


# Foreigners go home! Re-imagining ubuntu and the agency of faith communities in addressing the migration crisis in the City of Tshwane

**Author:**Thinandavha D. Mashau<sup>1</sup> **Affiliation:**<sup>1</sup>Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa**Corresponding author:**

Thinandavha Mashau, mashatd@unisa.ac.za

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Foreigners go home! This is a reverberating chorus at the heart of the migration crisis everywhere in the world. This call manifests itself in the recurring xenophobic or Afrophobic attacks directed at foreign nationals in South Africa. This article reflects on the most recent xenophobic attacks directed at foreign nationals during the anti-immigration march, held on 24 February 2017, in the City of Tshwane (South Africa). This article states that calls for foreigners to go home and the xenophobic or Afrophobic violent attacks that accompanied them were a direct attack on ubuntu. It was an attack that rendered ubuntu 'homeless' and reflected the direct opposite of what an African community generally stands for. It was also an attack directed towards the migrant God; hence, the article proposes a re-imagination of the theology of ubuntu and the agency of faith communities as an antidote to the recurring calls for foreigners to go home.

**Keywords:** Foreigners; Home; Xenophobia; Afrophobia; Migration; Ubuntu; Ubuntu; Agency; Faith communities.

## Introduction

Foreigners go home! This phrase constitutes a hostile response that migrants face globally – a response which is at the heart of a growing migration crisis today. It points to the challenge of the growing numbers of migrants in the world, on the one hand (Castles 2000:273), and a growing discomfort within host nations on the other hand. There seems to be a concerted global campaign to drive migrants back to their native countries. The drive seems to be happening everywhere and is gaining momentum by the day. This is evident in the change in the migration policies in the United States since the dawn of the Donald Trump era and his call for foreigners to be deported back to their native countries and his threat to build a wall to keep the Mexicans away from America (Hooghe & Dassonneville 2018). It is equally evident in the migration crisis in Britain (Harries 2016:34), Germany and the rest of Europe (Holmes & Castaneda 2016).

Migration in South Africa is on the rise (Gordon 2019:270), and this country has managed to attract migrants from other parts of Africa, Asia, Europe, Australia and America (Moyo & Nshimbi 2017). Migrants in South Africa, and particularly those coming from other African countries, are not immune to the call for them to go home. The most disturbing issue, in South Africa, is however that calls for foreigners to go home have been accompanied by violence in some instances (see Kerr, Durrheim & Dixon 2019; Solomon 2019). Violent attacks against foreign nationals include, among others, the looting and destruction of foreign-owned homes, properties and businesses. In some instances, they include brutal killings and the dislocation of foreign nationals rendering them homeless. The recurring nature of these xenophobic or Afrophobic and violent attacks in South Africa is well-documented (see Akinola 2018; Crush 2001; Dube 2019; Morris 2008; Neocosmos 2008). Chiumbu and Moyo (2018) capture this reality as follows:

In recent years, South Africa has experienced bouts of violent attacks against mainly black African foreign nationals in what has generally come to be described as xenophobic attacks. Despite numerous and sporadic incidents of this nature over the past decade, the May 2008, April 2015 and February/March 2017 attacks on foreign Africans living in the country stand out in terms of both scale and visibility of graphic images of violence on domestic and international media. (p. 136)

The recurring xenophobic attacks in South Africa have left many, including senior government officials and politicians, very alarmed and perplexed (Crush 2008:1). It has also led to a growing

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fear among foreign nationals (Neocosmos 2010:141). According to Breed and Semenya (2015:5), 'xenophobia is driven by fear of the other, fear that turns into hatred and wants to destroy the other'.

In the past, interventions were made to bring xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals to a halt. However, the serious backlash against foreign nationals in the City of Tshwane (South Africa), in the form of the anti-immigrant march on 25 February 2017 (a case that has not received significant attention in academia), is a clear indication that the demon of xenophobia is continuing to raise its ugly head and remains very much a part of our public discourse. This article seeks not only to interrogate the recurring nature of calls for foreign nationals to go home and the violence that accompanies it but also the role that faith communities should play as agents of transformation in eradicating this scourge or to at least manage to minimise the recurrence thereof. After having conducted a literature review on the issue and in re-imagining the theology of ubuntu (ubuntu) within the current discourse around the migration crisis facing foreign nationals in South Africa, this article proposes that faith communities as agents of transformation should actively assist locals and foreign nationals to co-exist and work together for the good of all. The ubuntu values, if applied in the faith praxis of faith communities, should serve as an antidote to the recurring backlash against foreign nationals in the City of Tshwane, a proposal that could possibly be replicated elsewhere in the global context.

## Foreigners go home! A South African reality

### The (im)migration crisis in South Africa

The number of migrants in South Africa has been rising steadily, especially in cities like Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and Tshwane (Naicker 2016). South Africa is increasingly becoming one of the favourite destinations of foreign nationals (Buffel 2013:244), particularly those from the African continent, for a few notable reasons, namely: firstly, South African leaders, liberation politicians in particular, feel deeply indebted to return the favour they had received in exile, specifically those who sought refuge in countries like Mozambique, Angola and Zambia. Secondly, unlike other countries with refugee camps, refugees in South Africa are not secluded from the rest of the population. Thirdly, South Africa remains one of the developing economies, which is viable, looking very much like a promised land to many African refugees (see Matunhu 2011:96). Fourthly, once granted refugee status in South Africa, foreign nationals enjoy the same rights as locals on many fronts – they have the right to work, the right to study, the right to belong and get access to property ownership and the right to own a business. It is important to also note, in the fifth place, that migrants from other countries are pushed to come to countries like South Africa because of civil wars, political intolerance and some refugees come for economic reasons (O'Malley 2018:2; cf. Resane 2019:1). They come to

South Africa with the hope of getting asylum. The call for foreigners to go home is discussed against this background.

In her analysis of the recurring xenophobic violence in South Africa, and with a special focus on the May 2008–2011 events, Hayem (2013:81) highlights the paradox between South Africa's welcoming official policy towards international refugees and asylum seekers and the violent nature of xenophobic attacks as experienced by foreign nationals. However, those being chased away and at the receiving end of violent attacks are mostly African foreign nationals; hence, the discussion below on the choice and use of concepts to define this phenomenon.

### Xenophobia or Afrophobia?

The term 'xenophobia' is generally used by various scholars to refer to the fear of and hatred directed at foreigners (Breed & Semenya 2015; Nel & Makofane 2014). Xenophobia is a kind of fear and hatred for a foreigner that may result in violence and loss of belongings and life. Reflecting on the South African xenophobic experience, Tshaka (2010) vehemently rejected the use of the term 'xenophobia' and preferred 'Afrophobia' instead. Tshaka (2010) stated the following:

It is incorrect to refer to the current antagonism towards other African nationals as xenophobia, because hatred in this instance is not necessarily aimed at the foreigner, irrespective of his/her race. If we consider the etymology of the notion of foreigner and then link it with the current situation in South Africa, it soon becomes clear that we have a specific foreigner in mind in the South African scenario. (p. 128)

From the findings of his analysis, it becomes clear that the foreign nationals who are the target of violent attacks are mainly other Africans from north of the Limpopo River (Tshaka 2010:128). Tshaka's views prompted a number of responses from researchers. While agreeing with Tshaka's use of the term 'Afrophobia', Lamola (2018:72–73) sees this phenomenon as a sickness of mind that is rooted in the colonial past and pervasive discomfort of some South Africans with *Africanness*. Botha (2013) partially agrees with Tshaka on the use of the term 'Afrophobia', with particular reference to black on black violence, but points out its limitations as follows:

Much as Tshaka's speculation on whether this is not a result of an underlying self-hatred, the term Afrophobia obscures the fact that perpetrators as well as victims are Africans. A further issue is that the notion can quite easily conceal the whole complex of underlying issues, for example, the political and socio-economic mechanisms of which both perpetrators and victims bear the brunt. (p. 106)

Other scholars who responded to Tshaka's use of Afrophobia are Nel and Makofane (2014:234–235). While defining the entire discourse as a battle for true African identity, they are of the view that both words, xenophobia and Afrophobia, can be used interchangeably, seeing that they are closely related to each other. For the purposes of this article, it is important to note that the South African experience of xenophobia is

best defined as Afrophobia and an attack on Africanness and the African philosophy of life, ubuntu.

### Afrophobia as an assault on ubuntu

It is my presupposition in this article that when a call is made for foreigners to go home, be it verbal or in the form of violent attacks, an assault is made on the African philosophy of life, ubuntu. Accordingly:

[U]buntu as a way of life finds meaning in the expression which recurs across the various African languages in Southern Africa: *umntu ngumntu ngabany' abantu* (Xhosa)/*motho ke motho ka batho ba babang* (Sotho) (a person is a person through other persons). (Mnyaka & Motlhabi 2005:218, cf. LenkaBula 2008:378)

In Tshivenda, which is my mother tongue, we say: *muthu ndi muthu nga vhathu* (Mashau & Kgatle 2019:4). At the heart of this African philosophy of life is 'humanness' (*vhuthu* in Tshivenda) and the need to be human towards others. It therefore becomes clear that human solidarity is a lived African experience that keeps the community together.

Ubuntu, therefore, considers every member of the community as equally important and therefore a person is defined within the collective or the communal whole. Ubuntu becomes real in the well-being of Africa when everyone is embraced by all, including aliens or strangers or sojourners. Everyone belongs to the community in the African context. Mnyaka and Motlhabi (2005) assert that:

[E]veryone belongs and there is no one who does not belong. The sense of belonging is necessary, important and central in *ubuntu*. One belongs or finds community through being a neighbour, a friend, a relative, a clansman, a member of a tribe or a nation, and so on. (p. 221)

This African sense of a community renders the exclusion of foreign nationals in any given African context. Africans have always welcomed foreigners with open arms and made them feel at home; hence, it is correctly concluded that: '[o]ne who does not belong or has not been made part of the community is considered to be a danger' (Mnyaka & Motlhabi 2005:222). This connectedness of the African people, as an expression of *ubuntu* among different ethnic groups, is captured by Resane (2017) as follows:

This corporate connectedness is expressed in different African languages, such as in Kiswahili (*wa kwetu*), Setswana (*mogaetsho*), and isiZulu (*umfowethu* or *umkhaya*). In essence, this concept means 'one who is from my home' or 'one from my family, clan, or tribe'. (p. 103)

This connectedness has for centuries been part of African history. Mnyaka and Motlhabi (2005) assert that:

Attitudes of Africans towards strangers or foreigners in previous epochs were characterized by the presence of tolerance and benevolence. Strangers were made to feel welcome and to move with ease within the community. They were referred to as visitors, guests (*iindwendwe*) or aliens, and/or sojourners (*abahambi*). (p. 228)

Visitors are valued members of African communities and this is expressed in the Tshivenda phrase that says, *ri la nga mueni* (we feast because of a visitor). The presence of a visitor is something that has always been celebrated in the African context, and sharing a meal with strangers has always been a symbol of unity and a way to affirm and celebrate humanness (*vhuthu*); hence, an attack on foreign nationals is a direct attack on ubuntu and a failure to show *vhuthu* (humanness). Breed and Semanya (2015) capture this as follows:

The traditional African cultural heritage that promotes harmony and a sense of pride is deteriorating in African communities. The efficacy of *ubuntu* is undermined by the growing xenophobic phenomenon in South Africa. (p. 5)

Speaking in the context of homelessness in the City of Tshwane, something that speaks of the attack directed at ubuntu as well, De Beer (2015:1) concluded that ubuntu becomes homeless when fellow human beings are rendered homeless and displaced. This homelessness can be a result of xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals, which have led to their dislocation or displacement or any other form of marginalisation.

It is clear from the above discussion that calls for foreigners to go home and the accompanying violent xenophobic attacks not only render ubuntu homeless but also are a direct opposite of what an African community stands for. This is captured by Cilliers (2008) as follows:

*Xenophobia is the exact opposite of Ubuntu; it is Ubuntu reversed in the most ghastly form thinkable. In Ubuntu we face one another; in Xenophobia we turn our faces from one another. But more than this: in Xenophobia the fear of the other becomes hatred for the other, and in the end, the ravaging of the other. Xenophobia cries out against the spirit of Ubuntu. (p. 9)*

### Afrophobia as an attack on the migrant and the refugee God

Afrophobia is not only an assault on ubuntu as mentioned above but also a direct attack on the image of God – specifically the image of God carried by those migrants who suffer as a result of this phenomenon. In mediating the hermeneutic of 'stranger', in the effort to develop a theological perspective on migrants and migration, Botha (2013) projects God as a migrant and refugee:

In many different senses the God of the Bible is a migrant God. This is first and foremost borne out in his migration from non-accessible light to creation. In Christ Jesus He became incarnated, pitching his tent in the neighbourhood. (p. 110)

In 'pitching his tent in the neighbourhood', God is said to be the migrant God who takes the side of the migrant poor, needy, vulnerable and marginalised. These migrants are a mirror of God's image and therefore those who attack, abuse and violate them are directly attacking the migrant God. Sharing the same conviction, Phan (2016) asserts:

Thus, when the migrant is embraced, protected, and loved, the *Deus Migrator* [God the Migrant] is embraced, protected, and loved. By the same token, when the migrant as *imago Dei migratoris*

is rejected, marginalized, declared 'illegal', imprisoned, tortured, or killed, it is the original of that image, the *Deus migrator*, who is subjected to the same inhumane and sinful treatment. (p. 861)

This understanding of God should prompt us to seek a theology of migration, which is relevant in resolving the current Afrophobic calls for foreigners to go home in the South African context, and particularly in the City of Tshwane where this research is located.

### Historical roots of Afrophobic attacks

In the case of South Africa, the recurring backlashes against foreign nationals are rooted in the colonial and apartheid past. The past saw native South Africans being treated as aliens in their own country and pushed out to the reserves known as the Bantustans. Colonial and apartheid legislation such as the *Natives (Urban Areas) Act No 21 of 1923*, the *Class Areas Bill of 1925*, the *Group Areas Act of 1950*, the *Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act of 1951* and the *Bantu Urban Areas Act of 1954* were used to restrict the movement of black Africans in whites-only urban contexts. This kind of treatment of natives and the accompanying legislation were all created to protect and enhance the interests of the white constituency (Hindson, Byerley & Morris 1994:323). In his research, De Beer (2016) correctly observed that:

... [I]n South Africa the apartheid city took socio-spatial control to its most extreme form in legislated segregation, restricting the movement and access of black South Africans to urban areas, thereby denying them citizenship in their own country. (p. 4)

The above-mentioned spaces, however, did not just become delineated spaces of exclusion but also spaces of violence and abuse. They provided the apartheid government with a fertile ground for brutal attacks against those perceived to have intruded into whites-only spaces (De Beer 2016):

Black South Africans were not able to move freely in neighbourhoods assigned to white people only, having to carry a pass, without which they risked arrest after a certain hour of the day. (p. 4)

Those who were allowed access to whites-only urban spaces for work purposes were compelled to live on the outskirts of urban spaces. This colonial and apartheid culture of human dislocation, human displacement and violent attacks against those who were considered to be aliens in reserved areas somehow gave birth to a violent culture. The democratic South Africa is now witnessing a movement from the *swart gevaar* to the *xenogenesis* reality where cross-border migrants become the recipient of social exclusion and violence (Resane 2019:2). This culture of violence includes, among others, gender-based violence and xenophobic hostility towards foreign nationals. Based on this historical fact, Klotz (2016:180) concluded: '[i]n South Africa, the racist roots of the connection between nationality and territory is especially significant for understanding anti-foreigner violence'.

### Recurring nature of Afrophobic attacks

While South Africa attracts economic migrants from foreign nations, South Africans show discomfort with the presence of foreigners in their midst. This has sometimes escalated into calls for foreigners to go home, which had at times become abusive, dangerous and violent. Some of the words used include the following: "We do not want foreigners here. They must go back to their country"; "*Phuma amakwerekwere, phuma!*"; "Foreigners must go away!" and "Go back to Zimbabwe!" (Hayem 2013:81). In their article, "Please GO HOME and BUILD Africa": Criminalising Immigrants in South Africa', Alfaro-Velcamp and Shaw (2016:984–985) discuss a WhatsApp message with hostile content that was circulated in April 2015. Foreign nationals are often accused of entering the country without the necessary documents. They include 'drug dealers, traffickers of children, facilitators or exploiters of an informal economy and thieves stealing opportunities from South Africans' (Alfaro-Velcamp & Shaw 2016:984–985). Nigerians, in particular, have been stereotyped as 'drugs-pushers' in South Africa and other countries (Akinola 2018:60).

In 2015, the Zulu monarch, King Zwelithini, also called on foreigners to go home. While addressing the Pongola community, he requested foreign nationals to go back to their respective countries. King Zwelithini found the scramble for resources among locals and foreigners unacceptable and deemed the deportation of foreigners as a solution. This incident was recorded by Ndou and published in *The Citizen* on 23 March 2015. This pronouncement by the Zulu monarch was followed by a series of violent attacks directed at foreign nationals that claimed the lives of five people and injured hundreds (Akinola 2018:66).

Another South African leader who has been consistent in calling on foreigners to go home is the Executive Mayor of the City of Johannesburg, Herman Mashaba. In a newspaper article, 'All illegal foreigners, leave my city – Herman Mashaba', Mashego and Malefane (2016) note that Mashaba is of the view that foreign nationals are not only criminals but also holding South Africa to ransom. According to Mashaba, South Africans are scrambling for less resources because of foreign nationals – resources which include, among others, jobs and houses. Mashaba's views are judged by many to be not only discriminatory but also fuelling violence against foreign nationals (see Akinola 2018:69).

These are just a couple of examples of the ongoing or recurring calls for foreigners to go home, but they help set the tone for our reflection on the City of Tshwane.

### Foreigners go home! Afrophobic attacks in the City of Tshwane

The City of Tshwane witnessed an anti-immigration march on 24 February 2017. This march was organised by concerned residents and therefore went down in history as a civic movement event, coming from the outskirts of the City of

Tshwane, Mamelodi and Atteridgeville. What started off as a peaceful call on all foreigners to register themselves officially or to go home became violent with foreign nationals arming themselves and fighting back in self-protection. According to Akinola (2018):

[C]ommunity members in Pretoria West ransacked and burnt shops and homes belonging mainly to Somalis and Nigerians, while shops belonging to other nationals from Pakistan, China and Indian were looted and burnt. (p. 66)

It is clear from the above quotation that in South Africa the face of xenophobia is Afrophobic, even though it included Asian nationals in some instances. It seeks to promote black on black violence. In his research, Pillay (2017) made a similar observation:

The xenophobic crisis in South Africa was not between white and black people but between black South Africans and mainly foreigners from Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Mozambique, including people from Pakistan, India, et cetera. (p. 8)

Taken at face value, the reasons advanced for this kind of backlash have to do with accusations that foreign nationals are peddling drugs and destroying the lives of children. Foreign nationals are said to be running illegal brothels and subjecting girls to another form of human trafficking and enslavement. In reality, the presence of foreign nationals in South African cities like Tshwane brought about issues of serious economic contestation where locals often feel that foreigners have taken away their jobs. This contestation constitutes a major scramble for resources and could therefore be classified as 'the politics of the stomach and survival'.

The politics of exclusion has also grown out of the existing contestation. Local businesses, and in particular those in the entertainment and catering industry, often prefer to employ foreign nationals, with some claiming that local people are lazy and too demanding when it comes to wages. This has led Pillay (2017) to conclude:

Xenophobia is strengthened when immigrant workers settle for lower wages and poorer working conditions than what the majority population is prepared to accept. The free-ride on the welfare state also aggravates xenophobic reactions. (p. 8)

In the end, the discourse around the notion of 'foreigners go home', can be classified as a human rights issue (Vorster 2002:308). The struggle against xenophobia is therefore not just a struggle for citizenship and belonging but one of social justice where foreigners are fighting for their dignity and survival – socially and economically. This is captured emphatically by Desai (2008):

Migrancy should be a right, as difficult as that may seem to be managed economically and socially. It is part of a struggle for survival. The challenge to commodification of basic services, evictions and proper housing has thrown up radical subjectivities and often pushed back the threat to bare life posed by the neo-liberal transition. (p. 65)

There is a need therefore to protect the lives of foreign nationals and learn to co-exist with them in the spirit of ubuntu.

## Re-imagining ubuntu and the agency of faith communities

### Ubuntu and ubuntuology

While the challenges of migration and the calls for foreigners to go home are there for everyone to see, the solutions needed are multidimensional and require a multidisciplinary approach from different stakeholders, including locals, foreign nationals, government (all departments that have a bearing on migration issues), faith communities and other civic formations. Speaking in the context of the role of the church in addressing racism and xenophobia, Pillay (2017:10) concluded, 'The Church must engage the issue of racism and xenophobia from a biblical and theological perspective'.

This article seeks to propose the theology of ubuntu (ubuntuology) as one of those theologies that can make a serious contribution to lasting solutions in dealing with the backlash against foreign nationals in South Africa and the world too. It is the author's submission, therefore, that a theology of ubuntu, if well-imagined, constructed and articulated, can provide a lasting solution to the recurring backlash against foreign nationals. Pillay (2017) concurs:

The African concept of ubuntu can teach us a lot about human community and communal rights and care for one another – a concept that can help us overcome the challenges of racism and xenophobia. (p. 14)

Ubuntuology has as its basis the African philosophy of life, ubuntu, as outlined above. Central to the concept of ubuntu, as already highlighted, is finding and defining your identity and being in relation with other people. It speaks of our humanness in relation to others. The virtues that define our humanness, such as love, respect, compassion, care and so on, are intertwined to a point that the lived experience of African people can only be viewed holistically. Speaking in the context of using the concept of 'ubuntu' in the Sesotho language and context, LenkaBula (2008:380) shares the same sentiments: '[m]ost scholars rightly assert that *botho* conveys the values of respect, humane relationships, and compassion and/or caring for other human beings'.

Tapping into this African philosophy of life, with particular reference to the Truth and Reconciliation process in South Africa, former Archbishop Desmond Tutu developed the theology of ubuntu (ubuntuology). Meiring (2015:2) rightly noted that in Tutu's ubuntu theology, the focus is on '... reconciliation, on the joining of apparent opposites and the restoration of the humanity and dignity of the victims of violence, but also that of the perpetrators of violence'. The restoration of human dignity and justice are integral elements of ubuntu theology, as envisioned by Desmond Tutu.

There is, according to Dreyer (2015:193), a natural synergy between theology and ubuntu. Ubuntu as a theological concept resonates with the biblical concept of 'koinonia' (fellowship) of believers and the 'communion of the saints' as espoused also in reformed confessions of faith. Mashau and

Kgatle (2019:5) conclude that '[a]s a theological concept, Ubuntu holds humanity accountable to one another, whilst honouring the biblical command to love one's neighbour as oneself (Lv 19:18; Mk 12:31; Mt 19:22-39)'. In their analysis, Mashau and Kgatle (2019:6-7) concluded that ubuntu is like a coat of many colours, an array of theologies that are knitted together to include the following:

- theology of life
- theology of care
- theology of solidarity
- theology of economic justice
- theology of hope and accompaniment.

This array of theologies, when knitted together, is able to bring God into the equation in terms of defining human relations within God's creative parameters and scope of living. If well applied in the context of xenophobia, human dislocation and displacement, ubuntu becomes a coat that brings the much needed warmth to foreign nationals under siege. Ubuntu, therefore, seems to be the theology that the world needs to resolve the current hostility towards migration and the call for foreigners to go home. It is a theology that is able to provide space for the following:

- To see humanity as one – created in the image of God and also having a common ancestry. 'The Church has to put time and effort in building the *human community*' (Pillay 2017:12). This community should be made up of all human beings across any human divide, and therefore include foreign nationals as well. Pillay (2017:13) opines that: '[b]uilding the human community requires dealing with all those realities that continue to propagate racism, tribalism, ethnocentrism and xenophobia'.
- To see the world as a common home that should be shared by all and for their well-being.
- To see the inhabited world with all the necessary ingredients for co-existence, co-operation, co-ownership and co-sharing.
- To see the world as a conducive environment for tolerance, peace and support for each other for a common good. Ubuntu becomes more visible when human beings stand in solidarity during difficult times. Mnyaka and Motlhabi (2005) share the same view:

People are family. They are expected to be in solidarity with one another especially during the hour of need. It is during times such as these that the need for *ubuntu* becomes more acute. (pp. 223–224)

### Ubuntu and the agency of faith communities

In order to address the current hostile climate surrounding the call for foreigners to go home, faith communities, among other agencies, have a special role to play. Renkin (2017:8) agrees that: '[c]hurches continue to play an important role in the social fabric of South Africa, and therefore they have a responsibility to respond to migration'. Reflecting on the context of 'faith communities, social exclusion, homelessness

and disability in the City of Tshwane', Mashau and Mangoedi (2015) concluded:

The church should serve as an agent of transformation, seeking to provide relief where it is needed but also empowering those in the margins to move to the mainstream of society. (p. 8)

This call and responsibility is also relevant in the context of human displacement and dislocation as a result of xenophobia. Speaking in the context of the marginalisation of people and xenophobia directed at foreign nationals in Johannesburg, Hankela (2014:9) concluded that faith communities are better placed to be at the centre of a liberating praxis that seeks to provide tangible and lasting solutions to the challenges facing us.

Faith communities can play the following roles, among others:

- They can become a home for the homeless and the persecuted (including foreign nationals under siege) (see Mashau & Mangoedi 2015:8). In this way, faith communities become active participants in making ubuntu 'to be at home' – this happens whenever foreign nationals are made to be at home wherever they are. Speaking in the context of the role of the church in protecting the rights of those marginalised in society, including foreign nationals, Ngcobo (2014:131) concluded: '[t]he Church should seek to emphasise that human dignity is encountered as we meet and interact with other people'. This should be done irrespective of where they come from. It is out of our respect for God and God's image in others that we should respect the rights of all migrants. Phan (2016) says:
 

Thus, the migrant is the *imago Dei*, created in the image and likeness of God as any other human being equally is, and this [is] the ontological ground of human rights. (p. 861)
- It can become a voice for the voiceless through advocacy. Faith communities have to embrace 'a praxis that engages exclusive and commodified spaces, economic exclusion mechanisms of social control that push out the poor, xenophobia, racism, and classism' (De Beer 2008:194). Faith communities should start asking critical questions to host nations with an eye to remind them of their humanness and belonging of all to the same human community. It is dehumanising to treat foreign nationals as different others while we should be sharing our common human heritage and values enshrined in ubuntu as an African way of life. This kind of advocacy speaks of the prophetic voice of faith institutions like the church. This role should include educating its own members to be drivers of ubuntu values in their communities. 'As communities of faith, we need to embrace and nurture a vision for the common good' (De Beer 2008:194).
- Faith communities should serve as healing agencies (Mashau & Mangoedi 2015:8). Speaking in the context of migration and the need to break stereotypes about foreign migrants in South Africa, Renkin (2017:8) agrees that: '[c]hurches play an important role to partake in the creation of a healthy and vibrant society that is seeking God's shalom for the city'.

- Faith communities should serve as agents of economic justice for foreign nationals. This will go a long way in stopping the looting and burning of businesses owned by foreign nationals. Economic justice encourages the spirit of shared space and shared resources as we strive to live together in celebrating our common humanity. In this regard, Pillay (2017:14) says, '[t]he Church must continue in the struggle for justice in South Africa, and in particular economic justice'.

## Conclusion

The reality is that contestation, resentment and xenophobic violent encounters against foreign nationals continue to cloud our social discourse around migration, inclusivity and the politics of exclusion in the global arena. If left unattended, the politics of contestation, exclusion and marginalisation will continue to divide the fragile unity of humanity in the global context. Africa's contribution to the deepening crisis of migration amidst calls for foreign nationals to go home, as proposed in this article, is the theology of ubuntu. This theology seeks to tap into the African philosophy of life and promote social cohesion by people reminding each other of the need for co-existence, co-operation, co-ownership and co-sharing. The interdependence of humanity as a collective can be achieved if people, anywhere in the world, can embrace the values of ubuntu. It is therefore imperative for faith communities to tap into the resourcefulness of ubuntu and ubuntu in addressing issues of migration and homelessness that come with continued xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals in South Africa.

Faith communities can become drivers of this most important need of humanity to share God's world with all and be at home wherever we find ourselves. If we fail in this calling, we can just as well issue an ultimatum to all of humanity living in our time: #ForeignersGoHome! We will then all remain foreigners or aliens in God's world, echoing the words of this old song by Jim Reeves:

This world is not my home  
I'm just a passing through  
My treasures are laid up  
Somewhere beyond the blue.

The angels beckon me  
from heaven's open door  
And I can't feel at home  
in this world anymore.

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### Author's contributions

T.D.M. is the sole author of this research article.

## Ethical considerations

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

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## Data availability statement

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

## Disclaimer

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

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