of Christians in xenophobic violence, which can be viewed as a paradox. Thus, the article thoroughly reflects on God's mission to foreigners and how the Church, a God-ordained community, fulfils that mission, which began in the Old Testament, when God anointed Israel as the vehicle of redemption for the world. Unfortunately, Israel failed to accomplish the mission, which was ultimately fulfilled by Jesus Christ, who ordained the Church as the new covenant community that would fulfil the aforesaid mission. This study reveals that all people, including foreign nationals, bear the image of God, who indiscriminately loves and cares for all of them. God's legislation in Israel's history and the New Testament Church attest to that. The article concludes by exposing the tension experienced by South African Christians, as well as proposing a thrust for Christians to participate in God's mission by practising sacrificial love and hospitality to foreigners.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This is an interdisciplinary article that looks at theological and sociological issues of co-existence.

Keywords: xenophobia; persisting xenophobic challenges; church; Christians; hospitality; foreigners; tension; nationhood; God's mission; love.

Introduction

There is an ongoing challenge of xenophobic violence within South Africa that raises the key question about the nation's hospitality to foreigners at both national and community levels. Such violence can be traced back to 1994, when the nation attained independence. Over the years, the Church responded to these persistent eruptions in various notable ways (Majola 2021; Phakathi n.d.:1–28). In the early stages, xenophobia was not as open as it is currently, whereby natives explicitly accuse foreign nationals of taking their jobs, an issue that is now a key topic in public debate (Field 2017:4; cf. Schippers 2015).

This article posits that the Church should be loving, caring and hospitable to foreign nationals, but it is caught between two seemingly conflicting obligations, that is, being loyal to the natives and serving the foreigners. Unfortunately, some Church members belong to communities that commit xenophobic offences. Consequently, the Church faces the dilemma of whether to side with the citizens or fulfil its duty and responsibility to show hospitality and love to people from diverse backgrounds, as the Bible teaches. These obligations are integral to the Church's calling. At stake here is the tension between one's duty and responsibility to one's nation, and the need to uphold God's mission to others, thus, calling for a reflection on God's mission to foreigners and the roles of the citizens and the Church. The latter is essentially a community that was divinely called to participate in God's mission.

However, the author is conscious that it is not just nationhood that is a problem in the context of xenophobic incidences in South Africa. This is because, among many other things, the economic challenges that are interconnected with the high unemployment rate are significant factors of tension and xenophobic violence. Field (2017:4), Schippers (2015:7–8), and many other scholars

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attribute xenophobic violence chiefly to unemployment, as the general belief among South African natives is that foreign nationals, including illegal immigrants,¹ are crowding the already shrunken job market. This accusation can be considered as reasonable if one considers the current unemployment rate, which peaked at 33.56% in 2021 (Macrotrends 2023:n.p.). This gives credence to the assumption that foreigners access jobs and other economic services at the expense of South Africans. In support of the aforementioned statement, Schippers (2015) rightly notes that:

This increase in competition for jobs translates and is understood as being an impediment to the access of economic and other resources which shape an individual's socio-economic position. (pp. 7–8)

However, the aforementioned economic problem is a bigger complexity of a different nature; therefore, it will not be discussed further in this paper.

In light of the foregoing discussions, this article analyses the tension between nationhood and God's mission in South Africa. Further, the article defines xenophobia and discusses the persisting xenophobic violence in South Africa. Since Christians experience the dilemma on whether to participate in, or refrain from xenophobic violence, the article thoroughly reflects on God's mission to foreigners and the role of the citizens and particularly the Church, as a community that God called to participate in the divine mission. The article concludes by analysing the tension between nationhood and God's mission in South Africa. Such tension is located within the nature and extent of Christian faith, such as the consummation.

Towards an establishment of persisting xenophobia in South Africa and the participation of Christians in xenophobic violence

Defining xenophobia

A considerable number of scholars (cf. Fauvelle-Aymar 2015; Manik & Singh 2013; Rukema & Khan 2013; Vahed & Desai 2013) concur that many foreign nationals in South Africa are victims of xenophobia in many different ways. However, it is important to first establish a working definition of xenophobia before providing a description of the persisting xenophobia in South Africa. The term xenophobia is derived from two Greek words namely: *xeno*, which means stranger, and *phobia*, which means fear (Pillay 2017:7). When combined, these two words translate to 'intense dislike or fear of strangers' (Pillay 2017:7). Harris (2002:169) also defines xenophobia as the 'dislike' or 'hatred or fear' of people from other countries, including

¹ In comparison to other African countries, South Africa's economy and infrastructure attract many foreign nationals from Africa and abroad (Fauvelle-Aymar 2015:31ff; South Africa's position in BRICS 2013). Many African immigrants in South Africa are forced to move beyond their borders because of life-threatening crises such as famine, drought, economic and political instability, conflicts, wars, and persecution (African Union [AU] 2006:2; Kiwanuka 2009:30; cf. Naudé 2008; The Nansen Initiative 2021:1; UNHCR 2015:2ff). Thus, the people who flee their countries because of the aforementioned life-threatening crises seldom have valid passports and visas to reside in South Africa. However, some of the people who arrive on legal permits overstay and decide to work in the country.

immigrants and refugees. Pillay (2017) aptly amplifies the definition of the concept by underscoring that xenophobia:

... [D]escribes attitudes, prejudices and behaviours that reject, and often vilify people based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society, or national identity. (p. 7)

Nevertheless, xenophobia does not only refer to the attitudes, behaviours and prejudices against foreigners. Instead, it is also associated with practical actions, in the form of the violence that some South Africans often unleash against foreign nationals (Harris 2002; cf. United Nations 2022:n.p.). Manik and Singh (2013) concur with the aforementioned when they note that:

... [X]enophobia is pervasive, that it manifests itself in many ways, from the blatant physicality of violence to subtle forms of psychological violence and dehumanis[ing] slander and that it has taken a stronghold in South African society. (p. 7)

Pillay (2017:8) helpfully warns against the danger of confusing racism with xenophobia. In his view, the differentiation is that on one hand, racism refers to the 'racial superiority of one race group over another'. On the other hand, xenophobia speaks about the 'feelings of fear or hatred of others from another group' that usually result in physical violence (Pillay 2017:8). That is to say, the difference usually lies in the underlining fact that:

... [R]acist people accept the presence of others but attempt to keep them oppressed and dominated. Xenophobic people, however, tend to refuse to accept the presence of other people around them usually because they are perceived as a source of threat. (Pillay 2017:8)

Having defined xenophobia and distinguished it from racism, the next task is to establish the persisting xenophobic violence in South Africa.

Establishing persisting xenophobic violence in South Africa

Field (2017) argues that:

... [M]igration and the presence of migrant populations provoke divergent responses from the indigenous population. In many situations, it has given rise to various forms of xenophobia. (p. 1)

In South Africa, violence against foreign nationals is a recurrent feature, and it has currently worsened (South African History Online 2021:n.p.). The aforesaid sentiments are echoed by Misago and Mlilo (2021), who avow that:

Xenophobic violence – acts of collective violence targeted at foreign nationals or 'outsiders' due to their origins – is a perennial feature of post-apartheid South Africa. (p. 2)

Misago and Mlilo (2021:2) and Pillay (2017:7) acknowledge that immigrants in South Africa have been subjected to persistent xenophobic attacks. This shows that xenophobic violence is an ongoing challenge that requires the urgent attention of all stakeholders. However, this discussion will only give an overview of the phenomenon from 1994 to date.

From late 1994 to early 1995, many foreign nationals residing in Gauteng, Western Cape, Free State, Limpopo, and KwaZulu-Natal experienced xenophobic violence (South African History Online 2021:n.p.). The aforesaid observation is echoed by Misago and Mlilo (2021), who affirm that:

Since 1994, tens of thousands of people have been harassed, attacked, killed, or displaced because of who they are and where they are from. This includes murders, assaults, looting, robberies, property damage, mass displacement and threats. (p. 2)

For instance, in December 1994 and January 1995, some native youth squads from Alexandra township in Gauteng demolished the residential places of alleged undocumented foreigners before marching to the nearest police station, where they demanded that all foreign nationals must be deported with immediate effect (South African History Online 2021:n.p.). The victims of these xenophobic attacks were mainly refugees and asylum seekers from Mozambique, Zimbabwe and many other parts of Africa (South African History Online 2021:n.p.). It can be argued that the perpetrators and, consequently, the government violated the United Nations (UN) and Organisation of African Unity (OAU) refugee and asylum seeker conventions, because South Africa became a member of these bodies upon attaining democratic governance in 1994 (South African History Online 2021:n.p.). This means that, prior to 1994, South Africa did not recognise refugees and asylum seekers.

In September 1998, two foreign nationals (Senegalese and Mozambican) were thrown out of a moving train in Johannesburg by a group of natives (South African History Online 2021:n.p.). In Zandspruit township, north of Johannesburg, some residents burnt down the shacks belonging to Zimbabwean nationals (South African History Online 2021:n.p.). In both incidents, the perpetrators alleged that they wanted the foreign nationals to leave South Africa, because they were taking their jobs, enjoying various services at the expense of locals, committing crime and spreading HIV/AIDS.

In May 2008, South Africa witnessed an explosion of violence on foreign nationals, which started in Alexandra township, just outside Johannesburg (Field 2017:1–2; Pillay 2017:7; South African History Online 2021:n.p.). Misago and Mlilo's (2021:2) factsheet on xenophobic violence provides an amplified picture of the xenophobic violence in South Africa and notes that between 2008 and 2021, at least 57 cases were recorded each year. However, the incidences could be higher, considering that some went unreported (Misago & Mlilo 2021:2). In 2008, 62 foreign nationals experienced violent attacks (Misago & Mlilo 2021:3; cf. Pillay 2017:7; South African History Online 2021:n.p.). Further, 342 shops owned by foreign nationals were looted, while 213 were burnt down and hundreds of immigrants were injured during the period under review (cf. South African History Online 2021:n.p.).

Between 14 November 2009 and 17 November 2009, 3000 Zimbabweans residing in De Doorns, a rural-informal settlement in the Western Cape province, were forcibly

displaced when xenophobic violence erupted. In the process, shops and houses owned by foreign nationals were looted and destroyed (South African History Online 2021:n.p.). Many foreign nationals from other countries, notably Lesotho, also resided in the area, but only Zimbabweans were the targets of the attacks. On 26 February 2013, eight police officers from Daveyton, East of Johannesburg 'tied a 27-year-old Mozambican man, Mido Macia, to the back of a police van and dragged him down the road' (South African History Online 2021:n.p.). The man sustained fatal injuries and died in police custody. Further, on 26 May 2013, two Zimbabwean men were killed by a xenophobic mob in Diepsloot. In 2015, 62 cases of violence against foreign nationals were reported (Misago & Mlilo 2021:3). These incidences were triggered by a Somali who shot two young boys who allegedly attempted to rob his shop in Soweto (cf. South African History Online 2021:n.p.). The ensuing waves of xenophobic attacks, mostly in Gauteng, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal, resulted in the looting of 120 Somali and Bangladeshi *spaza* shops in areas such as Snake Park, Zola, Meadowlands, Slovoville, Kagiso, Zondi and Emdeni (cf. South African History Online 2021:n.p.).

Table 1 presents the number of violent xenophobic incidences that occurred in South Africa between 2008 and 2021, as stated in Misago and Mlilo's (2021:3) factsheet.

At 343, Gauteng province had the most reported violent incidences against foreigners, followed by Western Cape (139), KwaZulu-Natal (105), Eastern Cape (61), Limpopo (44), Mpumalanga (33), Free State (28), Northwest (26), Northern Cape (8) and unallocated (9) (Misago & Mlilo 2021:3). Admittedly, the figures could be much higher, as many xenophobic violence cases against foreigners go unreported (Misago & Mlilo 2021:2).

As in the previous years, in 2022 some foreign nationals continued to experience xenophobic attacks, which usually target low-income black immigrants and refugees (United Nations 2022:n.p.). Although there are no official reports about the number of violent xenophobic incidences that were

TABLE 1: Xenophobic violence cases in South Africa from 2008 to 2021.

Year	Number of reported xenophobic violence cases
2008	149
2009	39
2010	61
2011	22
2012	69
2013	64
2014	39
2015	62
2016	19
2017	44
2018	43
2019	76
2020	51
2021	14

Source: Misago, J.P. & Mlilo, S., 2021, *Xenowatch factsheet 2: Incidents of xenophobic violence in South Africa: 1994–April 2021*, viewed 02 March 2023, from http://www.xenowatch.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Factsheet2-22-April-2021_Final.pdf

unleashed on foreign nationals in 2022, one can advance the highly publicised violent attack on a Zimbabwean national in Diepsloot, Gauteng, as one of the most recent cases of anti-migrant violence (Misago & Mlilo 2021:2). In April 2022, a defenceless 43-year-old father of four was beaten and burnt to death by members of Operation Dudula, which is 'an umbrella for the mobilisation of violent protests, vigilante violence, arson targeting migrant homes and businesses and even the murder of foreign nationals' (Misago & Mlilo 2021:2). The United Nations (2022) describes the horrific death of the victim as follows:

In one highly publicised incident in April 2022, a 43-year-old Zimbabwean national and father of four was killed in Diepsloot by a group going door-to-door demanding to see visas. The attackers drove the victim out of a place where he was seeking refuge, beat him and set him on fire. (p. n.p.)

On 20 June 2022, not long after the Diepsloot incident, alleged Operation Dudula members burnt down the Yeoville Market in Johannesburg on the pretext that they were targeting shops owned by foreign nationals (United Nations 2022:n.p.). Khumalo (2022:n.p.) argues that in 2022 cases of violent xenophobic attacks intensified following the rape of eight women, who were filming a video at a mine dump in Krugersdorp, west of Johannesburg, by suspected illegal immigrant artisanal miners. The incident incensed the residents of the nearby communities, who helped the police to apprehend 100 suspects, most of whom were undocumented foreigners from Lesotho and a few from other African countries (Khumalo 2002:n.p.). Hitherto, only 14 of the suspects have been brought before the courts (Khumalo 2002:n.p.).

Although the Krugersdorp community did well in assisting the police to arrest the suspects, the exercise was riddled with some elements of uncalled for vigilantism (United Nations 2022:n.p.). For example, a community mob indiscriminately assaulted some foreign nationals, stripped them naked, and paraded them on the streets, as well as burnt down their shacks (United Nations 2022:n.p.). The community could not hide its disdain for foreign nationals, and this was fuelled by the presence of undocumented migrants among the suspects (United Nations 2022:n.p.).

The United Nations Human Rights Lawyers condemned the aforesaid actions and concluded that the Krugersdorp incidence could trigger similar waves of violence across South Africa, given that disgruntled citizens tend to take matters into their hands (United Nations 2022:n.p.). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) legal team cited the death of the 43-year-old Zimbabwean man, who was beaten and burnt to death by members of a vigilante group, ostensibly because he lacked proper legal documentation to be in the country (Khumalo 2022:n.p.; cf. United Nations 2022:n.p.). In view of the vivid picture of persisting xenophobic violence that was depicted in this sub-section, one concurs with Vahed and Desai (2013:148),

who conclude that, in South Africa, the phenomenon is ongoing, and can be incited at any given time.

Having established the persisting xenophobic violence in South Africa, one fundamental question that may be posed is whether the Church and, consequently, Christians get involved in xenophobic violence or not. The ensuing section will attempt to answer the aforesaid question.

Do South African Christians participate in xenophobic violence?

In responding to the above-mentioned question, one is cognisant that a considerable number of systematic theologians, biblical commentators and practical theologians (Koester 2001:563; Mitch & Sri 2010:326; eds. O'Brien & Shannon 2010:119; Peitzner 1997:191; cf. Phillips 2006:588; Schaeffer 1982:4183; Thompson 2008:278; Van Zyl 2013: 116–117) concur that any xenophobic acts performed by Christians, whether attitudinal and/or behavioural or violent, deal a severe blow to their God-ordained mission of ministering to foreigners. The question is emotive, and all theologians who are concerned with the mission of the Church to foreigners should seek to answer it.

In answering the proposed question, there is very limited literature on the involvement of Christians in xenophobic violence and this warrants one to challenge practical theologians to undertake a thorough empirical investigation on the issue. If this is not done, one may unadvisedly conclude that there are no native South African Christians who have anti-immigrant mindsets nor engage in xenophobic violence. The paucity of related literature is of great concern because it may result in the Church neglecting to remind Christians to participate in fulfilling God's mission to foreigners. In the context of South Africa, partaking in such a mission would certainly present the Church as a distinctive people of God.

The notion that some South African Christians are involved in xenophobic acts is implicitly highlighted by Phiri (2014), who acknowledges that in South Africa xenophobia is a difficult concept to explore. Utilising some theoretical elements of xenophobia, the study established that the majority of young South Africans within the local Methodist churches, who participated in the focus group discussions had some anti-foreigner sentiments (Phiri 2014). Such attitudes can be attributed to the tendency to associate the economic and social hardships in the country with the presence of immigrants (Phiri 2014).

Thus, Phiri's (2014) study shows that being a Christian does not preclude one from having xenophobic attitudes and emotions. Given that the participants of the study had anti-foreigner sentiments, there is a high possibility that young and old native South African Christians can participate in xenophobic violence, as they consider themselves to be victims of economic and social exclusion, owing to the presence of foreign nationals in the country. In Phiri's (2014) own words:

... [B]eing 'religious' does not prevent xenophobic attitudes and emotions and that there is potential to have xenophobic reactions in people who 'perceive' themselves to be religious living in an environment of economic and social hardships. (p. v)

Moreover, some scholars corroborate Phiri's (2014) findings by positing that most of the xenophobic incidences in South Africa are spearheaded by the youth (Dolombisa & Porteus 2002:57). Phiri (2014:143-144) states that the youth played a leading role in executing the 2008 xenophobic violence in Gauteng. Dolombisa and Porteus' (2002:57) empirical study also indicates that there is a dominant violent tendency among the native youth in broader societies and institutions, including schools. Thus, young people, including Christians, are highly likely to be involved in violent xenophobic acts, because some of them have unequivocally anti-immigrant attitudes (Phiri 2014).

It is important to note that the findings of Phiri's (2014) research are corroborated by Bronwen Dachs, who spoke as a representative voice of the South African Roman Catholic clergy, against 2015 xenophobic violence (Dachs 2015:n.p.). The 2015 skirmishes had resulted in the death of seven foreign nationals, while 5000 were displaced and many had their shops destroyed and looted (Dachs 2015:n.p.). Dachs (2015:n.p.) criticises Catholics and the Christian community at large for failing to rein in their members from carrying out harmful and immoral acts against foreign nationals. Consequently, Dachs (2015:n.p.) calls 'on faith and other communities to use their influence to stop xenophobic violence and urged help for its victims'.

Dachs' (2015) report is of utmost significance because it explicitly states that Christians were also involved in the 2015 xenophobic violence, thus, dealing a severe blow to the twin missions of the Church namely: hospitality to foreigners and the love of people from diverse backgrounds. A considerable number of reports (cf. Dachs 2015:n.p.; Majola 2021:n.p.; Makoni 2010:n.p.²) indicate that many Church leaders across South Africa spoke against xenophobic violence and maintained a firm belief that Christians had the power to influence society to treat foreign nationals well. However, it is apparent that xenophobic violence is an ongoing challenge in South Africa and there is little hope for change, as some Church members, who should live distinctly as God's representatives in the world, perpetrate it. As a result, the Church is called upon to take its divine mission to foreigners more seriously.

The ensuing section ventures into a thorough reflection on the aforesaid mission and the role of the citizens and the Church in accomplishing it.

2. Majola (2021) reports that in 2021, 100 Church leaders from all the denominations in KwaZulu-Natal gathered at Medwood Gardens to speak against xenophobic attacks in Durban and other parts of South Africa. Majola (2021) indicates that the Church leaders stated that violence against foreign nationals was unjust and there was need to pursue dialogue in order to address the issue. Most importantly, the clergymen committed to provide relief to the affected immigrants, as well as develop a thoroughly worked-out theology of reconciliation and hospitality that would influence change in the world (Majola 2021).

A call for the Church to participate as an agent of God's mission in the world by exhibiting hospitality and love to all people

Israel's participation in God's mission to foreigners in the Old Testament

Christians are God's agents of change to the world, which they achieve through participating in the divine mission of care for the vulnerable (Bosch 2014:15-52; cf. Wright 2008:29-74). The mission of the Church is theocentric; this means that God is the centre of its mission. Thus, the Church of God does not have its own mission, but that of God, who revealed himself in the Bible as personal, focused, and goal orientated (Wright 2008:29-74). The mission of God and, consequently, that of the Church, is embedded within the Christian doctrines of creation, fall, redemption and consummation (Wright 2010:40-41).

The doctrine of creation means that God, the sovereign-infinite creator, with his *aseity* as the self-derived, self-existent and uncaused one, created the world, human beings (Adam and Eve), and everything in it (visible and invisible things), all of which were perfect, as Genesis 1:30b acknowledges (cf. Gn 1-2). It is important to note that God's intention was for humankind to live in eternal fellowship with him, the purpose for which he appointed Adam and Eve as the stewards of his creation (Gn 2:15ff.; Martin 2014:7; Torrance 2008:73; Wright 2010:49-52). Now, because of Adam and Eve's rebellion in Genesis 3, humanity and the entire creation fell (Rm 8). Nevertheless, from a biblical perspective, one can argue that there was hope for humanity and the world at large because, immediately after the fall, Genesis 3:15 presents an obscure gospel promise of salvation from sin for Adam's descendants. Genesis 3:15 reveals that God did not conceal the gospel until the incarnational mystery of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Instead, God shared his plan and mission, which he had worked before time, to bring back human beings into eternal fellowship with himself.

Notably, in working out his gospel promise of Genesis 3:15, God unmeritoriously called Abraham (cf. Gn 12:1-3) and entered into a covenant with him (cf. Gn 17). Thus, Abraham and his descendants became God's instruments of salvation to all nations (Torrance 2008:51-58). This means that, although Abraham's call and covenant with God were particular in nature, it is of supreme significance to understand that he and his descendants had a universal role (Torrance 2008:51-58). This means that they were instruments of God's salvation to the world, which helps one to comprehend the role of the Church as the agency of God's mission in the world (Torrance 2008:51-58). Thus, the mission of the contemporary Church was foreshadowed by that of Israel, which was to show godliness to the pagan nations so that they could emulate them, thus, glorifying God in doing so. God renewed the Abrahamic covenant with Abraham's descendants namely: Isaac, in Genesis 26:3-5; Jacob, in

Genesis 32:9–12 and the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, in Exodus 19:1ff.

Israel is a covenantal nation of God and when she was under the Egyptian bondage, God remembered his covenant with her forefathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and liberated her and entered into another covenant with her at Mount Sinai. This covenant was bound by different laws that Israel was supposed to obey, thus, showing other nations God's will and ideal ways in all matters of life (Grisanti 1998:40; Kaiser 2012; Martin-Achard & Smith 2011). In doing so, Israel fulfilled her role as the light to pagan nations that surrounded her (cf. Is 49:6); thus, also accomplishing her God-ordained mission in the world (cf. Is 49:6).

In amplifying the aforementioned, one can submit that Israel, as God's chosen or priestly nation, was a light to the world and was supposed to worship God only and be morally blameless in order to reflect God's care and love for all people. The fact that God loves all people, as his image bearers, is demonstrated in his legislation to Israel in Deuteronomy 24:17–22, which guaranteed that all the vulnerable people, including aliens, orphans and widows, who lived among the Israelites, would inherit the promised land of Canaan (Brueggemann 2001:239). This resonates with Craigie (1976:311), who aptly asserts that the spirit of this legislation in Deuteronomy 24:17–22 'clearly expresses the awareness that was to exist within the covenant community for all classes of people'. The underlying notion is that the land of Israel belongs to God, so the Israelites were supposed to utilise it for the benefit of all people, including aliens. For example, in Deuteronomy 24:19, God sanctioned the Israelites to leave some of their crops during the time of harvest so that the vulnerable would glean for grain. This was a means of practically caring for aliens, whose wellbeing God is also concerned with (cf. McConville 2002:364). Although one may avow that God is the owner of the land of Israel, there is a need to be conscious that he owns the whole universe, and he is both its creator and sustainer (cf. Ps 24:1; Col 1:15ff.; Heb 1:3).

Having clarified the aforementioned, it can be argued that Israel, as a covenant people of God in the Old Testament, and consequently, the Church, as a new covenant community of God in the New Testament, should understand that they 'have rights, in principle, to share in the blessings of the land, which is ultimately Yahweh's gift to the people as a whole' (McConville 2002:364). In Deuteronomy 24:17–22, God demonstrated his common grace and love for all people, including aliens, as he providentially provided for the landless foreigners in Israel. In turn, Israel had to live by these divine standards, so that she could be a light to the nations. In the context of the immigration crisis that South Africa is facing, native Christians can adopt this framework.

In substantiation, Exodus 22:21–27 and Leviticus 19:33–37, 23:9 are some of the critical texts in which God sanctioned Israel, as his priestly nation, to practically care for aliens by

treating them fairly and justly in all her dealings with them, since they were vulnerable (Bedford-Strohm 2008:41; cf. McConville 2002:201; Merrill 1994:204; Milgrom 2000:1706; Work 2009:221). Ryken (2005:738, cf. Stuart 2006:516) indicates that during the Old Testament period, foreign nationals did not speak the languages of hosting nations and were not conversant with their laws and culture; therefore, they lacked the basic support base for living in foreign lands. Thus, in embedding the injunction for the care of aliens in the successive covenants, God was concerned with their political, economic and social wellbeing.

Thus, one concurs with the assertions by McConville (2002:201), Merrill (1994:204), Work (2009:22), Milgrom (2000:1706) and Bedford-Strohm (2008:41) that, in various ways, Exodus 22:21–27 and Leviticus 19:33–37, 23:9 reveal that God sanctioned Israel, as his priestly people, to treat aliens as native-born Israelites and to love them as they loved themselves. In essence, Israel was supposed to be non-xenophobic in behaviour, attitude and action by '[overlooking] the stranger's status and deal with him as though he [were] a compatriot' (Kiuchi 2007:361). This casts a spotlight on Hobbs (2001:4), who rightly observes that although the word hospitality is not found in the Old Testament, the practice is salient in the Hebrew Bible, as evident in the aforesaid texts and many others.

The foregoing discussion reveals that one of God's main missions through Israel was for foreigners to be treated justly. For instance, in Jeremiah 7:1–15, God angrily confronted the Israelites when they ill-treated foreigners (Carroll 1986:207; Craigie, Kelly & Drinkard 1991:120). In Isaiah 56:1–8, God admonished the Israelites who had returned from Babylonian captivity to maintain justice and righteousness by embracing and justly treating all foreigners among them (Motyer 1999:351; cf. Webb 1996:221). This clearly indicates that, through Israel, God intended to teach pagan nations how to treat foreigners with kindness (cf. Grisanti 1998:40).

In light of the foregoing submission, the Old Testament reveals hospitality as a valuable practice in many different ways and Israel, as God's priestly nation was supposed to demonstrate it. In affirming the aforementioned, this paper concurs with Janzen (1994), who perceives the dispensation of justice to the marginalised people in Israel, such as foreigners, widows and orphans as an act of hospitality, thus, portraying it as a positive practice in social, economic and political contexts. Thus, it can be acknowledged that the term hospitality has multiple meanings, including defending the poor and the marginalised, notably foreign nationals.

The overriding notion is that God sanctioned Israel to reflect his love when relating with foreigners, so as to remind the latter of God's expectation from all people. Israel's failure to do the aforementioned would incur God's judgement against her. Owing to this, Magezi (2019:1) helpfully observes that Israel's fear of God's judgement should have stimulated her

to exhibit mercy and justice to foreign nationals so that the pagan nations could follow the example (Grisanti 1998:40).

The participation of the Church in God's mission to foreigners in the New Testament

Since all human beings were marred by the Adamic sin, Israel could not permanently fulfil her role as God's instrument of salvation and change in the world (Kruger 2007:2). This is qualified by many commentators, such as Fitzmyer (1993:135–136), Schreiner (1998:274–277), Jewett (2007:281, 373) and Moo (1996:326–328), who underscore that Romans 5:12–21 establishes that Adam's sin has affected all his descendants. The commentators concur that Romans 5:12–21 underscores that the identity of all humankind is either found in Adam or Christ. However, all the above-mentioned critics affirm the superiority of Christ over Adam because the former reverses the latter's sin and all its consequences. Further, humanity appropriates salvation through faith in Christ's saving work. In the following statement, Jewett (2007) encapsulates the aforementioned understanding well:

The one person of Jesus Christ matches the one person of Adam by which the many died. By enhancing the parallelism and dissonance between Adam and Christ, Paul renders more powerful his argument that the lesser is superseded by the greater. (p. 381)

The foregoing statement affirms that in the New Testament, Jesus Christ fulfilled the role of Israel to the nations and established the Church as a new covenant community of God that should be marked by hospitality, care and love for people from all nations (Bosch 2014:20–21; cf. Torrance 1992:5, 45, 2008:44). From a theological perspective, when Jesus Christ, the very God himself, ventured into human history, he assumed the human mode of existence so that he could fulfil the requirements of the covenant between God and Israel, that is, from both the side of God and man, therefore, bringing salvation to people that believe in him (Torrance 1995:155). Just like Israel in the Old Testament, those who are graciously chosen and saved through Christ's redemptive work in the dispensation of the New Testament are charged to continue with Israel's role to the world (Torrance 1995:155). This role includes the advancement of the redemptive gospel to people of all nations (Mt 28:16–20). It also entails continuance with the practice of hospitality to strangers, irrespective of the cost or challenges associated with the act (Heb 13:1–2), as well as the demonstration of love to all people, regardless of their backgrounds (Mt 22:34–40; cf. Brunson & Magezi 2020:8–9; Magezi 2021:6–9).

Matthew 22:34–40 is a critical text that can challenge South African Christians to refrain from xenophobic violence. The scripture indicates that the first greatest commandment for Christians is to love God with all their human faculties (heart, soul and mind), while the second is to love their neighbours as they love themselves (Magezi 2021:6–9; Meier 2009:482–486; cf. Turner 2008:536; Viljoen 2015:1ff.). It is important to note that Jesus stipulated the aforementioned commandments, as

a response to the Jewish law expert who had asked what he could do to inherit the kingdom of God (Magezi 2021:6–9; Viljoen 2015:1ff.). The question was intended to trick Jesus to give a wrong answer so as to discredit the claim that he was the Son of God. However, Jesus' gave a response that South African Christians can use as a framework for partaking in God's mission to foreigners. Here, the term neighbour does not refer to a fellow Israelite, as the legal expert thought (Viljoen 2015:10).

In other words, during Jesus' earthly ministry, the conception of neighbourliness was limited to fellow Jews within the borders of Israel (Viljoen 2015:10). Therefore, in the proposed text, Jesus radically challenged the Jews and, consequently, native South African Christians, to think of love beyond the borders of human construct (Viljoen 2015:10). Barca (2011:62) properly perceives that Matthew 22:34–40 is a critical text that reveals relational anthropology to God's people. Thus, Barca (2011) notes that Matthew 22:34–40 is a central text that:

... [D]emands not only recognition of the Other as neighbour, but as image of God. The double commandment of love demands an 'I-Thou' relationship with God and the Other who may be poor or non-poor, believer or not believer, but s/he is a person, child and image of God. (p. 62)

Ryken (2009:541) explicitly indicates that the mindset of the contemporary society is not different from that of the legal expert or the Jews of Jesus' earthly time. Consequently, any native South African Christian who participates in xenophobic violence limits the definition of neighbourliness to fellow South Africans, instead of perceiving all humankind as the bearers of the image of God and the objects of his love, who should be treated with dignity and respect. Hence, Ryken (2009) is right in asserting that:

The attitude is equally common today. Sometimes we draw the boundary along ethnic lines, excluding people from a different background. Sometimes we draw it along religious lines. We do a decent job of caring for other Christians, but we much less concern for people outside the church. Sometimes we draw the boundary along social lines, making a distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor. Sometimes we simply exclude people whose problem seems too large for us to handle. (p. 541)

Stated otherwise, Matthew 22:34–40 reveals the inseparableness of a Christian's love for God (the vertical love) and fellow human beings (horizontal love), which is the goal of scripture (Mitch & Sri 2010:289). Thus, the goal of the Bible is to make humanity to love and serve God wholeheartedly, as well as serve others without discrimination (Mitch & Sri 2010:289). In other words, man must love God (vertical love) and all humankind, as the bearers of the image of God, without reservation. As Mounce (1985:210) notes, this implies that Christians are God's ambassadors in the world; therefore, they should be cognisant that '... from the love of God stems the ability and desire to love those who are created in the image of God' (Gn 1:26–27). This means that it is difficult for sinful human beings to love their

neighbours as themselves, unless they, first and foremost, subscribe to their divine obligation to love God with all their human faculties (Turner 2008:537). That is to say, Christian love arises from loving God with everything one has, including human faculties, time and resources. South African Christians should consider this as one of the biblical-theological foundational bases for positively responding to the plight of foreign nationals and desist from xenophobic violence.

In substantiation, the injunction that all Christians should love all people, regardless of their backgrounds, is inherent in the incarnational mystery (Torrance 2008:84, 230–232). That is, in and through Christ's incarnational mystery, God demonstrated his care and love for humanity (whom he created in his image), as he had complete solidarity with all people, whether rich, poor or disabled, by becoming man³ (Torrance 2008:84, 230–232). Theologically, this act is termed ontological inclusivity of all humanity in the vicarious humanity of Christ, which expresses God's care and love for all people, who are his image bearers.

In amplifying the aforesaid, one can argue that after identifying with all people in the incarnational mystery, God, *in and through* Christ's earthly life, proceeded to demonstrate his care and love for all humanity in both words and deeds, as he wholeheartedly cares for and loves the marginalised and the vulnerable from diverse backgrounds (Groody 2009:653; Morris 1992:563). This is evidenced by Jesus' actions of embracing strangers and the marginalised, when he reached out to both the Syro-Phoenician and the Canaanite women (cf. Mt 15:21–28; Mk 7:24–30). Many such gestures are recorded in many other Scriptural accounts (cf. Mt 15:21–28; Mk 7:24–30). The love of God for all humanity climaxed in the sacrificial suffering and death of Jesus Christ, which restored all those who believe in him to eternal fellowship with God (Torrance 2009:146).

Therefore, instead of participating in xenophobic violence, native South African Christians, whose identity is found in Christ, are called to participate in God's mission, which entails embracing foreigners. By believing in Christ, Christians acquire a new identity in him; therefore, they should emulate him and demonstrate that they are marked by love, mercy and compassion, even for aliens. That is, because of their sanctified status in Jesus Christ, Christians are compelled to embrace foreign nationals, which is symbolic of God's love for all people, as shown through Christ's incarnational mystery and earthly ministry.

In considering hospitality for strangers as a central divine ethical obligation for Christians, scholars such as Koester (2001:563), Phillips (2006:588), and Brunsdon and Magezi (2020:7–8) interrogate the first century period, which is the

³ For in-depth understanding of the doctrine of incarnation, read Torrance's (2008) work titled: *Incarnation: The person and life of Christ*. In this discussion, Torrance (2008) brings the two Greek philosophical terms namely: *anhypostasis* and *anhypostasis* to configure the doctrine of Christ as a true representative of all humanity in the incarnation.

context of Hebrews 13:1–2. The scholars underscore that the proposed text challenged early Christians to continue practising hospitality, irrespective of the associated risks. Linking this to the South African context, it can be posited that the text challenges contemporary Christians to sacrificially embrace foreigners, regardless of the xenophobic sentiments of their fellow natives. Regrettably, as established in the previous sections, some native South African Christians disregard God's mission to foreigners by participating in xenophobic violence. This compromises their role as a community that was called to participate in God's mission, in which they are expected to practise hospitality and sacrificially love all people, as demonstrated in this section.

At this juncture, the author is conscious of potential criticism that the article uses the Bible to equate the calling of Israel to that of the Church in the New Testament without extended reference to literature on the missional conversation and how it addresses the research problem. Nevertheless, it has to be clarified that it would not have been possible to have a missional conversation with missional scholars on the issue because no missional literature has attempted to address the participation of Christians in xenophobic acts, from the perspective of the mission of the Church. As a result, this section simply ventured into an academic reflection that challenges the Church to uphold its God-ordained mission to foreigners. This is because, judging by the standards of Christian life established in section 'Do South African Christians participate in xenophobic violence?', it seems that native South African Christians are experiencing a tension between nationhood and God's mission in their country, as the next sub-section will briefly propose.

Towards proposing a tension between nationhood and God's mission in South Africa

Emerging from the foregoing discussion is the exhortation that native South African Christians should participate in God's mission to foreigners. However, the current situation attests that some of the native Christians have failed to uphold their God-ordained mission, because they are involved in xenophobic violence, which is a complete contradiction of their calling to love all people and practise hospitality sacrificially. Indeed, this highlights how some Christians in South Africa are caught up in a tension between nationhood and God's mission.

In the context of this study, the term nationhood refers to a Christian's status or national identity as a South African. In this case, when xenophobic violence erupts, native South African Christians are caught up in a tension on whether to side with fellow natives in unleashing violence on foreigners or uphold their God-ordained call to embrace foreigners. Usually, in this tension, some Christians join hands with non-Christians and participate in violence against immigrants.

The involvement of South African Christians in xenophobic violence highlights the fact that Church members come from

communities that commit xenophobic offences. This entails tension between their sense of nationhood and their responsibility to uphold hospitality to strangers, as the Bible teaches. Because of this proposed dilemma, the theology that was developed in the preceding section is of utmost significance, as it reminds the Church of God's mission of practising hospitality and love to all people, including foreigners. Given the aforementioned, it follows that Christians who side with fellow South Africans who unleash violence on foreigners are definitely violating God's mission, in which God calls them to participate as his agents for change in the world.

At this juncture, one can neither deny nor be surprised that some native South African Christians are involved in acts of xenophobia, because they are affected by the same issues that non-Christian natives also encounter. Naturally, some Christians sometimes have mixed feelings on the appropriate action to take, that is, whether to embrace foreigners, regardless of the prevailing sentiments, or join the public in chasing them away. Some native Christians definitely succumb to the tension and join hands with some non-Christian natives in using violence against foreigners. The tension between upholding their duty and responsibility to their nation and supporting God's mission to others can be validated by Scripture. Like all other Christians across the globe, some South African Christians struggle to exhibit their new sanctified status in Christ.

In Romans 7:14–25, Paul attests that Christians struggled to uphold their call as the ambassadors of God in the world, as they continued living their former lives that did not correspond to their sanctified statuses in Christ. The aforesaid tension can only be resolved at the consummation period, in which Christ will come back to consummate his salvation for Christians (cf. Martin 2014:9; Torrance 2009:247–271). This entails viewing how Christians participate in God's mission within the nature and extent of their faith. This faith views salvation and, consequently, the kingdom of God, to have broken within human history by the saving work of Jesus Christ that constitutes the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension and looks forward to the consummation, in which Christ returns to perfect salvation for his followers (Torrance 2009:174–271). Thus, the kingdom of God is now but not yet; therefore, at this interim period of Christianity, Christians are militantly awaiting the consummation of their salvation. The underlying truth is that at present, Christians continue to struggle to do what is right. However, they should strive to live lives that correspond to their divine calling, and this includes embracing foreign nationals, which is one of the supreme duties and responsibilities of a Christian. Torrance (2009) aptly encapsulates the aforementioned conception well by asserting that:

Redemption tells us that our world is already reconciled and redeemed, so that it is no longer the devil's world, but God's world, Christ's world, but we do not yet see all things under his feet. The Church still lives under the cross, as the church militant, and is not yet in the regnum gloriae, kingdom of glory. But we

are already redeemed for that kingdom and are already sealed for that glorification. ... [But] at the heart of the apostolic eschatology, therefore, lies the emphasis upon the present Lordship of Christ, a lordship asserted by his death and resurrection over all principalities and powers and all dominions. (pp. 174, 429)

However, the aforementioned does not justify the participation of South African Christians in xenophobic violence. Instead, the citation acknowledges the ongoing challenge that native South African Christians face as they pursue godly ways of dealing with people from other nations. In the midst of the proposed tension, there is a need to call on South African Christians to uphold God's mission to the others on a continuous basis, as taught in the Bible because, as Torrance (2009:174) postulates, the future has invaded the present. The aforesaid notion corresponds with Martin's (2014:9) balanced theology of the Church's unconditional hospitality to be fully realised at the Parousia (the second coming of Christ), however, with a serious thrust on the followers of Jesus to practise it at this interim period of Christianity. The discussion on the proposed tension within some South African Christians can be aptly concluded by directly quoting Martin's (2014:9) exhortation to Christians to uphold their divinely ordained duty and responsibility to foreigners as God's followers:

Although God's hospitality reaches its fulfilment in the eschaton, that is not to say that Christians should postpone their efforts to bring full and unconditional hospitality into the present. After all, the Lord's Prayer includes the following petition: 'thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. One valuable function of eschatology is to alter the present behaviour of believers, who should live in light of the end. The goal of Christian hospitality should be to reach out to the Other in anticipation of the eschaton, when God will bring together every people, nation, kindred and tongue. (Rv 7:9)

Conclusion

This article establishes the persistence of xenophobic violence in South Africa. In doing that it acknowledges the complexity of the dilemma that is faced by some native Christians, as they have to choose between siding with foreigners or joining their fellow citizens' xenophobic agenda. As a result, the article engages in a thorough reflection of God's mission to foreigners and the roles of the citizens and the Church, as a community called by God to participate in his mission. The discussion embeds the Church and, consequently Christians, within God's mission in the Old Testament through Israel. This is the mission that Israel failed, but it was ultimately fulfilled by Jesus Christ, the very God himself, who ordained the Church as the new community of God that participates in his mission to foreigners. This means that Christians should sacrificially practice hospitality and love foreigners, who like their fellow native South Africans, are also bearers of the image of God. The article concludes by proposing a tension among South African Christians that was located within the nature and extent of Christian faith, which views Christians as people living in the interim period of Christianity, which

is characterised by tension between effectively carrying out God's mission and the practicalities of being a human being caught in the real-life crisis faced by immigrants.

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