



Missio Politica Pro-Refugee Camps: The Case of South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Dissimilar to several countries of the world including some African countries such as both Namibia and Botswana, South Africa continues to be without refugee camps nor camp policy. The problems arising from the lack of such measures have become apparent in recent years, as increasing numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers living in host communities have become victims of violent situations. Among some of the challenges resulting from this absence is that during the heightening of xenophobia or at times during public protests, both unsuspecting refugees and asylum-seekers are left without protection. To this end, this paper relied upon literature and employed a *missio politica* framework to align the urgent need for refugee camps in South Africa with the objectives of the *Missio Dei*. Although South Africa is the case in point, the objective was to argue for the establishment of refugee camps in all of Africa permanently open to accommodate refugees and asylum-seekers. In this way, the main goals of the *Missio Dei*, especially with regard to total salvation, are achieved at the continental level. Consequently, the scope of this paper provided an opportunity to further examine a new and relatively unexplored significance of refugee camps from a theological and missiological perspective.

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INTRODUCTION

The construction or existence of refugee camps remains important as they provide temporary facilities with immediate assistance or legal protection for those who have been forced to flee their homes for various reasons such as violent wars, persecution, and abusive regimes. As a result, literature has developed in all parts of the world in recent years that deals with the social significance of refugee camps.¹ However, unlike its neighboring countries such as Namibia and Botswana,² South Africa has no refugee camps, adding to the security challenges often faced by refugees and asylum seekers within

¹ Marlen De La Chaux, Helen Haugh, and Royston Greenwood, "Organizing Refugee Camps: 'Respected Space' and 'Listening Posts,'" *Academy of Management Discoveries* 4, no. 2 (2018): 155–79; Nando Sigona, "Campzanship: Reimagining the Camp as a Social and Political Space," *Citizenship Studies* 19, no. 1 (2015): 1–15.

² Aderanti Adepoju, "The Dimension of the Refugee Problem in Africa," *African Affairs* 81, no. 322 (1982): 21–35; Elizabeth Macharia-Mokobi and Jimcall Pfumorodze, "Advancing Refugee Protection in Botswana through Improved Refugee Status Determination," *African Human Rights Law Journal* 13, no. 1 (2013): 152–77.

its borders. While there are numerous other African countries without refugee camps, this is a major problem for South Africa, especially when viewed in the context of the increasing influx of internationally displaced people and the increase in xenophobic incidents that have been observed in recent years. Consequently, the security of refugees and asylum-seekers from African countries has often been threatened by public protests, which have often manifested into violent xenophobic episodes. This paper draws on literature and uses the *missio politica* framework to call for the urgent establishment of refugee camps in South Africa, in line with the *Missio Dei* mandate.

Missio Dei refers to a Latin Christian theological expression that encompasses, as it were, God's mission or the sending of the triune God to the world.³ This missionary theology has gained prominence within the broader field of theology since the second half of the 20th century, particularly in light of the 1952 International Missionary Council (IMC) conference held in Willingen, Germany. In the perspectives emerging from this conference, represented in seminal works of key missiologists including but not limited to David Bosch, Tormod Engelsen and Darrell Guder, salvific mission in its entirety, to which the church belongs, is an activity or initiative of the Triune God. Saying *Missio Dei* means acknowledging that only the Triune God is the source and ultimate purpose of mission. As correctly recited in Engelsen, the German missiologist George F. Vicedom emphasized this very point, that mission is God's work and involves him as the acting subject from beginning to end.⁴ Reflecting this very understanding, Bosch stated unequivocally that: "mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God."⁵ Guder equally expressed this understanding in writing: "We have come to see that mission is not merely an activity of the church.⁶ Rather, mission is the result of God's initiative, rooted in God's purposes to restore and heal creation."⁷ Put simply, this meant that firstly, the mission belongs to God, secondly, the Church only participates in it, and finally, not only the Church but the Church, together with several other human entities such as politics, participate cooperatively in the context of the *Missio Dei*. The work of Soares, Lotter and van der Merwe reconciles or identifies the issue of the displaced in the form of refugees and consequently their care as one of the central aims of the *Missio Dei*.⁸ Accordingly, this paper uses the framework of *missio politica* to reconcile the urgent need for refugee camps in South Africa with the goals of *Missio Dei*.

Missio Politica

Missio Politica is a Latin Christian theological expression encompassing the role of politics in relation to or in the context of the *Missio Dei*. Although somewhat neglected in missiology, the context in which the 1952 IMC conference was convened or in which the *Missio Dei* resurfaced was in itself a cry for the *missio politica* framework. This meeting took place at a very difficult time in the life of the Church, due to the volatility of world politics and global conflicts that followed the Second World War (1939-1945). The Chinese Communist victory in 1949 was followed by the suppression of religion and the expulsion of missionaries from China. More than anything, this represented a major setback for church missions, not just in China but worldwide, as it threatened to reverse the mission's course and weaken the morale of missionaries or mission activities in other countries. In the words of Arthur, it was: 'against this pessimistic background Willingen fleshed out the theology of mission that Barth,

³ Jonas Sello Thinane, "Missio Dei as the Main Project: Project Management Model for Mission of God," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 102, no. 2 (2021): 1–17.

⁴ Tormod Engelsen, "Missio Dei: The Understanding and Misunderstanding of a Theological Concept in European Churches and Missiology," *International Review of Mission* 92 (2003): 482.

⁵ David J Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Orbis books, 2011), 389-390.

⁶ Daniel L Guder and Lois Barrett, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998).

⁷ Guder and Barrett, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, 4-5.

⁸ Nicolette Van der Merwe, "Teaching Fashion Computer Aided Design (CAD): A Design Research Approach.," 2014; Diniz R Soares, George Lotter, and Sarel J Van der Merwe, "The Missio Dei as Context for a Ministry to Refugees," *In Die Skriflig* 51, no. 1 (2017): 1–7.

Hartestein and others had been moving towards'.⁹ Mission theology, which emphasized the knowledge that the triune God and not the church alone is responsible for the mission of salvation in the secular world, including in the area of politics. That is, even in the physical absence of Church-appointed missionaries in parts of the world, the missionary God remained present as the source and impetus of such a course. No doubt this brought the agenda and analysis of secular politics into close contact with the mandate of the *Missio Dei*, by far an appeal for *missio politica* framework.

Consequently, the *Missio Politica* framework, although often neglected in the field of missiology, has been identified by the seminal work of scholars such as Verkuyl, Saayman and Garcia as the most acceptable framework integrating political discourse within the context of *Missio Dei*.¹⁰ Fittingly, or as if incorporating all of these insights, the seminal works of Verkuyl and Saayman, as correctly recited in Reimer, agreed that the admissions that Yahweh is God (Old Testament) and that Jesus is Lord (New Testament) represent a confession of faith on the one hand and a political confession on the other.¹¹ Thinane agreeably pointed out that this framework tests the goals of secular politics in relation to the broader mandate of the *Missio Dei*.¹² As if to deepen the applicability of this framework, Reimer has included politics or policymaking as the Church's mandate within the broader context of *Missio Dei*, particularly given the crucial role or missionary responsibility that religions, especially Christians, have in dismantling unjust political regimes.¹³ In many ways, therefore, this framework breaks with the usual limitations of theological perspectives, which have been observed to constantly strive to impose the distance between God and politics. As would be used in this paper, it will enable a confrontation with the global politics of restoration centered around refugee camps in light of the main goals of the *Missio Dei*, namely total salvation and the kingdom of God.

Distinguishing between Asylum Seekers and Refugees

In general, the terms refugee and asylum seeker are usually used to describe people who left or fled their home countries and settled in another country for security reasons.¹⁴ Although these terms are often used interchangeably to refer to such individuals generically, it is important to distinguish between them to show their legal differences and more so their applications. First, refugee, as the term implies, refers to a person who seeks refuge in another country after fleeing their home country for various security reasons, including but not limited to the risk of human rights violations, violent conflict or war, persecution, etc.¹⁵ However, what needs to be stressed in this regard is that, for someone to be legally recognized as a refugee, the host state must first determine that there is a serious threat to the safety and life of such a person from which their own government is unable to safeguard.¹⁶ Almost similarly, an asylum seeker is a person who is seeking sanctuary in another country but has not yet been legally recognized as a refugee and is still waiting for their asylum claim to be confirmed. Understood in this way, it can be said that every refugee was once an asylum seeker, but not all asylum

⁹ Eddie Arthur, "Missio Dei and the Mission of the Church," Wycliffe Global Alliance. June 6 (2013), 1-2.

¹⁰ Johannes Verkuyl, "Mission in the 1980s," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 3, no. 3 (1979): 93; Johannes Verkuyl, "Mission in the 1990s," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 13, no. 2 (1989): 55-58; Willem A Saayman, *Christian Mission in South Africa: Political and Ecumenical* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1991); Hidalgo B Garcia, "Missio Politica Oecumenica: Mission and Political Action in the Life and Thought of Johannes Verkuyl (1908-2001)," 2006.

¹¹ Johannes Reimer, *Missio Politica: The Mission of Church and Politics* (Langham Publishing, 2017), 4; Verkuyl, "Mission in the 1990s"; Saayman, *Christian Mission in South Africa: Political and Ecumenical*, 12.

¹² Jonas Sello Thinane, "Missio Politica on Coalition Governance: 'better Devils' in SA Coalition Politics.," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 104, no. 2 (2023), 3.

¹³ Reimer, *Missio Politica: The Mission of Church and Politics*, 2-3.

¹⁴ P. Baker and T. McEnery, "A corpus-based approach to discourses of refugees and asylum seekers in UN and newspaper texts." *Journal of language and politics*, 4(2).(2005); 197-226.

¹⁵ James C Hathaway, "The Evolution of Refugee Status in International Law: 1920—1950," *International & Comparative Law Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1984): 348-38.

¹⁶ Janet Phillips, *Asylum Seekers and Refugees: What Are the Facts?* (Department of Parliamentary Services, Parliament of Australia Canberra, 2013); Peter von Kaehne and Rhona MacDonald, "Career Focus: Working with Refugees and Asylum Seekers," *BMJ* 322, no. Suppl S5 (2001),2.

seekers become refugees as it depends on the outcome of their application.¹⁷ Perhaps to clarify further: anyone who arrives in another country fleeing security threats from their country of origin applies for asylum (hence asylum seeker), which means the right to be recognized as a refugee by the receiving country. The asylum seeker awaits the outcome of the investigation of his endangerment claim, while the refugee is the one whose claim has been successfully established and has since been granted legal protection status.¹⁸ However, as will be shown below, both asylum seekers and refugees enjoy almost the same but qualitatively different legal status or protection, often depending on the receiving country.

Although the term 'refugee' seems to be deserting asylum seekers, it consequently came to be used to refer generically to anyone displaced or forced to flee their home country and seek refuge in another. Following the displacement of people as a result of World War II, the United Nations Special Conference held in 1951 at Geneva in Switzerland adopted a multilateral treaty that became the main international instrument of refugee law.¹⁹ This convention was based on Article 14 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which sought to recognize the rights of displaced people in their host countries. Although the scope of this Convention was initially limited to the protection of European refugees, it was later expanded in its 1967 Protocol to address the problem of displacement of people around the world. This is correctly noted by Smyser who noted that consequently: 'these documents defined refugees as persons compelled to seek asylum abroad owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted'.²⁰ What this means is that, while the scope of the 1951 Convention limitedly covered displaced persons within Europe from before 1 January 1951, the 1967 Protocol extended that scope to universal coverage. However, what is perhaps more important in relation to this convention is that it not only provided a definition of a refugee but also outlined the type of legal protection, material assistance and social rights to which the displaced persons are eligible within all its signatory states. Consequently, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) acted as guardian of both the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, from which it derived its mandate to assist and protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and all stateless persons (UNHCR 1951).²¹

Jesus Christ as a 'Refugee'

It is perhaps important to begin this section with a disclaimer: since there is not a sufficient body of literature identifying Jesus Christ as a refugee case, care must be taken in stating this as a tested fact. The refugee narrative is adopted here solely on the basis that the Holy Family, consisting of Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus, fled to Egypt fearing persecution in the form of Herod's massacre of children. This interpretation is based solely on the context of Matthew 2:1-23, which contains the description of the flight from Judea to Egypt, which was outside of King Herod's rule and represented a logical place of refuge, regardless of whether they both fell under the Roman Empire. While this work fully acknowledges the discrepancy of this story in Luke's Gospel, which says nothing about the flight into Egypt, it at the same time shows no distrust of the historicity of Jesus' family's flight into Egypt as recounted in Matthew. Therefore, this work's cautious conclusion regarding Jesus' refugee status is based solely on Matthew's account, without attempting to reconcile it with the picture in Luke 2:1-7, which focuses on an edict issued by Emperor Augustus.

Although the word 'refugee' is not used in the Bible for those seeking refuge, it is implied in several accounts dealing with those who are forced to live in a country far from their homeland. The broad Scriptural instruction regarding them (refugees or asylum-seekers) is that they are to be treated

¹⁷ E Shacknove Andrew and E A Shacknove, "Who Is a Refugee," *Ethics* 95, no. 2 (1985): 274–84.

¹⁸ Angela Burnett and Michael Peel, "What Brings Asylum Seekers to the United Kingdom?," *BMJ* 322, no. 7284 (2001): 485–88.

¹⁹ Paul Weis, "The Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons," *International & Comparative Law Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1961): 255–64.

²⁰ William R Smyser, "Refugees: A Never-Ending Story," *Foreign Affairs* 64, no. 1 (1985): 155.

²¹ UNHCR. *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*. [online] UNHCR (1951).

Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>.

as natives by those who were once foreigners in Egypt (Lev. 19.34). Admittedly controversial, it can be said that the Holy Family, composed of the Infant Jesus, the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, were refugees seeking refuge in a distant land. In the New Testament, it is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew that an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and instructed him to take the child (Jesus) and his mother (Mary) and flee from Israel to Egypt. The angel also instructed him to stay there (Egypt) until further notice, since King Herod planned to kill Jesus. Thereupon Joseph obeyed the instructions, took the child and his mother with him in the night and traveled to Egypt, where they stayed until Herod's death or then returned home (Matt. 2:19–21). Perhaps fitting the description of a refugee or rather the legal definition of an asylum seeker, it is clear that they had to flee political persecution. King Herod's decision to kill all children under the age of two was undoubtedly a remarkable political persecution, instilling a well-founded fear in the local population and consequently compelling Christ's parents to protect their son by fleeing to a foreign land. In fact, it is this aspect of the narrative which led into concluding that: "This divine Infant, born in Bethlehem and headed to Egypt, is the authentic guardian of today's refugees, who are persecuted by modern-day Herods."²² On that basis, perhaps it must be admitted that the claim that the Holy Family's flight to a remote land was a refugee case has often led to divided interpretations. On the one hand, some obstinately argue that the mere fact that Egypt was not legally separated from Roman territory precludes the flight from being classified as a refugee even under ancient legal norms. Others, on the other hand, believe that any situation in which one has to flee their homeland to a distant land out of fear constitutes a refugee case, regardless of geopolitical realities. Although this is little removed from modern refugee sentimentality, the fact remains that the Holy Family left infanticide within the purview of one government and sought refuge in another. There was no security for them in their homeland, so they could only search for it on foreign soil in another government territory.

In light of the above, it is safe to conclude that Jesus Christ was born in unusual circumstances that included violent intentions in every respect, which led to him becoming a refugee in a distant land. While opposing views on Christ's refugee status are welcomed, it should also be welcomed that the Holy Family was forced to flee and seek refuge in a distant land, essentially introducing a refugee element. Ultimately, it can be argued that the case of the flight of the Holy Family or Jesus in a broader sense to Egypt describes a refugee situation in an elementary way. The biblical record seems to make it very clear that Jesus, who was in the care of his parents at the time, was effectively displaced from his homeland on credible threats of persecution. Somewhat contrary to current law, which requires asylum-seekers to first demonstrate reasonable fear before being declared refugees, Jesus was a refugee by ancient standards, since his family also went to a foreign land in search of refuge. While there is a high probability that Christ's refugee status will remain controversial, what is clear however, even by ancient standards, is that he was among those displaced, or among those who had to flee their original homes for fear of persecution. For the Holy Family, or by extension Jesus Christ, as instructed by the angel, Egypt was a reasonably safe place to seek refuge. Consequently, whether or not it can be considered part of refugee discourses, this story sets a precedent in the broader context of forced migration or displacement. Accordingly, or as will be shown below, the Christian mission as exemplified by the command or in the account of the Good Samaritan has a mandate that is concerned with caring for those seeking refuge.

The Christian Mission and Refugees

In general, the images of the exodus from slavery to freedom are the touchstone for the generational missions associated with the Abrahamic religions, of which Christianity is one.²³ For these religions or their adherents, the memory of the Exodus did not disappear with ancient history but continues to

²² Janice Capel Anderson, "Jesus Was a Refugee: Reception of Matthew 2: 13–23," in *Anatomies of the Gospels and Beyond* (Brill, 2018), 91.

²³ John Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation: Deliverance Politics from John Calvin to Martin Luther King Jr.* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2014); Jon D Levenson, "Exodus and Liberation," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 13, no. 1 (1991): 134–74.

be kept alive, particularly in the context of displaced communities or refugees, so to speak. In other words, followers of Abrahamic religions, including Christians, will likely read the reality of refugees within the context of the Exodus narrative. Broadly speaking, then, the likelihood is that refugees themselves, particularly those belonging to an Abrahamic religion, will often liken their circumstances to reliving the reality of the Israelites in the broader context of the Exodus.²⁴ This explains in part why Jesus Christ, although Jewish, displayed boundless care and justice throughout His mortal ministry in practical solidarity with the other or stranger, who in the version of this essay is a refugee. It was precisely this character of deep caring for others that shaped the basic identity and shaped Christian mission. In other words, the scope of the Christian mission is based on concern for displaced people and remains closely linked to what by definition extends to the region of refugees in humanitarian crises. Therefore, it can be argued that the church, as the body of Christ, is partly commissioned to represent a community of hope in the lives of migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, or generally people in humanitarian crises. The commission to the refugees or displaced persons was largely demonstrated through the account of the good Samaritan among others (Lk. 10:25-37). Among several parables told by Jesus Christ, the parable of the good Samaritan may offer a guide or signpost for carrying out the mission to the displaced unknowns. This parable is perhaps one of the best known, popularly preached in sermons, and most often quoted in the literature, particularly in the context of caring for displaced people and people in humanitarian crises.

This story, recorded in Luke, is about a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, attacked by robbers, stripped, and then left to die (Lk. 10:29-37). This parable accompanied a reply from Jesus Christ to the legal expert who asked what must be done to inherit eternal life, to which Christ first replied: 'Love your Lord God with all your heart, strength, and mind. Then love your neighbor'. When the man asked: 'who is my neighbor?', it was at this point that Jesus told the story of the injured man who was saved by the man from Samaria after being ignored by both the priest and the Levite. This man, whom the Samaritan did not know, was obviously in dire straits and in need of care or refuge after being brutally beaten, robbed by thieves, and left to die. The Samaritan took pity on the injured man, approached him, bandaged him, put him on his horse, took him to the inn and arranged for further care. The powerful missionary message in this story relates to the fact that the Samaritan cared for one abandoned by his own tribe. This was despite the fact that there was an existential animosity between Jews and Samaritans, or at least the Samaritans were despised enemies of the Jews. The scope of this parable emphasizes that compassion knows no bounds and calls Christians to constant dedication to the mission of saving the displaced, regardless of ethnicity. In other words, the story of the Good Samaritan conveys in all its vividness the need for tender human connection, shaped by compassion across cultural boundaries. With this story, Christ wanted to encourage his audience to act with extraordinary compassion toward others, known or unknown, just as the good Samaritan did. Compassion must be shown to those in need, especially those who have been displaced by their own culture or tribes, as the priest and Levite did. According to the version of this parable, all suffering fellow human beings must be shown compassion, regardless of religion, nationality and cultural borders. However, what is more relevant to the scope of this paper is the fact that the good Samaritan not only showed compassion but took the injured man to the inn, thus ensuring that he received further care in a lodging. In addition, he even went so far as to pay for both future housing and care for the then-displaced person. Beyond the rhetoric about compassion as a universal value, the latter part of this story points to the need for practical accommodation of the displaced, or in many ways the need for refugee camps.

Refugee Camps

At the risk of oversimplifying, the idea behind refugee camps involves temporary facilities set up to provide immediate refuge or shelter and assistance to people who have been displaced or who have

²⁴ Hendrik Ludolph Bosman, "The Exodus as Memories about Migration: Examples from the Hebrew Bible and the Deuterocanonical Books," *Christian Theology in the Age of Migration*, 2020, 33–50.

fled their home countries for fear of persecution, violence, or war. As pointed out by Bulley, these camps are primarily intended to provide immediate assistance and temporary security to refugee communities or displaced people who are in dire need of protective shelter that will accommodate them while they find a solution to their displacement.²⁵ In other words, these camps are an essential temporary humanitarian facility providing hospitable accommodation to the displaced while seeking a long-term solution. This understanding is within the realm of Ramadan who similarly defined that: ‘The refugee camp is a temporary space in which refugees may receive humanitarian relief and protection until a durable solution can be found to their situation’.²⁶ Although such structures are largely associated with refugees and asylum seekers, they can sometimes be used to provide shelter to internally displaced persons during or following domestic violence situations. It can thus be said that refugee camps, in general, are not only intended to receive people who have crossed international borders but exist as a short-term humanitarian solution to meet the needs of all displaced persons in emergency situations, regardless of their citizenship status. As will be seen below, it might be important to first describe refugee camps from the perspective of the internal displacement situation, before proceeding to the international perspective, which is more in line with what is meant by refugee camps.

Dissimilar to the situation of refugees or asylum-seekers who flee their home countries and are forced to cross an internationally recognized border in search of refuge. Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) refers to a group of people who have been forced to either flee or leave their local homes and residences as a result of internal conflict, violence, or more commonly some form of human-made or natural calamity. According to Phuong in considering the provisions of the 1951 Convention, states such as Greece expressed concern about the internally displaced persons and indirectly appealed that they too are covered within the scope of the Convention.²⁷ More often than not, both refugees and asylum-seekers, IDPs remain in their country of origin, reasonably closer to their original places of residence, continue to enjoy legal protection, enjoy the same rights as other citizens, but find themselves in a situation of displacement and need secure shelter. The admission of IDPs to refugee status was consequently rejected on the grounds that the primary responsibility for their care lies with their national governments and the international communities can only play a supplementary role.²⁸ It is virtually at this level that refugee camps often, mainly due to a lack of internal capacities, cooperate with national governments to offer shelter to the IDPs until their dislodgment is resolved. In other words, although IDPs have been similarly displaced from their family homes, they are not refugees as they remain under the jurisdiction of their own governments. Consequently, or in line with this understanding, refugee camps are designed more to provide safe housing for border crossers than for internally displaced persons, or rather to serve their historical purpose as shown below.

Unless used as a supplement to house internally displaced people, refugee camps are ideally designed to accommodate millions of displaced people from around the world who have crossed internationally recognized borders in search of refuge. As noted above, the expressed mandate of these settlements is to support the displaced either towards their voluntary return to the country of origin, integration within a first-choice host country, and/or resettlement in a third country. In order to be able to provide the material help that was urgently needed at the time, such camps were set up spontaneously which is why refugee camps are often known as improvised tents today. As such, or given that they are built largely to assist the transnationally displaced persons, refugee camps are strategically placed in accessible areas such as close to borders, the country’s outskirts, or seldomly amongst host communities, so long as they are easily accessible to those in need.

²⁵ Dan Bulley, “Inside the Tent: Community and Government in Refugee Camps,” *Security Dialogue* 45, no. 1 (2014): 63.

²⁶ Adam Ramadan, “Spatialising the Refugee Camp,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38, no. 1 (2013): 65.

²⁷ Catherine Phuong, *The International Protection of Internally Displaced Persons*, vol. 38 (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 23.

²⁸ Phuong, *The International Protection of Internally Displaced Persons*, 23-25.

Noah's Ark and Refugee Camps

The Flood narrative recorded in the book of Genesis, in which God chose to destroy the world along with its inhabitants with epic flooding, except for Noah and his family, is very popular, especially among the Abrahamic religions and beyond. What has often intrigued scholars about this story is the Ark's design, reminiscent of a Titanic-like size when imagined in terms of its God's clearly expressed specifications. This became a strong ship that would withstand the flood or at least that would provide enough refuge for Noah, his family, and animal pairs during the flood. According to Genesis 6:14-16, God instructed that the dimensions of such an ark should be 300 cubits long (about 510 feet long), 50 cubits wide and 30 cubits high (about 50 feet above the ground). Also, God instructed Noah to build a roof for the ark and divide it into three decks. Consequently, scholars who have taken these measurements into account and have often commented that few, if any, wooden ships ever reached the size of this ark, which is why some have come to equate it with a Titanic-like size. In consideration of these measurements, one cannot rule out the logical possibility that it was big enough to allow its human occupants some privacy and freedom of movement. Not only that, but God also instructed Noah to store edible food in the ark, enough food for the ark's inhabitants to eat during the course of salvation, or at least until the flood crisis was over.

Although it is common in most receiving countries to erect tents or structures that are temporary, the idea has never been that such structures are temporary, but that they provide a temporary solution until permanent resettlement takes place. In other words, what is temporary in this respect is only the aid provided to the displaced, and certainly not the structure itself. This is to keep those who are or have been housed in these structures safe and well taken care of until their situation is satisfactorily resolved. Emphasis must be placed on the temporary nature of such residency rather than structures themselves for two reasons; one the residency is temporary to avoid a situation where victims of displacement live out the rest of their lives, or worse, die in the camp without being relocated. Regrettably, this has often been the reality for refugees and asylum-seekers in many countries, such as for Palestinian refugees when an elderly woman was killed during an Israeli operation in the Jenin refugee camp.²⁹ Secondly, the importance of permanent structures is to avoid a situation where fewer efforts are directed towards permanent dignified structures suitable to house human life, often composed of families. Unconsolably, as noted by Newman concerning the Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees, most refugee camps around the world consist of erected, undignified temporary structures such as tents or confined spaces unfit for human habitation.³⁰ Among many reasons contributing to undignified temporary structures is the fact that often times these settlements are established on an urgent basis responding to a crisis of some kind. As Crisp and Jacobsen have noted, the settlements built between 1994 and 1996 for Rwandan refugees in Tanzania and Zaire typify the worst type of overcrowded refugee camps in Africa.³¹ Perhaps, as in the case of Noah, it is necessary to build refugee camps while time permits, rather than being built in response to a humanitarian crisis. In this way, both time and resources are directed towards designing the camps to meet the highest possible standards of human living and nurturing community. Consequently, not only the simple provision of refugee camps is needed, but camps that are humanely built, can accommodate families, give a sense of privacy, hospitably provide for basic needs, and restore hope to the displaced.

²⁹ Rania Aburamadan, Claudia Trillo, and Busisiwe Chikomborero Ncube Makore, "Designing Refugees' Camps: Temporary Emergency Solutions, or Contemporary Paradigms of Incomplete Urban Citizenship? Insights from Al Za'atari," *City, Territory and Architecture* 7 (2020): 1–12; Sahera Bleibleh, Michael Vicente Perez, and Thaira Bleibleh, "Palestinian Refugee Women and the Jenin Refugee Camp: Reflections on Urbicide and the Dilemmas of Home in Exile," *Urban Studies* 56, no. 14 (2019): 2897–2916.

³⁰ Paul Newman, "Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees: A Voiceless, Undignified Existence," in *The Routledge Handbook of Refugees in India* (Routledge India, 2022), 628–41.

³¹ Jeff Crisp and Karen Jacobsen, "Refugee Camps Reconsidered," *Forced Migration Review* 3, no. 12 (1998): 27–30.

Refugees and Public Protests

South Africa, perhaps like many other countries in the world, has a history of public protests or strike action dating back to the early 1970s or any significant public protests falling within the anti-apartheid period (1912-1992) and even beyond. However, since the advent of democracy in 1994, these public actions have largely or increasingly taken on the character of protests against the provision of services, so much so that in one province or another, there is hardly a day that goes without a public protest. In fact, or at least as observed in Gençer, Fuzile and Mukhari, between January 2012 and May 2013 alone there were over 500 protests on the provision of services in Gauteng Province alone.³² Not surprisingly, the increasing scale of such protests has led scholars such as Ndebele to raise suspicions that: ‘widespread service delivery protests may soon take on an organizational character that will start off as discrete formation and then coalesce into a full-blown movement’.³³ Accordingly, with South Africa currently embroiled in myriad corruption scandals, the continued economic fallout and lack of policy implementation, it seems beyond a reasonable doubt that even more public frustration in the form of organized protests is on the horizon in South Africa. Consequently, it will not only be about the plight of ordinary people against a lack of services or, at best, against the political elite but, as has often been observed, somehow redirected to the presence of foreigners in South Africa, thereby threatening their security.

Although the increasing level of public protests may reflect societal awareness of or in line with Section 17 of the Constitution, which states that everyone has the right to protest, demonstrate, or petition, in recent years the exercise of such a right has often resulted in violent attacks on refugees, asylum seekers and broadly undocumented migrants. This means that what would often start as a public protest by disgruntled communities against under-service delivery often quickly takes the form of a protest not only against service delivery but also against refugees, particularly asylum-seekers, who would be left without any shadow of protection. Although this has often been condensed into xenophobic incidents as opposed to pure crime, the section below, focusing on xenophobia in South Africa, will attempt to address this aspect in its entirety. However, at this stage, it is important to problematize the absence of refugee camps in South Africa, the vulnerable state in which both refugees and asylum-seekers or undocumented migrants find themselves, particularly in the context of rising protests against the provision of public services. The importance of refugee camps, or the urgent need for them, in South Africa, is made starkly clear whenever there is an outbreak of service-delivery protests, which quickly take the form of violent groups targeting immigrants, particularly those of African descent. Furthermore, in recent years these tensions have intensified or coincided with the emergence of movements such as Operation Dudula, made up of local people in the name of eliminating foreign criminal groups and consequently demanding that all undocumented foreigners leave South Africa.³⁴ Eventually, the mere existence of such groupings fueled feelings of confrontation, with refugees, asylum-seekers, or migrants uniting in protests against what would appear to be the rising xenophobic violence.

Refugees and Xenophobia

At least since the dawn of democracy in 1994, South Africa has witnessed increasing levels of xenophobic attacks or crimes of a xenophobic nature against foreigners, particularly in provinces such as the Western Cape, KwaZulu Natal, Limpopo, Gauteng and Free State. As noted above, public

³² Alper Şükrü Gençer, “Politics of Social Assistance Provision: Contentious Politics and Child Support Grant Provision in South Africa” (Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2019), 60; Sello Mukhari, “Challenges of Service Delivery in South Africa: A Case of Gert Sibande District Municipality” (2019), 32; L. Fuzile, *Communication tools used by municipalities to communicate with external stakeholders: a case of King Sabatha Dalindyebo Municipality (KSD)* (Doctoral dissertation, Durban University of Technology, 2021).

³³ Njabulo S Ndebele, “Liberation Betrayed by Bloodshed,” *Social Dynamics* (Taylor & Francis, 2013), 113.

³⁴ Samuel Fikiri Cinini and Sazelo Mkhize, “Combatting Violence against African Foreign Nationals,” *South African Crime Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (2022): 2–87; Mondli Hlatshwayo, “South Africa Enters the Second Wave of Xenophobic Violence: The Rise of Anti-Immigrant Organisations in South Africa,” *Politikon* 50, no. 1 (2023): 1–17.

protests against the provision of services in South Africa have often morphed into or resulted in groups attacking undocumented migrants. As a result, there has been wild but unverifiable speculation or credible myths, widely accepted as reality, about factors contributing to xenophobia, or, so to speak, motivating attacks on foreigners. While such attacks have been classified as xenophobia, or simply termed xenophobic incidents, such misclassification can be challenged, as maintaining it has in many ways protected the perpetrators of atrocities from the might of the law. It may be necessary to pause here and briefly address the misclassification to uncover the sheer criminality behind attacks on refugees, asylum-seekers or undocumented migrants of African descent in South Africa. In many ways, xenophobia is limited to pure hatred of the other because of their cultural identity, but once that hatred manifests itself or causes real harm to its target, it becomes a crime. In other words, it may be unscrupulous to harbor xenophobic feelings in a sense of prejudice against foreigners, that alone is not a crime, but acting out such feelings becomes a punishable crime. Meaning, once xenophobia goes beyond prejudice against people's identities or unspoken hatred of foreigners, its manifestation through looting, assault, or killing and malicious destruction of property falls more into the realm of pure indictable crime than just xenophobia. Given that xenophobia is not considered a crime, those who commit xenophobia cannot be charged with xenophobic crimes as this category is not part of the common law crimes in the South African legal system. As a result, it becomes extremely difficult for law enforcement agencies to punish perpetrators of xenophobic violence, particularly those who have organized into a group.

Given the above highlighted escalation of xenophobia in South Africa, there is no doubt that there is an urgent need for the establishment of refugee camps as a number one priority among the government's efforts to protect both refugees and asylum-seekers or undocumented migrants. Furthermore, the ongoing armed conflict that erupted in multiple locations across the country of Sudan on April 15, 2023, leading to a humanitarian crisis for the civilian population, has increased the urgency of refugee camps not only in South Africa but across Africa.³⁵ In relation to South Africa, this urgent need was perhaps illustrated by the hundreds of refugees and asylum-seekers or undocumented migrants who took refuge at the Central Methodist Church in Cape Town's Greenmarket Square.³⁶ Accounts of this story detailed how every pew in this church was occupied, the aisles converted into bedrooms, while its altar had been converted into a makeshift dormitory with dozens of bed covers lying loose.³⁷ These numerous people had moved to this church after escaping arrest by the South African Police Services (SAPS) after hosting a sit-in outside the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Cape Town on October 8, 2019, to protest against xenophobic violence and challenges in obtaining legal documents.³⁸ Although churches and possibly numerous other centers can offer viable alternatives for refugees and asylum seekers, such settlements do not offer protection that would be offered in refugee camps, as such refugee camps remain an absolute need in South Africa. More than anything, this incident has shown how vulnerable foreign nationals are and has added another layer of urgency to the need for refugee camps, which will certainly provide much-needed security for refugees and asylum-seekers or undocumented migrants in South Africa.

³⁵ M. Osman and N. Booty, Sudan fighting: Street battles dash hopes of Eid ceasefire. (2023). BBC News. [online] 21 Apr. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-65344372>. [Accessed 22 Apr. 2023].

³⁶ B.L. Nowicki, Greenmarket Square refugees have split into 'two hostile groups'. [online] GroundUp News. Available at: <https://www.groundup.org.za/article/reverend-criticises-greenmarket-square-refugee-leadership/> [Accessed 22 Apr. 2023].

³⁷ J. Evans, *Cape Town church provides refuge to foreign nationals violently moved by cops*. [online] News24, 2019. Available at: <https://www.news24.com/news24/cape-town-church-provides-refuge-to-foreign-nationals-violently-moved-by-cops-20191030> [Accessed 16 Apr. 2023].

³⁸ R. Jacobs, *From despair to where? Portraits of stateless survival in Cape Town's unofficial refugee camp*. [online] Daily Maverick, 2021. Available at: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-07-08-from-despair-to-where-portraits-of-stateless-survival-in-cape-towns-unofficial-refugee-camp/>. [Accessed 16 Apr. 2023].

Establishing Refugee Camps in South Africa

Although the history of refugees and asylum-seekers in South Africa dates back to the 1980s and stretches well into the Apartheid era, refugees were not legally recognized, at least practically until 1993. Consequently, with the advent of democracy and the signing of the United Nations (UN) Refugee Conventions and the Organization of African Unity in 1994, the country became more attractive to migrants from neighboring countries, which in turn increased the influx of undocumented migrants. As a result, South Africa hosted a vast number of undocumented migrants or refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly from neighboring countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. With no official refugee camps or camp policy in South Africa, both refugees and asylum-seekers settle in or are taken in by the local communities. Unfortunately, the lack of refugee camps means that makeshift camps are spontaneously set up in response to xenophobic outbreaks or humanitarian crises. Following the outbreak of xenophobic violence in KwaZulu-Natal province in April 2015, some Good Samaritans in South Africa like Andrew and Rae Wartnaby commendably offered to house the refugees and asylum-seekers on their farm.³⁹ In addition, the local government in Durban also set up a refugee camp in Chatsworth which hosted about 5000 affected or displaced migrants but it was closed within a short time.⁴⁰

Although there are reasonable concerns about the possibility of refugee camps, from the perspective of refugees it has been noted that in reality, a camp could well provide a much safer environment than in cases where displaced persons settle themselves.⁴¹ The mere fact that the local government had to improvise and set up tents to house the displaced migrants temporarily underscores the urgent need for refugee camps to be set up at the national level in South Africa. This formally ensures that the national government will streamline the provision of basic needs and the management of services that displaced people desperately need. Consequently, or given that these trends are likely to continue for many years to come, it is important that not only South Africa, but all African countries consider establishing permanent refugee camps. As already emphasized, or analogous to the standard of Noah's Ark, not just ill-considered low-quality refugee camps, but camps composed of high-quality structures that reflect a conscious goal of housing human families. In other words, such camps should not only offer refugees shelter but have all the necessary infrastructure, giving them a sense of security where basic necessities such as food, water, medicine and all the administrative services needed for their resettlement are provided. Furthermore, judging by how today's world is characterized by ever-increasing corruption, rampant global conflicts such as the Russo-Ukrainian War, and African migration trends due to declining political leadership, there is no doubt that humanitarian crises continue to shake the world in unprecedented ways. These are compelling reasons why South Africa and all other African countries should consider establishing refugee camps. This not only protects migrants from being victims of violent situations but is also consistent with the aims of the *Missio Dei* as it relates to the full redemption of the African people.

CONCLUSION

Wars, persecutions, and gross human rights violations around the world continue to force millions of people to leave their countries of birth and seek refuge abroad. With these violent circumstances leading to displacement reaching alarming proportions in every country in the world, especially in Africa, there is an urgent need for countries like South Africa to seriously consider establishing refugee camps. This need is perhaps underlined by the fact that the absence of refugee camps in South Africa has led to numerous refugees and asylum-seekers becoming victims of domestic violence in the form of xenophobia and public protests. Given that such structures are intended for human habitation, it is

³⁹ C. Ndaliso, Refugees settle on KZN farm. [online] IOL, 2015. <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/kwazulu-natal/refugees-settle-on-kzn-farm-1882436> [Accessed 12 May 2023].

⁴⁰ V. Mkhize, Inside Durban's refugee camp. [online] ewn.co.za, 2015. Available at: <https://ewn.co.za/2015/04/17/Inside-Durbans-refugee-camp> [Accessed 12 May 2023]; A. Essa, Africa: Displaced Face Uncertain Future As South Africa Camp Closes. allAfrica.com, 2015. <https://allafrica.com/stories/201506300155.html> [Accessed 12 May 2023];

⁴¹ Crisp and Jacobsen, "Refugee Camps Reconsidered," 3.

the view of this paper that, as with Noah's Ark, there should be watertight guidelines and standards to ensure the quality of such storage structures. Although the discourse on refugee camps is political in nature, it is not only about alleviating suffering or settling displaced people but also about saving all human lives in the spirit of the *Missio Dei*. Consequently, this paper successfully drew on the framework of the *missio politica* and called for the urgent establishment of refugee camps not only in South Africa but in all African countries, in line with the main objectives of the *Missio Dei*. In this way, the main goals of the *Missio Dei*, especially with regard to total redemption, are to be achieved at the continental level.

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