Missio-pastoral and theological implications for migration and increased demagoguing in South Africa

A call to prophetic and transformative engagement with migrants

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Abstract

This article highlights mission challenges presented by the intensified movement of people in South Africa with a view to identify opportunities for Christian mission and challenge demagoguing in the context of growing intolerance. Migration is identified as an opportunity for mission and discussed as one of the untapped resources not just for mission, but also for economic development and social transformation. Compassion fatigue and complex challenges presented by COVID-19 have eroded traditional roles that ensured hospitality to strangers and despite an increase in scholarly interest in human mobility, policy makers, politicians and economists have not taken migration flows within the South African context seriously. This has serious missional implications and requires restoration of *ubuntu* as a biblical imperative.

Key words: migration, Christian mission, hospitality, transformation, ubuntu, South Africa

1. Introduction

The presence of migrants in South Africa has constantly been in the spotlight as the country is reeling under the challenges of growing intolerance in the face of increased levels of poverty, unemployment and economic meltdown exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 lockdown measures negatively impacted global economies, and South Africa has witnessed a surge in violence directed at foreign migrants, particularly in the transport sector where trucks have been burnt and roads blockaded as local unions demand that foreigners leave those jobs for locals.[2] This article identifies migration as an opportunity for Christian mission and

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2   For more details see: Isilow, H. 2020. South African Target Foreign Truck drivers over jobs. Available at https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/south-africans-target-foreign-truck-drivers-over-jobs/2056232 (Accessed 02/02/2022).

highlights that compassion fatigue has eroded traditional roles that ensured hospitality to strangers and laments how policy makers and economists have not taken migration flows within South Africa seriously. The study also argues that the isolation of the role played by religious communities in the migration processes, compounded by waning compassion, has serious economic and missional implications.

The study aims to answer the research question: How can local Churches draw on untapped resources of migration as social capital to promote peace and economic stability in South Africa? A qualitative literature review is employed to analyse the South African context and identify migration opportunities for Christian mission through transformative engagement with migrants in ways that appreciate their agency and economic contribution. The study concludes by engaging the concept of *ubuntu* from a biblical perspective to posit that the agency of foreign migrants should be at the centre of missional activities in communities where locals are intolerant towards migrants

2. Background and statement of the problem

Since the fall of apartheid, South Africa has received more migrants and refugees seeking safety from poverty, wars and persecution. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM)[3] indicates that more than 200 million people are migrating around the world, and the World Migration Report (2010) estimated the number of international migrants[4] in Africa in 2010 to be 19 million,[5] while 10% of all African migrants were hosted by South Africa (WMR, 2010). According to a recent report by the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMM) of the Danish Refugee Council (2017), most migrants heading for South Africa originate from the Horn of Africa, particularly Ethiopia and Somalia, with significant numbers also leaving from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and, to a lesser degree, from West Africa. While the exact numbers of African migrants living in South Africa remains a contentious issue, statistics from the South African Department of Home Affairs (DHA) (2015) ranked the top 15 sending countries as follows: Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Nigeria, DRC, Malawi, Somalia, Ghana, Burundi, Mozambique, Uganda, Congo-Brazzaville, Cameroon, Tanzania, Lesotho, and Senegal (DHA, 2015). Political and economic instability in Zimbabwe, Namibia and Swaziland have been cited as the main reason for migration in southern Africa, while religious tensions, wars

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[3]   More statistics on global movement can be accessed from the website of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) at: http//www.iom.int.

[4]   In this article the terms 'migrant' and to a very limited extent 'foreigner' (where cited in quotes) will be used to refer to people from other countries, who reside in South Africa. This is because in South African legislation the distinction between refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants are not yet clearly distinguished in terms of rights and access to public funds, mobility and work.

[5]   IOM Statistics. Retrieved 7 August 2012 from: http://wwwjcp.ge/iom/pdf/WMR_2010_ENGLISH.pdf.

and economic instability have been a major driving force behind the movement of people from further north (Kok et al., 2006).

Managing this complex movement of people comes with a myriad of challenges. The *World Migration Report (2015) Migrants and Cities: New Partnerships to Manage Mobility* noted that "many city and local governments still do not include migration or migrants in their urban development planning and implementation." The report aims to address this gap by considering migration as a defining factor alongside climate change, population growth, demographic change, and economic crisis in shaping sustainable cities in the future. Equally important, this report examines how migration and migrants are shaping cities and how the life of migrants is shaped by cities, their people, organisations and rule, suggesting that there is a direct correlation between social responsibility and regimes of hospitality experienced by migrants.

These developments have had an impact on Christian mission, particularly with regards to traditional hospitality extended to strangers by the local hosts. Christian practice has been tested and resources stretched to the limit. The result has been some kind of fatigue, the same response we are seeing in Europe where migrants fleeing wars in Syria, Libya and elsewhere are stranded in borders as leaders avoid responsibility to care for them in defiance with the international law. Similar fatigue was observed by Orobator (2005:167) during his fieldwork in East Africa when he postulated that:

> Refugees are rejected by host communities for whom their presence portends disaster for their already strained economic and ecological resources. Quite clearly, for "many Third World Countries….refugees represent an unacceptable strain on their limited resources." This situation has severely compromised the much-vaunted African spirit of solidarity, generosity and hospitality…Today supportive evidence of 'African hospitality' for refugees has become harder to find."

It is a generally accepted view that the Church should be concerned with the presence of unwelcome strangers within any community because the content of Judeo-Christian faith is informed by scriptural imperatives on the treatment of strangers with love; '*but the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shall love him as thyself*' (Leviticus 19:34-35 KJV). Evidence of African hospitality has become hard to find at a time when more communities are receiving more strangers. What does this mean to Christian mission? What we know is that any authentic Christian mission or theological reflection must address all forms of rejection or divisions in society by promoting relationships of love and tolerance and acknowledging diversity; what Min (2004) calls the "soli-

darity of others."[6] The presence of migrants in South Africa constitutes a challenge to Christian mission and points to the need for cross-cultural mission and development of new models of "*neighbourhood*" built on dialogue and hospitality with migrants. Lessons can be drawn from Churches such as the Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg to explore new models of community relationships that promote tolerance and hospitality for people coming from outside South Africa.

It is in this regard that notable efforts to understand the role of spirituality in the lives of refugees and migrants from the African perspective need to be commended. In responding to this challenge, Orobator (2005:164) raised a question; "[w]hat is the Church on a continent where 20 million people live in exile?"[7] And went further to rely on the data from his fieldwork in East Africa to examine the lived experiences of refugees concluding that refugees have a widely held view which portrays "*refugeeness*" as a test of faith, and employed Catechist Niboye to elaborate:

> There are three categories of Christians in the camp: those who have persevered in the faith in the midst of trials and tribulations, those who have abandoned the faith, and those who have discovered God as their only help and comfort in exile. All three categories face a difficult test of faith triggered by feelings of abandonment, isolation and despair…The more the refugees live here, the more difficult it is for them to live out the virtues of their Christian faith. After a while enthusiasm gives way to apathy, egoism and individualism. The overriding priority is to survive" (Orobator, 2005:164).

There are migrants and refugees who have given up the hope of ever finding a home outside the borders of their country of origin. The survival tendencies of the experience of refugees observed by Orobator among the refugees in East Africa are reminiscent of the spiritual realities among the migrants in Johannesburg. Some migrants have persevered in faith in the midst of trials and tribulations; some have abandoned the faith, and there are some who have discovered God as their only help and comfort in exile. These revelations challenge us to think differently about the mission of the Church. Congregations should rediscover their sense of mission in the context of migration. The former Mayor of Johannesburg, the city that was at the heart of the 2008 xenophobia attacks speaking against African migrants and

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[6] Cited from Anselm K. Min, (2004). "From Autobiography to Fellowship of Others: Reflections on Doing Ethnic Theology Today," in Journeys as the Margin 135-59. See also Min, The Solidarity of Others in a divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism. New York: T. & T. Clark International.

[7] In Orobator 2005, cited from, Peter Kanyandago, "Who Is My neighbour?: A Christian response to the refugees and the displaced in Africa," in J.N.K. Mugambi and A. Nasimiyu-Wasike, eds., Moral and Ethical Issues in African Christianity: Exploratory Essays in Moral Theology (Nairobi: Initiatives Publishers, 1992), 178.

Herman Mashaba, often drew a stark distinction between citizens and migrants, and we have seen more political parties rise to prominence for a very critical stance against migrants. In fact, on the occasion of marking his first 100 days in office, he announced; "I will do everything possible to provide accommodation. But the City of Johannesburg will only provide accommodation to South Africans. Foreigners, whether legal or illegal, are not the responsibility of the city."[8] A closer look at some opposition politicians such as that advanced by Gayton McKenzie of the Patriotic Alliance (PA)[9] suggest an increase in political demagogues who frame political rhetoric by exploiting the current conditions of rising poverty and unemployment to exclude migrants in the interest of the citizenry and national development. Such politics undermine the role played by state institutions such as the DHA, which fuels vigilantism and violence.

Given that South Africa experienced an increase in hostility towards migrants between 2008 and 2015, the government embarked on programmes that unfortunately focussed on excluding "illegal" migrants, such a *Project Fiela* and in some cases, foreign migrants were provided shelter in places isolated from workplaces and social services, making them an easy target to violence. Such an approach breeds a culture of hostility towards migrants. The work of Bishop Paul Verryn, previously of the Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg, stands out as a model of religiously informed response and a number of scholars have reflected on this Church occupation as a good example of extending hospitality promoting tolerance for people coming from outside South Africa. Culbertson (2009) reflected on the reception of Zimbabwean migrants, while Sabar (2004) paid focus to 'the paucity of attention to religion and leaves a major gap in our understanding of African migrants.' Settler (2017) argued that the Central Methodist Church emerged as a site of exception, which ultimately disrupted the Church's understanding of self. According to Lauren Landau (2009:10) from the Africa Centre for Migration and Society, there are new forms of exclusion through policies related to employment and residence, and he goes on to suggest that religion emerged as one of many strategies for negotiating inclusion and belonging, while transcending ethnic, national and transnational paradigms.

One of the objectives of this article is to underscore the theological and missional or pastoral debates which arise from the experiences of migrants. Such an

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8   "Joburg Mayor Mashaba: Foreigners Not The Responsibility Of The City" reported on 24 July 2017 (see http://ewn.co.za/2017/07/24/joburg-mayor-mashaba-foreigners-not-the-responsibility-of-the-city#).

9   For more details see: Elections 2021: Patriotic Alliance targets 'illegal foreigners' at manifesto launch. Accessed 04/02/2022 from: https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/elections-2021-patriotic-alliance-targets-illegal-foreigners-at-manifesto-launch-20211009.

understanding should appreciate the role of religion in shaping the identity of people on the move through their lived experiences of migration, something which has been widely ignored by most scholars exploring the discipline of religion and migration, as Hegan and Ebaugh (2003:39) have rightly noted:

> … scholars of both immigration and religion have tended to neglect the role of religion and spirituality in the process of international migration. With the exception of historical (Dolan, 1975; Bodnar, 1985; Dolan, 1985) and recent case studies (e.g., Orsi, 1985; Mullins, 1988; Hurh & Kim, 1990; Leonard, 1992; Min, 1992; Waugh, 1994; Lin, 1996; Numrich, 1996; Warner & Wittner, 1998; Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000) that focus on the functions of the Church in immigrant set-tlement and the emergent literature on the role of religion in the development of transnational activities (Casanova, 1997; Levitt, 1997; Rudolph & Pisca-tori, 1997; Levitt, 1998a, b), the role of religion in other stages of the migra-tion [sic] process, especially in decision-making and the journey, has been gener-ally [sic] overlooked by social scientists and policymakers alike.

The Church can only address migration issues if there is an informed understanding of these challenges and what their mission implications are. For example, if the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC, 2010b:164) understands mission as the crossing of all borders (*transnationally*) that separate people (*boundaries*) from God, one another and creation. It is only by crossing *borders* (*boundaries*) that reconciliation through Christ becomes a reality (WCRC, 2010b:164). This definition of mission takes people moving across borders seriously and notes that; "[t]he missional Church is *transformational*. It exists for the transformation of the community that it serves, through the power of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit" (WCRC, 2010b). Missional Church conversation presents a different way of thinking about the Church and also offers an alternative hermeneutic to reading and interpreting the Bible in the light of the experience of migration. Christopher Wright has warned in his book, *The Mission of God (2006)* that reflecting on mission demands that we pay attention to ethical issues, arguing; "there is no biblical mission without ethics, and God's mission calls for human response and that includes ethical dimensions (Wright, 2006:358). For purposes of this article, the current reflection on mission will not delve into the deeper ethical implications for mission.

While some debates focus on the states' social responsibility on the presence of migrants, others focus on ethical and philosophical debates on nation state (Carsen, 2013) and Citizenship (Castles, 2000), scholars like Landau and Seggati (2011), in *Contemporary Migration to South Africa - A Regional Development Issue,* explored the developmental potential of migration for promoting integration/social

cohesion, enhancing tolerance and addressing xenophobia. They focused on how migrant communities articulate, negotiate and construct meanings in a context of hostility to migrants and they also concluded that religion plays a significant role in the lives of migrants before, during and after migration. What has been missing in these debates is the role of the Christian mission from the African perspective. For example, Stephen Bevans (2008) argues that through acting compassionately towards the stranger, we will gain insights not only as a community that helps and sustains migrants, but also "as a community with and of migrants."[10]

As indicated above, sentiments towards migrants in South Africa, are largely oriented towards regimes of exclusion, as opposed to hospitality. The civic and state approach to migration along this trajectory range from integration, tolerance to outright hostile xenophobia. A 2006 study by the South African Migration Project (SAMP) on citizen's attitudes to migrants concluded that South Africa continued to be a society in which xenophobia remained well-entrenched, and the study revealed that most citizens wanted to give "limited or little rights to migrants, [and] even benefits they were legitimately entitled to" (Crush et al., 2013:10). The same study found that despite increased contact and social interaction between migrants, South African hostility towards migrants has not lessened to a great degree. The result of this study was confirmed by the World Values Survey, a global longitudinal study of peoples' beliefs and values, which indicated that South Africans were more hostile and resistant to migrants and refugees than citizens of any other country.

The Africa Centre for Migration and Society, and the Southern Africa Migration Project have conducted several studies exploring how migrant communities articulate, negotiate and leverage religious identity to construct meanings to suffering experienced as a result of living in often hostile contexts. Similarly, the Southern African Missiological Society made a call for proposals on the subject of Migration in Africa in March 2012, after raising a critical question: where is Christian mission located in all of these matters in a continent where migration has become a way of life? Swart and de Beer (2014:7) who assert in a non-theological, non-fictional publication, *Sanctuary* on the work of Paul Verryn and the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg, illustrate the vacuum in South African theologies to the massive challenges of migration. The work of Luis Rivera (2012) "*Xenophilia or Xenophobia: Towards a Theology of Migration*", a paper delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary on the 6th of October in 2012 provides an attempt to develop a theology of migration and warns:

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[10]   See Stephen B. Bevans (2008). "Mission among the Migrants, Mission of the Migrants: Mission of the Church," in A Promised Land, a Perilous Journey 89-106.

> Migration and xenophobia are serious social quandaries. But they also convey urgent challenges to the ethical sensitivity of religious people and persons of good-will. The first step we need to take is to perceive this issue from the perspective of the immigrants, to pay cordial (that is, deep from our hearts) attention to their stories of suffering, hope, courage, resistance, ingenuity, and, as so frequently happens in the wildernesses (Rivera, 2012:4).

Making their contributions, Spikard and Adogame (2010) point to the instrumentalist uses of religion in the context of migration. These range from studies concerned with new migrants' use of Churches and mosques as the primary site for building social networks (Robertson, 2012), religion as resources for migrants and source of resilience to help them cope with the challenges of migration (Hagan & Ebaugh, 2003), to migrants replicating religious traditions at various sites of settlement as an assertion of cultural and religious identity (Levitt, 2001, 2007; Huwelmeier & Krause, 2010). Another school of thought refers to what I have called theologies of migration which focus on hospitality, reception and integration of migrants. This tradition is primarily concerned with the response of the Church to increasing visible migrant community, and the failure of the state to adequately respond to the lived needs of migrants. Theologies of migration seek to invoke a whole range of themes such as hospitality (Groody & Campese, 2008), Church as host/welcoming the stranger, (Cruz, 2010; Mpofu 2016), Church as a suffering body (Rivera 2012), and theologies of inclusion and incorporation (Baggie, 2008).

These theologies of migration largely rely on metaphors of the Church or religious communities as characterised by unity, oneness, focusing on shared belief and at times empathy. In *I Was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality,* Sutherland (2006) writes against the decline in hospitality in the Christian Church. He suggests that in Pauline's biblical narrative, Church elders are instructed to be beyond reproach and to not just live a normative, orthodox life, but to act as an example of an exemplary life into which the stranger can be assimilated. Unlike Sutherland's focus on the competence of the Church to receive the stranger, Groody and Campese (2008) in *A promised Land/A Perilous Journey*, move beyond the politics of reception, to offer a sustained theological critique of borders physical and ideological barriers.

They highlight three Christian themes – Imago Dei (the Image of God), the Verbum Dei (the Word of God), and the Missio Dei (the Mission of God) – that touch directly on the migration debate and help us understand that crossing borders is at the heart of human life, divine revelation, and Christian identity. Through drawing our attention to *Imago Dei* they insist that we ought to see immigrants not as problems to be solved but people to be healed and empowered. Finally, in his docu-

mentary on migration, "*Dying to Live*", Daniel Groody suggests that true aliens are not those who are undocumented but those who have so disconnected themselves from their neighbour, because they fail to recognise the humanity in the Other. Lastly, drawing on his intercultural theological perspective on migration, Rivera-Pagán (2012) suggests that instead of perceiving national identity as "an already historically fixed essence", it should rather be seen as historically constructed and constituted "by exchanges with peoples bearing different cultural heritages" and he invokes the idea of Jesus as a wanderer, foreigner.

3. *Ubuntu* as an alternative to intolerance: Biblical lessons from early missionaries

Despite its orientations towards inclusion, protection and integration, what these theological analyses have in common is that they rely on an idea of religion that presupposes an idea of the migrant 'other' as apolitical and asexual, vulnerable and ready for incorporation into the host culture. Further issues that emerge from the two sets of interests is that they both submit to, replicate and rely on the idea of the nation-state as homogenous, on the one hand, and the migrant Other as victim, the non-national on the other hand. This is where the role of Christian mission becomes critical in ensuring that the human dignity of migrants is restored and they are treated like all citizens in the country. The early missionaries in Bible were always missional in their endeavours to unite communities and promote peace and stability. In an article on Mission and Migration, Stenschke (2016:3) observed:

> Many of the people mentioned in Acts – be they Jews, Christians and also Gentiles – appear in places where they were not born. The causes of this and its conse-quences vary significantly: some moved voluntarily, others followed their leaders or were placed by a higher authority, others had to leave as refugees because of persecution. In Acts 1–6 9 [records]… group of about 120 Galilean disciples in Jerusalem where Jesus commands them to stay and wait for the coming of the Spirit (1:4). He also announces that later on, they will be "on the move" to "all Judea, Samaria and even to the ends of the world" (1:8). The events of the follow-ing narrative are the fulfilment of this commission.

The book of Acts highlights how the gospel spread with the movement of people and so did the mission as the migrants spread out. Therefore, Christian communi-ties need to draw from the Bible to motivate believers to explore possible ways of doing mission with the migrants. For example, there are more biblical excerpts that address migration and treatment of strangers, where Christians are instructed to "Love the stranger" (Deuteronomy 10:19; Leviticus 19:34) and warmed against

"perverting the judgement of the stranger…" (Deuteronomy 27:19). Matthew 25:35 presents a damning indictment on those to ill-treat strangers; "…I was a stranger and you took me in…" and in Romans 12:13 Christians are exhorted to be "…given to hospitality…" and admonished to put on a new person which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him who created us so that we maintain unity (Colossians 3:10-11) so that we let brotherly love to continue and not forget to entertain strangers "for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:1-3). Therefore, caring for migrants is a divine calling and an integral part of Christian mission. To remain silent when political demagogues blame foreigners for all of South Africa's economic woes would be a betrayal, especially given the fact that there is a growing tendency to ignore the impact of COVID-19 by those who 'pervert' the judgement of strangers. Our human dignity, *ubuntu* needs to be restored.

Ubuntu is one resource and a biblical imperative that could help restore peace between locals and foreign migrants in communities where there is violence. Challenges such as compassion fatigue and growing intolerance are symptoms of a society that is losing its values and has shifted from a biblical call to care for strangers. According to Lesteka (2011), *ubuntu* is a form of human engagement that allows for critical thinking, non-domination and the optimal development of human relationships. Simply understood, *ubuntu* means that each individual`s humanity is ideally expressed in relationship with others, *ubuntu* is a term used to describe the state of being aware of one's own being but also one's duties towards one's neighbour. Interpreted from the biblical perspective of loving one another and caring for strangers in our communities, *ubuntu* can be a concrete manifestation of our humanity, manifested in the interconnectedness of all human beings. In one of the recent contributions, Mpofu (2019) argued that South Africa's notion of 'rainbow nation' captures the diversity of different cultural and racial groupings which form a diverse nation, and such '*rainbowism*' should include foreign nationals and all groupings that constitute South Africa; diversity [whether cultural, racial or ethnical] is the embodiment of South African outlook.

4. Missional implications of Integration, Assimilation and Cohesion

According to the WCRC (2010b), "[t]he missional Church is *transformational*. It exists for the transformation of the community that it serves, through the power of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit." Keum (2013:15) further adds that:

> Mission from the margins seeks to counteract injustices in life, Church, and mission. It seeks to be an alternative missional movement against the perception that

mission can only be done by the powerful to the powerless, by the rich to the poor, or by the privileged to the marginalised. Such approaches can contribute to oppression and marginalization. Mission from the margin recognises that being in the centre means having access to systems that led to one's rights, freedom, and individuality being affirmed and respected; living in the margins means exclusion from justice and dignity... People on the margins have agency, and can often see what, from the centre, is out of view (Keum, 2013:15).

Another contributor to missiological thinking in southern Africa was David Bosch. In his seminal work, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (1991) he sketches a historical and theological review of the different paradigms of mission from the early Church through to what he refers to as "*the emerging ecumenical paradigm,"* highlighting six historical paradigms of mission that he identified as; (1) *The apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity,* (2) *The Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period*, (3) *The medieval Roman Catholic paradigm*, (4) *The protestant (Reformation) paradigm*, (5) *The modern enlightenment paradigm*, and (6) *The emerging ecumenical paradigm;* which is of interest and relevant to this article.

Bosch believed that the 21st century will see developments that will push the Church to seek a new paradigm, which he calls *the emerging ecumenical paradigm*. He cites the following factors behind the emergence of this new paradigm:

- West losing its dominance in the world[11]
- Unjust structures of oppression and exploitation being challenged today as never before in human history
- Western technology and the development agenda being suspect[12]
- The need to work for peace and justice given the reality that for the first time in human history we are capable of wiping out humankind
- European theologies can no longer claim superiority over other parts of the world given that culture shapes the human voice that answers the voice of Christ
- Freedom of religion is now considered a human right, forcing Christians to re-evaluate their attitude toward and understanding of other faiths

As Bosch earlier warned, we are seeing an emerging paradigm that relies on social networks and technology as means for survival among the migrants, something that

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[11] For him, the world is in fact seeking liberation from the stranglehold of the West. This is one important reason for the emergence of new alternatives in most spheres of life that were previously dominated by the western worldview.

[12] For Bosch (1991), technology, development, and the idea of progress have in fact proven to be false gods of the Enlightenment.

requires a deeper exploration from a mission perspective to explore how migrants survive in the context of xenophobia, threats and violence directed to them in South African communities. The paucity of data regarding theological and missional implications for these developments is a cause for concern.

Swart and de Beer argued that:

> What further illustrates the vacuum in South African theologies, and particularly in public theologies, with regard to the urban, is that one of the most significant reflections in recent years on a local urban Church was a non-theological, non-fictional publication, *Sanctuary* (Kuljian, 2013), on the work of Paul Verryn and the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg, in response to the massive challenges of migration (Swart & de Beer, 2014:7).

The above observation highlights the contemporary urban challenges of migration and draws attention to obstacles of theoretical formation on migration patterns and studies which were rightly identified and discussed by Stephen Castles (2010) in an article when he argued that a theory of migration is "neither possible nor desirable" suggesting rather, that "we can make significant progress by re-embedding migration research in a more general understanding of contemporary society. For Castles, a conceptual framework for migration studies should take social transformation as its central category, in order to facilitate understanding of the complex, interconnected, and contextual nature of migratory processes. This would mean examining links between social transformation, human mobility and hospitality.

Johannesburg is, therefore, an opportunity for the local Churches and researchers alike, to engage in a mutual partnership with migrants. Such engagement will require appreciating the agency and contributions of migrants in the developmental agenda of Johannesburg; something which highlights the need for a paradigm shift, politically, missional and ecclesial to promote practices that will go beyond the notion of caring for migrants to caring *with* migrants and from compassion for strangers to compassion *of and with* migrants. There is a need for a paradigm shift, a transformation in the Church's *missional* and *ecclesial* thinking and practice that goes beyond the notion of caring for migrants. According to Orobator (2005:169):

> '…the Church in the context of refugees (and migrants) represents an inclusive community. Inclusiveness is the direct antithesis of any attitude that considers the refugees (and migrants) as a nuisance. It looks beyond immediate needs of the local community, no matter how impoverished, and reaches out to the displaced… Being the Church in the context of refugees (and migrants) presumes a commitment "to create community with uprooted people."

It is a generally held view that models that focus on providing care and support to migrants have to focus on integration, assimilation or cohesion, but just what are the implications for Christian mission and leaders? Jonathan Sacks in his 2008 book; *The Home we Build Together* (2008)[13] offers three parables as a framework for understanding the relationship between newcomers and local citizens, that helps us reflect on social responsibility towards the migrant or newcomer. The first parable tells the fate of hundred strangers who have been wandering around the countryside in search of a dwelling place and eventually find themselves at the gate of a large country house. They are greeted by the owner at the gate who asks for their names and responds to their search for a place to stay with a warm welcome. He has a big house with many empty rooms; so they are welcome to "stay as long as they like." They are guests who can stay for as long as they want but the *host* remains the *host* and they are his guests.

In the second parable, a hundred strangers are searching for a place to stay and find themselves in the middle of a city. They see a large and comfortable hotel with all amenities. They have enough money to pay for their bills, so they check-in and stay. For Sacks, their relationship with the hotel is a contractual one, they pay money in return for their services and will remain there for as long as they can afford to pay. In the wisdom of Sacks' understanding, treating migrants as strangers in South Africa is nothing but society as a hotel (Sacks, 2008:15).

In the third parable, a hundred strangers are met by the mayor, councillors and residents of the city to a warm welcome. The mayor addresses them and explains that there is no townhouse to accommodate them. However, the city leaders and residents have land to accommodate all of their guests. The city has town planners, engineers, builders and experts who can help them work together to design and build homes for the new citizens. *They do it together*. Unlike in the country house or hotel, the newcomers have to invest their energy to build their own long term houses. They play an active role and get an opportunity to work with their newly found citizens in building their permanent dwelling place (Sacks, 2008:15). These three parables serve as an important signpost of the kind of hospitality that migrants and refugees should experience. The challenges presented by migration are very complex and as Sacks explain, building such an ideal society (based on the model of the last parable) as home won't always be easy and requires commitment and concerted efforts because:

> The newcomers still occasionally seem strange. They speak, act and dress differently than the locals. But those long sessions of working together have had their effect. The locals know the newcomers are serious, committed, dedicated. They have their own ways, but they have also learned the ways of the people of the town,

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[13] I am aware that I have used these parables in my previous research but do feel that a brief reflection is also helpful for this current study.

and they have worked out . . . a rough and ready friendship. . . Making something together breaks down walls of suspicion and misunderstanding. . . That is society as the home we build together (Sacks, 2009:29).

Sol (1982:38) observed that "when the people move, the Church moves," this is an assertion that the Church is not just a structure built in and for local communities, but it is a community of people who share a set of beliefs and values, and who remain connected although they move from one place to another. As people move, they do not leave behind their religious experiences; they move with them and articulate their migration experiences in the light of personal theological reflections on the journey, and connect with people who share the same views and values. It is because of this that we have sought to argue that we should focus on the religious lives of migrants as well as that of the host nation as a resource for social transformation and development. Faith communities cannot simply be imagined as communities that help to sustain migrants through patronage, but we must allow the presence of migrants to lead to a re-imagination of self, community.

5. Conclusion

This article highlighted the role played by religion in the migration processes and argued that by focusing on the realisation that the lived experiences of migrants' mission and theological reflections can be enriched to discover alternative ways of being family in transnational communities. The presence of migrants offers an opportunity to engage in transformative Christian mission through a mutual partnership with migrants. Such transformation will require appreciating their agency. The article also highlighted missional challenges for the South African Church and notes that the task of restoring human dignity and identity for migrants should be informed by contextual theology which liberates and advocates a culture of life for vulnerable people living on the margins of society. In conclusion, it is important to summarise the focal points for mission engagement on migration:

- The social reality of the lived experiences of migrants should be a starting point for all mission and theological practice and reflection.
- The Church should draw on tradition for mission practices that focus on caring for strangers and advocates the preferential option for care with strangers.
- Transformative models of providing support to migrants should value their agency and role in contributing to the development of host communities.
- Undocumented movement of people in search of better living conditions as some form of survival quality of life strategy which must be distinguished from criminal activities.

5.1 Some practical activities that can be undertaken by local religious communities

• Introduce cultural awareness Sundays to celebrate cultural diversity and the presence of different nationalities in South African communities as part of '*rainbowism*' and emphasise on demonstrating that there is richness in diversity, and prepare lessons on such themes as unity in diversity, and *ubuntu* as promotion of human dignity in the affirmation that all people are created in the image of God.

• Use religious premises as safety nets and a place of comfort for the community's marginalised and vulnerable people such as the foreign migrants.

• Move from providing temporary shelter, and develop missional programmes with long-term sustainable interventions which foster community integration and cohesion. This will ensure a shift from 'caring for migrants' to 'caring with migrants' as an alternative transformational model which promotes 'unity in diversity' through collective engagement towards seeking solutions to socio-economic challenges in South Africa.

• Last but not least, faith-based communities and leaders should speak out against demagogues who exploit declining socio-economic conditions for political gain. Political opportunists should be reminded that they should respect institutions tasked with addressing migration challenges and engage communities within the ambits of law as means to counter vigilantism.

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