

# The interplay of migrants and host nations for the good of nations: A biblical-theological reflection



## Author:

Christopher Magezi<sup>1</sup> 

## Affiliation:

<sup>1</sup>Department of Missiology,  
Faculty of Theology,  
North-West University,  
Mahikeng, South Africa

## Corresponding author:

Christopher Magezi,  
magezichristopher@gmail.com

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South African citizens usually accuse foreign nationals of stealing their jobs and increasing the crime rate in the country. Such accusations have often resulted in xenophobic violence. Unfortunately, not much effort has been made to depict immigrants in positive light to improve the relations between them and the indigenous population. Thus, this article utilised Joseph's narrative (as described in Genesis in the Old Testament) as a biblical-theological lens in an attempt to mitigate the negative perceptions of migrants among the South African indigenous population. The narrative cast a positive picture on migration by presenting Joseph who, as a foreigner in Egypt, contributed to the development of the economy of Egypt. This article accomplished its aforementioned objective by initially interrogating relevant literature that identified and discussed the various factors that portrayed immigrants negatively, thereby pushing disgruntled South African citizens to engage in xenophobic violence. Thereafter, Joseph's forced migration to Egypt is discussed. This narrative was used as a biblical-theological lens to establish the contributions of foreign nationals in the development of the economies of host nations. While applying the biblical-theological lens of Joseph's narrative to the contemporary situation of migration, this article lamented the dearth of research on the contributions of foreigners to host nations. Furthermore, pertinent sources were used to highlight the correlation between Joseph's narrative and the current migration situation. Having underscored the aforementioned, this article argued that the current positive contributions that immigrants have made to the host nations' economies, should compel the nations to construct migration policies and frameworks that proactively integrate immigrants. Furthermore, formal recognition of any such contributions would encourage peaceful coexistence between the indigenous population and foreign nationals, resulting in a more compassionate and inclusive world. That is, instead of regarding immigrants with resentment and anger, nations can create a world where migration is not only acknowledged but celebrated as a fundamental part of the human experience. In its attempt to encourage peaceful coexistence between the indigenous population and immigrants in South Africa, this article aligned with the principles of this journal, which aim to develop South African society by addressing the ongoing challenge of xenophobia within some of the country's communities.

**Contribution:** The contribution of this article lies in that formal recognition of any positive contributions made by foreign nationals would encourage peaceful coexistence between the indigenous population and foreign nationals, resulting in a more compassionate and inclusive world where immigrants are primarily viewed positively rather than as mere criminals.

**Keywords:** immigrants; the indigenous population; peaceful coexistence; xenophobia; Joseph's forced migration to Egypt; migration policies and frameworks.

## Introduction

A considerable number of scholars, such as Fauvelle-Aymar (2015), Rukema and Khan (2013), Vahed and Desai (2013) and Manik and Singh (2013) concur that many foreign nationals in South Africa are victims of xenophobia in many different ways. Xenophobia is a Greek term that is derived from *xeno* [stranger] and *phobia* [fear] (Pillay 2017:7). Thus, the word translates to 'intense dislike or fear of strangers' (Pillay 2017:7). In line with Pillay (2017), Harris (2002:169) defines xenophobia as the 'dislike ... "hatred or fear" of people from other countries, including 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 as often witnessed in the form of the violence that native South Africans unleash against foreign nationals. This is why Manik and Singh (2013) acknowledge 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 dehumanizing slander and that it has taken a stronghold in South African society. (p. 7)

In agreement with the above assertion, Field (2016:1) notes that the proliferation of foreign nationals in South Africa provokes divergent responses, including xenophobic violence, which has been a recurrent and increasingly worsening phenomenon in South Africa. Misago and Mlilo (2021:2) concur with the aforementioned point and assert 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.' Although xenophobic violence was a feature of the apartheid period, one can argue that it worsened from 1994, when the nation attained democratic rule to the present era<sup>1</sup> (South African History Online 2021: n.p.). For instance, statistical data of xenophobic violence from 2008 to 2021 demonstrates the extent of anti-immigrant sentiments in South Africa (South African History Online 2021: n.p.).

The aforementioned scholars indicate that, for each year between 2008 and 2011, there were 149, 39, 61, and 22 violent incidences respectively. Sixty-nine incidences were reported in 2012, while 64, and 39 cases were witnessed in 2013 and 2014 respectively. In 2015, 62 incidences were reported, while 19 occurred in 2016, and 44 in 2017. In 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 43, 76, 51, and 14 violent incidences were recorded respectively. There are numerous factors that fuel xenophobia in South Africa. These factors include assumptions that foreign nationals steal jobs meant for the indigenous population and commit various crimes, inaccurate reporting on the number of immigrants in the country, anti-immigrant statements by high profile figures, and assumptions that foreign nationals illegally own properties such as the

1. Despite the strong notion of the concept of *Ubuntu* in Africa, this is the case, particularly in South Africa. *Ubuntu* is an African concept that recognises that people are united with one another as encapsulated by the expressions 'a person is a person through other people' or 'I am because we are' (Tutu 1999:34–35). *Ubuntu* is characterised by qualities such as oneness, care, love, kindness, respect and selflessness. Despite some criticism regarding Nelson Mandela's and Desmond Tutu's roles in the South African context, one can argue that the two leaders truly put the concept of *Ubuntu* into practice. *Ubuntu* is pervasive in the African philosophy of humanness, but xenophobia is surprisingly still persistent in South Africa. In my view, the primary victims of the phenomenon are foreign nationals from other African countries, which consequently makes it a case of black-on-black violence. If this is the case, it follows that the African concept of *Ubuntu* has had negligible effect in terms of shaping peaceful coexistence among African people. In a book chapter titled *Ubuntu in flames – Injustice and disillusionment in post-colonial Africa: A practical theology for new 'liminal Ubuntu' and personhood*. Magezi (2017:117) indicates one of the reasons the *ubuntu* concept has not yielded its full potential in maintaining peace and unity among African people. He argues that the practice of *Ubuntu* is generally confined to relatives, friends and people from the same communities. Magezi (2017) notes that: [I]n the traditional Ubuntu framework, individuals feel 'bound and obligated to respond to the needs of people related to them'. They are also inclined to assist people who come from the same geographical area. This is evident in political and employment circles. When a new president is elected, there is generally a tendency to appoint someone from the same geographical area. (p. 117) Xenophobia, tribalism and many other challenges that are gripping South Africa tend to violate the peace and unity of African people that are embedded in the notion of *Ubuntu*.

Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) houses that are exclusively reserved for South Africans (Magezi 2020:54–64).

The above-mentioned factors tend to cast a negative picture of immigrants, thereby causing South African nationals to disregard the positive contributions of the immigrants to the nation. Therefore, it follows that there is need for various stakeholders, such as the churches that are involved in mitigating xenophobic violence, to publicise some of the immigrants' noble contributions to the host country's well-being. In the context of South Africa, such efforts can engender peaceful coexistence between the indigenous population and foreign nationals. Looking at this issue from a theological perspective, one can argue that a biblical-theological reflection on how immigrants contributed to the development of the economies of their host nations should be conducted. The reflection should be complemented by drawing parallels to the contemporary migration scenario. In addition to encouraging peaceful coexistence, as mentioned earlier, the exercise would enable South Africans to clearly see the benefits of hosting immigrants.

The first section of this article briefly discusses the three leading causes of xenophobic violence in South Africa, namely high unemployment rate, the involvement of some foreigners in criminal activities and anti-immigrant utterances by high-ranked officials (Khumalo 2022: n.p.; Magezi 2020:54–64). The second section provides a biblical-theological reflection of how the interplay between migrants and the indigenous population can yield benefits for the host nations. The final section uses the theological lens on immigrants from a biblical-theological reflection to assess if current literature provides an overview of the contributions of foreign nationals to the good of host nations, particularly South Africa to enhance positive perceptions of immigrants and, consequently, encourage harmonious coexistence of the indigenous population and foreign nationals. The article concludes by bringing some overarching findings to the fore.

## The underlying causes of xenophobic violence in South Africa

Magezi (2020:54–64) identifies numerous causes of xenophobic violence in South Africa, which include the following:

- sentiments that foreign nationals commit various crimes and steal jobs meant for the indigenous population
- inaccurate reporting on the number of immigrants in the country
- anti-immigrant utterances by high-profile figures
- foreign nationals are also accused of illegally owning properties, especially (RDP) houses.

Although there are many more causes of xenophobic violence in South Africa than those listed above, this section only discusses the three leading ones, namely high

unemployment rate, the involvement of some foreigners in criminal activities and the anti-immigrant statements by prominent citizens (cf. Khumalo 2022: n.p.; Magezi 2020:54–64).

## High unemployment rate

Numerous scholars (cf. Fauvelle-Aymar 2015; Field 2016:4; Kalitanyi & Visser 2010:376; Magezi 2020:54–62; Schippers 2015:7–8) chiefly attribute xenophobic violence to high unemployment. Consequently, the general belief among South African citizens is that foreigners steal their jobs. To some extent, this accusation can be considered as reasonable, given the current unemployment rate, which reached a peak of 33.56% in 2021 (Macrotrends 2023: n.p.). In essence, the current unemployment rate gives credence to the assumption that foreigners compete with South Africans for jobs and other economic services. 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)

Thus, to eliminate competition for scarce job and service delivery, some citizens unleash violent attacks on immigrants to drive them out of the country (Schippers 2015:8).

Nonetheless, although the current unemployment rate is so high that some of the citizens' anti-immigrant sentiments seem justifiable, Kalitanyi and Visser (2010) argue that South African authorities have never made any meaningful efforts to ease the tensions between the indigenous population and foreigners. This notion is embedded in the fact that many skilled and professional immigrants experience difficulties in securing employment in the country's formal sector and, consequently, they start some small businesses, which employ both the indigenous population and foreign nationals (Fauvelle-Aymar 2015; Kalitanyi & Visser 2010). Kalitanyi and Visser (2010) conducted an empirical study of seven non-governmental organisations to establish the role of immigrant entrepreneurs in job creation. The study concluded that (Kalitanyi & Visser 2010):

A significant number of these migrants have successfully applied their entrepreneurial flair in establishing small enterprises and employing workers, often to the envy of their local counterparts. (p. 376)

It is apparent that Kalitanyi and Visser (2010:376) do not entirely concur with the overriding notions that foreigners take the jobs that were meant for citizens, as the former also create jobs for both fellow immigrants and the indigenous population, thereby contributing to the growth of the South African economy. Further, Fauvelle-Aymar (2015) and Field (2016:4) argue that, due to their precarious situation that is sometimes exacerbated by lack of proper legal documentation, some skilled and professional foreign nationals end up deskilling by taking some unskilled jobs in the formal and informal sectors which are below their qualifications. Such

jobs usually pay salaries that are below the stipulated minimum wage. At this juncture, the general notion is that, because of their dire situation, foreign nationals take up jobs that the indigenous population despise, because of extremely low wages (Magezi 2020:58). Fauvelle-Aymar and Budlender (2014) concur by noting that:

The participation of foreigners in the South African economy is an important political and economic issue within South and southern Africa. In a context of high unemployment rates and insufficient job creation, the access of foreign workers to national labour markets has become a politically sensitive question. (p. 1)

The situation depicted above is further worsened by the fact that employers in the informal sector prefer hiring undocumented immigrants to local citizens, because they can exploit the former with impunity, as the former are usually hesitant to report cases of exploitation to the responsible government authorities (Field 2016:4). In Magezi's (2020) view, this situation:

[O]ften causes South Africans to contemptuously regard foreigners, because, owing to their susceptible conditions, the latter accept very low wages, which riles the native people. (p. 58)

Some disaffected South African inhabitants get so annoyed by the above-mentioned practices that they violently vent their frustrations on foreigners. In this case, it can be argued that both foreign nationals and native people are victims, given that the former are exploited in the workplace, while the latter are excluded from working in the informal sector. Field (2016) encapsulates the foregoing position in the following manner:

Migrants whose legal status is dubious and whose recourse to the law is problematic, even when they have legal status, are often the victims of economic exploitation. Employers in some sectors prefer to employ migrants as they can exploit their situation by paying low wages and avoiding other legal obligations of employers. This is combined with the phenomenon that as a consequence of their precarious situation, migrants often work harder and longer than nationals and are prepared to do jobs that are below their qualifications. This contributes to resentment experienced by unemployed or underemployed nationals. Both migrants and nationals are victims – one group by exploitation and the other by exclusion. (p. 4)

## Blaming the spike in crime on foreigners

The fact that some foreigners in South Africa are involved in criminal activities also sparks xenophobic violence, as some of the indigenous population tend to believe that immigrants are naturally criminals (cf. Bekker 2010:127). Thus, it cannot be entirely denied that foreign nationals get involved in some criminal activities. For instance, in 2016, there was an outcry by the authorities that South African prisons were overpopulated due to the high number of foreign prisoners (Maravanyika 2016:1). Maravanyika (2016:1) indicates that the South African prisons have a capacity to host 120 000 convicts; yet, at the end of 2016, they were holding close to 160 000. Shezi (2017:1) corroborates Maravanyika's (2016) evidence by indicating that, of the 158 111 prisoners in the 243 prison centres, 11 842 were foreign nationals.

Although there can be discrepancies in the reporting of the number of prisoners in South African correctional facilities, the validity of the claim that foreign nationals are indeed involved in criminal activities in South Africa cannot be disputed. However, this does not mean that South Africans themselves do not commit crime, as the above-cited statistics suggest that the number of South African inmates outnumbered that of foreign nationals by a very wide margin.

In 2017, the issue of overpopulation in South African prisons was such a serious concern that the Correctional Services Commissioner argued that the matter (Dispatch Live 2017):

*[Was not a] Department of Correctional Services predicament alone but a crisis that the South African society has to address as it is a symptom of a much bigger, and more complex, problem [which reflects] a larger systemic ill in society, which is that of crime itself. Therefore, crime prevention, in cooperation with communities, remains a priority. (p.1)*

The involvement of foreign nationals in criminal activities was recently substantiated by the Krugersdorp mine dump incident (Khumalo 2022: n.p.).<sup>2</sup> The incident further inflamed xenophobic sentiments, because some of the alleged culprits were undocumented foreign nationals from Lesotho and other parts of Africa (Khumalo 2022: n.p.). Given this, one can maintain that the involvement of foreign nationals in criminal activities is one of the underlying causes of xenophobic attacks, which native South Africans often use to force foreigners to go back to their countries (Khumalo 2022: n.p.).

In responding to the Krugersdorp incident, Khumalo (2012: n.p.) reports that one South African citizen, Manhlo Hadebe, demanded that the government should send all legal and illegal foreign nationals back to their countries, because all of them, regardless of their statuses, were criminals and that even those with legal documents were 'wolves in a sheep skin' (Khumalo 2012: n.p.). Thus, in view of the foregoing discussion, one can concur with Khumalo (2012: n.p.) that, although there are many causes of xenophobic violence in South Africa, it is apparent in the literature that the main cause is the belief by some of the indigenous population that immigrants worsen the country's crime and unemployment rates.

### Anti-foreigner sentiments of authoritative people

Some senior South African government officials often utter reckless anti-immigrant public statements and opinions that fan 'the flames of violence' (United Nations 2022: n.p.). For example, Bongani Mkongi, the then deputy police minister, expressed some anti-immigrant sentiments that had potential to spark xenophobic violence. Mkongi accused foreign

<sup>2</sup>Khumalo reports that in the Krugersdorp incident, eight women were robbed and raped by suspected illegal immigrant artisanal miners. The victims were filming a music video at a mine dump in the area, which is west of Johannesburg. This incident instigated anger among the residents of the nearby communities who helped the police to identify 100 suspects of the gruesome crime (Khumalo 2022: n.p.). Among the suspects were undocumented foreign nationals from Lesotho and other parts of Africa (Khumalo 2022: n.p.). Hitherto, only 14 of the suspects have been brought before the courts (Khumalo 2022: n.p.). One should note that, although the Krugersdorp community did a great job in joining hands with the police to arrest the suspects, it is apparent that the exercise was riddled with some elements of unsolicited vigilantism (United Nations 2022: n.p.).

nationals in Hillbrow of the following things: committing economic sabotage; illegally owning old buildings in Johannesburg, whilst the indigenous population did not have places to stay; and colonising South African land.

Mkongi concluded by calling on South Africans to safeguard their land from foreigners (Lindeque 2017). What can be discerned from the former deputy minister's conclusion is the insinuation that South Africans had ceded Johannesburg city to foreign nationals. Consequently, he theorised that, sometime in future, South Africa would have a foreign national as president (Lindeque 2017).

In 2016, the former mayor of Johannesburg, Herman Mashaba, also made some inflammatory public statements accusing illegal foreigners of committing crimes; therefore, Johannesburg city had to be rid of foreigners (Mavhinga 2019: n.p.). The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) and many other key players rightly condemned Mkongi's and Mashaba's outbursts, because they were meant to incite citizens to violently attack foreigners (cf. Mavhinga 2019: n.p.).

The issue of anti-immigrant statements by high-profile people is arguably problematic, because these very people are the ones who are supposed to craft immigration policies that are in line with the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU) charters, which protect immigrants and guarantee their rights to jobs, food, accommodation, health and many other services while they are in foreign lands (cf. Bekker 2010:125; South African History Online 2021: n.p.). For this reason, Misago and Mlilo (2021:2) and Mavhinga (2019: n.p.) indicate that South Africa lacks immigration policies that can effectively deal with the prevailing immigration situation. At this juncture, one agrees with Mavhinga's assertion (2019: n.p.) that, although the South African authorities are making some efforts to solve the immigration issues, the executive, the legislature and the judiciary should all decisively address the factors that fuel xenophobic violence. The foregoing proposition is buttressed by Misago and Mlilo (2021:2), who stress that, 'without a firm response from politicians and the justice system, these attacks are also a threat to South Africa's constitutional democracy and the rule of law.'

However, both the executive and the judiciary seem to be hesitant to take a firm stance on xenophobic violence, as evidenced by their failure to prevent further violence given that perpetrators are hardly held to account for their xenophobic actions (United Nations 2022: n.p.). For the past 30 years, this hesitancy has engendered institutionalised discrimination in both government policy and the broader society (United Nations 2022: n.p.). To this end, the United Nations (2022) experts bemoan that:

We are gravely concerned that South Africa is not meeting its positive obligations to protect and promote human rights while preventing racial and xenophobic discrimination. At the same time, perpetrators enjoy widespread impunity for xenophobic rhetoric and violence, leading to a lack of accountability for serious human rights violations and the flourishing of racist and xenophobic political platforms. (n.p.)

The South African National Action Plan was developed in 2019 through consultation between the government and civil society. The plan was designed to increase 'public awareness about anti-racism and equality measures, improve access to justice and better protection for victims, and increase anti-discrimination efforts to help achieve greater equality and justice' (Mavhinga 2019: n.p.). Mavhinga (2019: n.p.) unequivocally affirms that South Africa's National Action Plan does not address the issue of accountability for the perpetrators of xenophobic violence or crimes. In substantiation of the aforesaid weakness, Mavhinga (2019) argues that:

[T]he Action Plan fails to address a key challenge fuelling the problem: South Africa's lack of accountability for xenophobic crimes. Virtually no one has been convicted for past outbreaks of xenophobic violence, including the Durban violence of April 2015 that displaced thousands of foreign nationals, and the 2008 attacks on foreigners, which resulted in the deaths of more than 60 people across the country. To effectively combat xenophobia, the government and police need to publicly acknowledge attacks on foreign nationals and their property as xenophobic and take decisive action. This should include ensuring proper police investigations of xenophobic crimes and holding those responsible to account. (n.p.)

Nevertheless, having explained the above-mentioned complex factors that mostly fuel xenophobic violence in South Africa, the underlying question is whether the Bible can provide a biblical-theological lens that challenges native South Africans to view the presence of foreign nationals in their country in a positive way to eliminate negative attitudes towards the latter and the resultant violent attacks that are consistently unleashed on them. In other words, valuing the contributions of migrants from a biblical-theological perspective can help South African citizens and government institutions to move beyond their resentment of immigrants as well as the bitterness that often characterises immigration-related discussions at local, provincial and national levels. The ensuing section provides a biblical-theological reflection of the narrative of Joseph in the Old Testament as a theological lens through which to view immigrants.

The section begins by using the biblical-theological reflection of Joseph's story to establish the positive contributions that immigrants make in host nations. Subsequently, parallels will be drawn between Joseph's forced migration to Egypt and the current situation of migration in an attempt to create a world where migration is not only acknowledged, but celebrated as a fundamental part of human experience that brings good development to the economies of host nations.

## Using Joseph's story as a biblical-theological reflection of migrants' contributions to the good of host nations

There are many Scripture narratives of characters like Ruth<sup>3</sup> and Joseph that demonstrate how the interplay of migrants

3. Ruth was a Moabite woman whom God used to unleash his salvific plans and purposes for the world. Ruth married Boaz and gave birth to Obed (Rt 4:17), the

and host nations is good for those nations. However, due to space constraints, this article uses the story of Joseph as described in the Old Testament to establish the proposed interplay. The insights that will emerge from the biblical-theological reflection on Joseph's story will be used as a theological lens to positively view migration and immigrants in the contemporary world. In other words, using the emergent theological lens could assist the native South Africans and various government institutions to shift from the anger and resentment that often characterise discussions of migration.

### Joseph's contribution to the good of the Egyptian nation

Joseph was one of Jacob's 12 sons. Under his divine grace and providence, God used Joseph, who was a foreigner in Egypt, to preserve Egypt, Israel and many other nations from famine as the proceeding discussion shall demonstrate. Adamo (2015:32–33), in an article titled *The African Joseph and his contribution to Africa and ancient Israel (Gen. 41:41–51)*, argues that, because of his coronation in Genesis 41:41–45, Joseph was given both power and citizenship in Egypt. Adamo's (2015) research yields some interesting insights, as it establishes that, although Joseph was a foreigner, he was granted Egyptian citizenship because of his extraordinary contribution to the economy of the nation.

However, it is important to note that the story of Joseph cannot be understood properly if it is not located within its proper biblical-theological historical perspective. This means that the story of Joseph should be embedded in the Abrahamic calling in Genesis 12:1–3 where God calls Abraham and his descendants to be instruments of salvation to the nations (cf. Grisanti 1998:40). In the wider context of Genesis 37–50, Joseph was hated by his brothers, because their father, Jacob, doted on him as the son of his old age (Gn 37:3–4). The hatred intensified when they interpreted Joseph's subsequent dreams to mean that he was going to rule over them (Gn 37:51).

Consequently, the elder brothers conspired to kill Joseph by throwing him in a pit (Gn 37:20–21). However, God, in his sovereignty and divine providence, used the eldest brother, Reuben, to spare Joseph's life. Reuben advised his brothers not to shed the blood of Joseph, but to throw him in a pit, as his intention was to later rescue the young man and restore him to Jacob, his father<sup>4</sup> (Gn 37:22). The brothers did as Reuben suggested and stripped Joseph before throwing him in a dry pit, but immediately an Ishmaelite caravan passed by (Gn 37:23) and Judah convinced his brothers to sell their

father of Jesse, who sired David. When he became the king of Israel, David entered an eternal covenant with God. In the covenant, David was promised that his throne would endure forever. Matthew 1:1–25 alludes to the relationship between Jesus Christ (the saviour of all people) and David by referring to Jesus as the Davidic son.

4. Given the narrative in Genesis 37:30–36, it is apparent that Reuben and some of the brothers may not have been present when Judah and the other brothers sold Joseph to the Midianite traders. Reuben later came back to the pit in a bid to rescue Joseph, but found him gone. Although Reuben and some of his brothers then disguised Joseph's disappearance to Jacob, their intention to rescue Joseph was good.

hapless younger brother to the traders (Gn 37:25–28). It was these Midianite traders that took Joseph to Egypt, where he later became a successful servant in the house of Potiphar, because God was with him, and he blessed everything that the young man touched (Gn 39:1–6). Nevertheless, later in this narrative, Joseph suffered when he was thrown into prison after Potiphar's wife falsely accused him (Gn 40:15–41:14). However, in his divine providence and sovereignty, God redeemed Joseph from all the afflictions in order to further his redemptive purposes for the world, which he had promised to accomplish through Abraham and his descendants in Genesis 12:1–3.

In his divine providence, God rescued Joseph from prison after satisfactorily interpreting Pharaoh's dream and this culminated in Jacob's descendants and the whole of Egypt being saved from famine (Gn 42). Consequently, Pharaoh installed Joseph as the second highest in charge of Egypt (cf. Gn 41). Thus, Pharaoh's dream was a divine warning about the approaching famine, and he was supposed to prepare for it during the days of plenty (cf. Gn 42). It should be noted that, through Joseph's painful experience, God's promise to use Abraham and his descendants as vehicles of redemption to all nations remained alive (cf. Gn 42–45; Magezi 2019:5–8).

In the wider context of Genesis 45:1–10, Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers who had, hitherto, made a number of trips to buy grain from Egypt. Joseph remarked that his brothers intended to harm him by selling him to the Midianite traders, but God meant it for good as, in his providence, he was sending Joseph to Egypt so that he could later work as God's instrument for the preservation of his people, Israel. Joseph's statement is profoundly theological, as it is embedded in the doctrine of God's sovereignty, foreknowledge and providence. Based on this argument, it is clear that God used Joseph to unleash his salvific plan and purposes for the world as promised in the Abrahamic calling in Genesis 12:1–3 (cf. Gn 45:5, 8, 50:19–21). From the perspective of God's redemptive history in Scripture as well as the moral evil narrative of Joseph, it is clear that God's salvation for the world is timeless and was sovereignly planned to be executed through Abraham and his descendants. Just like Joseph in Genesis 45:5–7 and 50:19–21, who says that the world needs to understand, one wants to agree with Arnold (2009) that:

God's purpose is not thwarted by human sin, but rather advanced by it through his good grace. The hand of God is seen, not only in clearly miraculous interventions and revelations, but also in the working out of divine purposes through human agency, frail and broken, as it is. (p. 361; cf. Cotter 2003:313)

However, the narrative of Joseph does not only serve God's salvific purposes and plans for the world, but it also preserves the Egyptian nation from famine. This has a huge implication on the attempt to establish the interplay of immigrants and host nations. As the article has established before, Joseph landed in Egypt due to forced migration, and he was later appointed the second in charge of Egypt. Even after being appointed a senior administrator in Egypt, Joseph's faith in

God did not waver, as he understood that his wisdom and discernment were gifts from God, and these had taken him that far. One can thus affirm that Joseph selflessly executed his job, because he never took personal advantage of his position by exploiting the underprivileged. Joseph's job touched every practical aspect of Egypt, and he turned the country, which was on the verge of experiencing the worst ever famine, into a breadbasket of many nations.

For the good of Egypt and many other nations, one can argue that, although Joseph was full of divine wisdom, knowledge and discernment, he had to familiarise himself with the nation's legislation, communication skills, and goods transportation routes to and from various districts and provinces. In addition, Joseph sought knowledge on safe and efficient methods of storing goods, economic strategies, and the handling of transactions, either by currency or barter trade (cf. Gn 47:15–17). Finally, in order to be able to effectively appoint suitable people to execute their respective jobs properly, Joseph had to acquire some needful human resource skills. Thus, whilst leadership acumen is one of the critical components that one can learn from Joseph's story, one cannot miss the point that it was both developed and administered in a foreign nation, for the good of Egyptians and people from other nations (Gn 41:57), including the Israelites, through whom God's redemptive plans and promises to the world would materialise.

As repeatedly argued, Joseph became a senior administrator in Egypt by God's grace and providence in order to preserve the nation of Israel from famine, as this would have jeopardised God's salvific promise to the world through Abraham's descendants. It can also be argued that the fulfilment of God's salvific promise to the world through Joseph, a descendant of Abraham in a foreign land (Egypt), would not only benefit Israel, the priestly nation of God. Egypt and all the other nations also survived famine as a result of the agricultural industry of Egypt under the administration of Joseph (cf. Gn 47:15–17). In this case, Israel, a priestly nation of God, is preserved and blessed to advance God's salvific plans to the world. Through the blessing of foreign nations by Joseph, the forced migrant in Egypt, Israel was also blessed. This means that God did not raise a descendant of Abraham in the land of Canaan to preserve the nation of Israel from famine. Instead, in his divine grace and providence, God raised Joseph and enabled him to rise to the second highest position of influence in Egypt to provide famine relief for Israel and the rest of the world. This interplay clearly shows how migrants can contribute to the good of the host nations.

At this juncture, the author is aware that there is a potential misconception that, as part of the oppressive Egyptian society, Joseph enlisted a large number of people in Egypt into slave labour (cf. Gn 47:21). This can cast a negative picture on foreign nationals that get into positions of influence in foreign countries. However, Scripture is clear that during the seven years of plenty, Joseph commanded that grain be stored in various Egyptian cities (Gn. 41:48–49).

During the subsequent seven years of the pervasive famine, the grain was distributed to the people of Egypt and other nations. The grain was initially sold for cash, but when the people's money ran out, Joseph devised a one year barter exchange plan whereby people traded their livestock (horses, sheep, goats, cattle and donkeys) for grain (cf. Gn 47:15–17). Thus, it is important to note that, when they ran out of livestock, people willingly turned themselves into slavery as well as offered the title deeds of their land to Pharaoh (Gn 47:18–21). The only land that Joseph did not buy was that of the priests, as the allotment of food that they received from Pharaoh was enough for them and their families; therefore, they had no need to sell their land (Gn. 47:18–21). This means that, under his administration, Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh besides the land that belonged to the priests, thereby making all ordinary Egyptians Pharaoh's slaves (Gn 47:20–22).

Given this, it is not reasonable to argue that Joseph enslaved the Egyptians. This misconception is often employed to perpetuate negative perceptions of foreign nationals. However, it can be conceded that, when some foreign nationals assume positions of influence in host nations, they may become selfish and ruthless, thereby abusing their positions of power. Notwithstanding that, some native people in positions of influence are also prone to abusing their power as evidenced by vices such as corruption and nepotism. Consequently, it would be naive and myopic to cite Joseph as an example of foreign nationals who abuse their power in host nations, because the Egyptians willingly gave themselves up as Pharaoh's slaves, in order to save themselves from the pervasive famine (cf. Gn 47:18–19).

Having clarified the fact that the Egyptians willingly enslaved themselves to Pharaoh so that they could be saved from the ravaging famine, it can now be argued that God desires to see all foreign nationals making positive contributions in the host countries. This arises from Jeremiah 29:1–23 in which, under divine direction, Prophet Jeremiah writes to the Judeans in exile and orders them to marry and have sons (multiply), build houses, seek the welfare of the city of Babylon and pray for the salvation of the Babylonians, thus, making them missionaries in both words and deeds (Jr 29:5–7; cf. Carroll 1986:209ff.; Ryken 2001:122ff.; Stulman 2005:90ff.; Webb 1996:31ff). In its proper historical theological framework, Jeremiah's letter pays attention to the special relationship between God and Israel in the biblical history of salvation. Thus, one can argue that, although God sent the Judeans into Babylonian captivity as a punishment for their sins (Gowan 1998; Webb 1996:31), the general insights that emerge from God's message to them is that they were supposed to be committed to the welfare of the foreign land in many different ways. This is because the prosperity of the foreign land of Babylon was also theirs.

Given the foregoing, one can robustly advance that Joseph understood God's desire for the interplay between migrants and host nations as stated in Jeremiah 29:1–23. Consequently, Joseph showed unswerving commitment to his job, which

benefitted not only the host nation of Egypt, but also Canaan and other parts of the world. It can be submitted that Joseph's selfless mentality exemplifies what God desires to see in all immigrants working in the various sectors of their host countries, including South Africa and beyond.

The following section focuses on Joseph's story as a theological lens on the contribution of foreign nationals to the building of the host nations' economies. Although it can be acknowledged that migration yield benefits for both the sending and host nations, as Joseph's story demonstrated, the focus of this article is limited to how immigrants contribute to the development of foreign nations, as such enlightenment may enhance peaceful coexistence between immigrants and native people.

## Joseph's narrative as a theological lens on the contribution of immigrants to the building of foreign nations: Towards fostering coexistence between the indigenous population and immigrants

From a biblical-theological perspective, Joseph's narrative clearly reveals that foreign nationals have the potential to positively contribute to the well-being of host nations. Using this as a theological lens, it can be argued that Joseph's story resonates with the current situation of migration in which immigrants are meaningfully impacting the host nations' economies. However, the underlying challenge is that this impact is under-researched as revealed in a joint empirical research study that was conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Centre, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and European Commission (OECD/ILO 2018:3–5). The research was done in close collaboration with the Department of Labour in South Africa, the ILO Country Office for South Africa and many other ILO offices and organisations from various countries (OECD/ILO 2018:5).

Although the above-mentioned empirical research acknowledges the contributions of foreign nationals to the economies of developed countries, it barely focuses on developing economies. This clearly indicates lack of research that underscores the contributions of immigrants to the development of countries such as South Africa, where decision-making processes on immigration issues are not evidence based (OECD/ILO 2018:5). As a result, both migration policies and discussions in many developing countries are characterised by anti-immigrant sentiments, notably anger and resentment (OECD/ILO 2018:5). The OECD/ILO (2018) advances this concern in the following captivating manner:

Developing countries host more than one-third of international migrants in the world. Most immigrants are migrant workers and are employed either formally or more often informally in

their countries of destination. Immigration thus plays a key role in the destination countries' economic development. A number of low- and middle-income countries, however, lack evidence and awareness of how immigrants can contribute to different segments of the economies and very few have developed and implemented appropriate policy frameworks. A large informal economy associated with weak labour migration management capacities and a lack of active labour market policies prevent many destination countries from making the most of immigration. (p. 3)

The OECD/ILO (2018) study empirically examines how foreign nationals make an impact on two key aspects of the economies of developing nations, namely the labour market and economic growth. It should be noted that this article does not attempt to argue that the OECD/ILO (2018) research is not conscious of the negative contributions of immigration on host nations such as raising unemployment and crime rates and other negative aspects as noted above. However, by recognising the current positive contributions made by foreign nationals to the overall economic well-being of developing nations, the OECD/ILO (2018:3) research casts a positive picture on immigration, thereby resulting in evidence-based immigration policies and discussions that encourage harmonious coexistence rather than the ongoing xenophobia, which is sometimes based on unfounded accusations. To this end, the OECD/ILO (2018) argue that:

A more systematic analysis on the economic impact of labour immigration in developing countries will better inform policy makers to formulate policies aiming to make the most of immigration in destination countries. (p. 15)

An analysis of immigrants' contributions to the aforementioned two components of the economies of developing countries resonates with the findings of the OECD/ILO research. Firstly, the OECD/ILO (2018:3) research indicates that there are many foreign nationals in both the informal and formal labour markets of developing nations. In the South African context, the aforementioned findings corroborate Kalitanyi and Visser's (2010:376) empirical research on seven South African based non-governmental organisations. The study established that many foreign nationals in South Africa are entrepreneurs in the informal sector, where they even create jobs for the indigenous population. To use Kalitanyi and Visser's (2010:376) words: 'A significant number of these migrants have successfully applied their entrepreneurial flair in establishing small enterprises and employing workers, often to the envy of their local counterparts.'

In this way, one can concur with Kalitanyi and Visser (2010:376) that it would be naïve to accuse immigrants in South Africa of stealing jobs from the indigenous population without acknowledging that the former also create jobs for locals, thereby contributing to the growth of the South African economy. Nevertheless, the OECD/ILO (2018:15) research argues that in some of the developing countries where the research was conducted, it was shocking to discover that immigrants have higher labour force

participation and employment rates than native born workers. It is unfortunate that the research does not provide the actual figures. However, the finding that there are more immigrants than inhabitants in the labour force of host nations can cast a negative picture on immigration, as it might be misconstrued as contributing to the increment of unemployment rates among the indigenous population. While the aforementioned assertion has some merit, the truth is that many immigrants join the labour force of some developing countries, because they tend to take any job to cater for their basic needs in host nations (cf. Field 2016:4; Kalitanyi & Visser 2010:376).

Consequently, it is highly possible that, due to their precarious circumstances, which are sometimes exacerbated by lack of proper legal documentation, some skilled and professional foreign nationals end up deskilling. This phenomenon entails taking unskilled jobs, which are below one's qualifications, in the formal or informal sector (cf. Field 2016:4; Kalitanyi & Visser 2010:376). Such jobs usually pay salaries that are below the stipulated minimum wage (Field 2016:4). At this juncture, it is apparent that, because of desperation, foreign nationals often take some extremely low paying jobs that the indigenous population despise (Magezi 2020:58). The aforementioned reality corresponds with the below-cited conclusion ((OED/ILO 2018):

Immigrants in most partner countries have higher labour force participation and employment rates than native-born workers. However, the quality of jobs immigrants take remains a concern because they often face a lack of decent work. (p.15)

In corroboration with the foregoing conclusion, it can be argued that the large numbers of immigrants who form part of the developing nations' labour force clearly indicate that foreign nationals are playing a critical role in the growth of the economies of host nations and, in developing nations such as South Africa, this reality is brought to the fore by the following research findings (OECD/ILO 2018):

The estimated contribution of immigrants to gross domestic product (GDP) ranges from about 1% in Ghana to 19% in Cote d'Ivoire, with an average of 7%. The immigrants' contribution to value added exceeds their population share in employment in half of the partner countries. In countries where this is not the case, the differences were small. Overall, immigration is unlikely to depress GDP per capita. The analysis on how immigration affects productivity reveals less clear results. Various research methods were employed across the countries depending on data availability. (p.15)

With the absence of the actual figures on foreign nationals' contributions to the growth of host nations' economies, one can posit that the foregoing depiction by OECD/ILO (2015) is largely correct. Recognising the current positive contributions of foreign nationals to the building of the host countries' economies encourages peaceful coexistence between the indigenous population and foreign nationals, thus laying a foundation for building a more compassionate and inclusive world. In South Africa and similar global contexts, this would mean appreciating the positive

contributions that immigrants make instead of associating them with crime, thus exposing them to xenophobic violence and resentment that often characterise immigration policies (cf. Mishra 2017:247). Consequently, there is need for a multi-pronged approach where governments and international organisations can work together to create a world where migration is acknowledged and celebrated as a fundamental part of human experience that has the potential to make positive contributions to host nations.

Regardless of the negative impact of immigration on host nations, OECD/ILO (2018:3) challenge host nations to construct appropriate migration policies that pay attention to its positive elements. In support of the foregoing assertion, OECD/ILO (2018) acknowledge that, although the impact of immigration is not straightforward, host nations are challenged to:

[M]aximise the positive impact of immigration by adopting coherent policies aimed to better manage and integrate immigrants so that they can legally invest in and contribute to the economy where they work and live, while staying safe and living fulfilling lives. (p. 3)

In concurrence with OECD/ILO (2018:16), this article recommends that nations can harness the economic benefits of hosting immigrants by:

- Adopting both migration policies and frameworks that suit the needs of their labour markets (OECD/ILO 2018:16).
- Considering migration policies that enhance the employability of migrants such as 'extended network of public employment services or training and lifelong learning opportunities' (OECD/ILO 2018:16). Such policies improve immigrants' skills and remove the barriers that hinder them from investing in and creating businesses that create employment for native people (OECD/ILO 2018:16).
- Protecting foreign nationals' rights and fighting against all the forms of discrimination that they face (OECD/ILO 2018:16).
- Investing in the integration of foreign nationals (OECD/ILO 2018:16).
- Finally, developing satisfactory 'public policies and actions can come from better data and evidence' (OECD/ILO 2018:16).

## Conclusion

This article revealed that many foreign nationals in South Africa are victims of xenophobic violence in many different ways. Xenophobic sentiments mainly stem from the assumption that foreigners are taking the jobs that are meant for South Africans. However, while xenophobic violence is worsening, it is surprising that limited effort has been made to paint a positive picture of immigrants in order to foster peaceful coexistence between the indigenous population and foreign nationals in South Africa and beyond. Thus, in an attempt to address the proposed gap, this article looked at the issue from a theological perspective by using Joseph's narrative

as a theological lens that establishes the contributions that migrants make in the development of the economies of foreign nations. The aforesaid narrative is used as a biblical-theological lens on the contemporary situation of migration, as it clearly resonates with current trends in which foreign nationals contribute to the growth of the economies of host nations. At this juncture, this article underscores the reality of limited research to highlight such contributions, thereby hindering host nations from constructing migration policies and frameworks that extract maximum benefits from immigration.

Stated differently, the emerging underlying notion is that focusing on the economic benefits of immigration encourages peaceful coexistence between the indigenous population and foreign nationals. Consequently, host nations will begin to develop and shape a more compassionate and inclusive legislation that views immigrants as partners in holistic national development. That is, acknowledging the inherent dignity of immigrants and valuing their positive contributions can surmount the anger and resentment that often characterise immigration policies and discussions across the globe. In this way, nations can work together to create a world where migration is acknowledged and celebrated as a fundamental part of human experience.

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