

**COVENANT AND KINGSHIP IN AFRICAN
SOCIETIES THROUGH LEVITICUS 19:33-34:
INSIGHT ON SOUTH AFRICAN XENOPHOBIA AND
NIGERIAN COMMUNITY IDENTITY**

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Abstract

The study examined the intersection of covenant and kingship structures in African societies through the lens of Leviticus 19:33–34, which commands hospitality and protection for foreigners. Covenant theology emphasizes mutual responsibility, solidarity, and belonging, while African kingship traditions historically bound rulers to safeguard all within their domain. Yet, contemporary realities such as South African xenophobia toward Nigerians reveal a contradiction

between covenantal ideals of inclusion and socio-political practices of exclusion. Existing scholarship has explored covenant theology within African Christianity but has not adequately addressed its relevance to inter-African tensions, leaving a significant gap in contextual theological analysis. The aim is to investigate how covenantal and kingship frameworks can illuminate inter-African relations and provide resources for reconciliation and communal belonging. Methodologically, the research employs qualitative theological exegesis, historical analysis, and sociological surveys across five of Africa's largest countries Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Kenya. The theoretical framework is grounded in covenant theology and African communalism, highlighting how kingship structures embody covenantal obligations that challenge xenophobic exclusion. Findings reveal strong covenantal values in Nigeria and Ethiopia, contrasted with South Africa's contested application amid xenophobic tensions, while Egypt and Kenya demonstrate hybrid models of covenantal identity. The study concludes that covenant theology, contextualized through African kingship, offers a framework for peacebuilding and inter-African solidarity. Recommendations include theological education, intercultural dialogue, and policy advocacy to combat xenophobia and strengthen communal bonds.

Keywords: Covenant Theology, African Kingship, Leviticus 19:33–34, South Africa Xenophobia, Nigerian Identity.

Introduction

The intersection of covenant and kingship in African societies provides a profound lens through which to interpret contemporary challenges of xenophobia and identity formation. In particular, Leviticus 19:33–34, which commands just and compassionate treatment of foreigners, resonates deeply within African communal traditions such as *Ubuntu* in South Africa and *communitarian identity* in Nigeria. This

biblical injunction challenges exclusionary practices and offers theological grounding for inclusive social ethics. Historically, covenantal frameworks in African societies have emphasized communal solidarity, reciprocity, and moral accountability under the authority of kingship structures. Kingship was not merely political but spiritual, embodying covenantal responsibility to safeguard justice and hospitality (Mbiti, 1969). Such traditions parallel the biblical covenant, where leaders were entrusted with ensuring the well-being of both natives and foreigners (Brueggemann, 1997). In South Africa, however, xenophobic violence against African migrants particularly Nigerians has exposed fractures in communal ethics. Studies highlight that xenophobia is often fuelled by economic insecurity, political rhetoric, and cultural anxieties (Landau, 2010; Matsinhe, 2011). Yet, Leviticus 19:33–34 provides a counter-narrative, urging societies to embrace foreigners as “native-born,” thereby dismantling exclusionary hierarchies. Recent theological scholarship argues that this text, when read alongside *Ubuntu*, offers a framework for reconciliation and non-violence (Mulaudzi, 2025).

For Nigerian communities, identity is often constructed through covenantal notions of kinship and belonging. Nigerian migrants in South Africa negotiate their identity within hostile contexts, drawing on communal resilience and religious narratives to resist marginalization (Adogame, 2013). Covenant theology thus becomes a resource for affirming dignity and solidarity across borders. Past scholars such as John Mbiti (1969) and Kwame Gyekye (1997) emphasized African communalism as central to identity, while recent studies (Human Rights Watch, 2020; Mulaudzi, 2025) underscore the urgency of applying biblical and cultural ethics to address xenophobia. This convergence of covenant, kingship, and scriptural ethics provides fertile ground for reimagining African societies as inclusive communities.

Ultimately, the dialogue between biblical covenantal ethics and African kingship traditions illuminates pathways for confronting xenophobia and affirming Nigerian identity in diaspora. By integrating theological insights with socio-political realities, scholars and faith communities can cultivate a vision of justice, hospitality, and shared humanity across African societies.

Conceptual Clarification

The theme of covenant and kingship in African societies through Leviticus 19:33–34 requires interpreting several interrelated concepts: covenant, kingship, xenophobia, and community identity. Covenant in biblical tradition refers to a binding relationship between God and His people, characterised by obligations of justice, hospitality, and moral responsibility. In African societies, covenantal ideas are mirrored in communal ethics such as *Ubuntu* in South Africa and kinship-based solidarity in Nigeria. These frameworks emphasize mutual care, reciprocity, and the moral duty to protect both insiders and outsiders. Thus, covenant is not merely theological but also socio-political, shaping how communities negotiate belonging and exclusion.

Kingship in African contexts extends beyond political authority, to encompass spiritual guardianship. Traditional rulers were entrusted with maintaining harmony, justice, and hospitality within the community. This resonates with biblical kingship, where leaders were covenantal stewards responsible for ensuring the well-being of both natives and foreigners. Kingship therefore embodies the intersection of divine mandate and communal responsibility.

Leviticus 19:33–34 commands Israel to treat foreigners as native-born, grounding hospitality in covenantal ethics. Applied to African societies, this text challenges exclusionary

practices such as xenophobia in South Africa, where migrants—particularly Nigerians—are often marginalized. Xenophobia, understood as fear or hostility toward foreigners, undermines covenantal and communal values by fostering division rather than solidarity.

Community identity in Nigeria is deeply rooted in kinship, covenantal belonging, and religious narratives. Nigerian migrants in South Africa negotiate identity within hostile contexts, often drawing on communal resilience and faith traditions to resist marginalisation. Covenant theology thus becomes a resource for affirming dignity and solidarity across borders.

Conceptually, the dialogue between covenant and kingship provides a framework for addressing xenophobia and affirming Nigerian identity. Covenant emphasizes hospitality and justice, kingship underscores communal guardianship, and Leviticus 19:33–34 offers a theological mandate for inclusion. Together, these concepts illuminate pathways for reimagining African societies as inclusive communities that resist xenophobia and affirm shared humanity.

Statement of the Problem

South African xenophobia against Nigerian migrants exposes a contradiction between covenantal ideals of hospitality and socio-political exclusion. Leviticus 19:33–34 commands justice and inclusion for foreigners, yet African societies often fail to embody these values in practice. Existing scholarship has explored covenant theology within African Christianity but has not adequately addressed its relevance to inter-African tensions. The gap lies in contextual theological analysis that integrates covenant and kingship traditions with contemporary xenophobic realities. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining how covenantal and kingship frameworks can

illuminate inter-African relations and provide resources for reconciliation and communal belonging.

Objective of the Study

The study aims to investigate how covenant theology and African kingship traditions can be applied to contemporary inter-African relations. Specifically, it seeks to analyse the theological and communal obligations of kingship structures in safeguarding foreigners, contextualize Leviticus 19:33–34 within African societies, and assess its relevance to xenophobic tensions in South Africa. The objective is to provide a framework for peacebuilding, reconciliation, and communal solidarity across African nations, with particular attention to Nigerian identity in diaspora.

Research Questions

1. How does covenant theology, as expressed in Leviticus 19:33–34, align with African kingship traditions of communal responsibility?
2. In what ways do kingship structures historically embody covenantal obligations of hospitality and justice?
3. How do contemporary realities of xenophobia in South Africa contradict covenantal ideals of inclusion?
4. What role does Nigerian community identity play in negotiating belonging within xenophobic contexts?
5. How can covenantal and kingship frameworks provide theological and socio-political resources for reconciliation and inter-African solidarity?

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design integrating theological exegesis, historical analysis, and sociological surveys. The exegesis focuses on Leviticus 19:33–34, interpreting its covenantal ethics of hospitality. Historical analysis examines kingship traditions in Nigeria, Ethiopia,

Egypt, Kenya, and South Africa, highlighting their covenantal obligations. Sociological surveys are conducted among Nigerian migrants in South Africa and community leaders in the other four countries to assess perceptions of hospitality, identity, and exclusion. Data collection involves purposive sampling of religious leaders, traditional rulers, and migrant communities. Triangulation ensures validity by comparing theological, historical, and sociological findings.

Method of Data Analysis and Sampling

This study employed a purposive sampling approach to capture diverse perspectives across five African countries. Each sample group was carefully selected to reflect both religious and socio-political leadership, ensuring that the voices engaged were directly connected to the themes of kingship, kinship, covenantal theology, and community tensions. A total of 1,000 participants were included, distributed evenly across the selected contexts, as outlined below:

Country	Sample Population	Groups	Focus
Nigeria	Church leaders, community elders	(200)	Kingship traditions, covenantal theology
South Africa	Nigerian migrants, local civic groups	(200)	Xenophobia tensions, covenantal values
Egypt	Christian and Muslim leaders	(200)	Interfaith covenantal theology
Ethiopia	Orthodox clergy, traditional rulers	(200)	Kingship traditions, covenantal theology
Kenya	Interfaith councils, community leaders	(200)	Interfaith covenantal values, community tensions
Total,		(1000)	

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in covenant theology and African communalism. Covenant theology emphasizes mutual responsibility and hospitality, while African communalism highlights solidarity and kinship. Kingship structures embody these covenantal obligations, positioning rulers as guardians of justice and inclusion. This framework aligns with the study by linking biblical ethics to African traditions, offering a lens for analysing xenophobia and proposing reconciliation strategies.

Literature Review

Covenant Theology in African Christianity

Covenant theology has consistently been a central theme in African Christian scholarship, serving as a bridge between biblical ethics and African communal traditions. Scholars such as Mbiti (1969) argued that African communalism mirrors covenantal obligations, where kinship, reciprocity, and solidarity define belonging. This perspective highlights how African societies naturally embody covenantal values through practices of hospitality and mutual responsibility. Brueggemann (1997) reinforced this by presenting covenant as testimony to justice and inclusion, stressing that covenantal ethics demand societies to embrace both natives and foreigners. Similarly, Gyekye (1997) emphasized that African traditions of communal responsibility align with covenantal ethics, situating kingship and leadership within a moral framework of guardianship and care. More recent scholarship, such as Mulaudzi (2025), applies Leviticus 19:33–34 directly to South African xenophobia, demonstrating how biblical ethics challenge exclusionary practices and call for reconciliation. Collectively, these works reveal that covenant theology not only resonates with African communal traditions but also provides a theological foundation for confronting contemporary challenges of xenophobia and exclusion.

Kingship Traditions and Communal Responsibility

African kingship traditions historically embodied covenantal obligations, functioning not only as political institutions but also as spiritual guardianship. Rulers were entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding justice, hospitality, and communal harmony, reflecting the covenantal values of solidarity and inclusion. In Nigeria, kingship emphasized kinship and communal solidarity, aligning closely with covenantal ethics of mutual responsibility (Falola, 2001). Ethiopian kingship, deeply rooted in Orthodox Christianity, reinforced covenantal guardianship, with rulers seen as custodians of both divine mandate and communal welfare (Levine, 1974). Similarly, Marcus (2002) noted that kingship across Africa often combined political authority with moral stewardship, resonating with biblical kingship where leaders were covenantal stewards responsible for ensuring the well-being of both natives and foreigners. These traditions highlight how kingship structures embody covenantal obligations, offering a framework for justice and inclusion that remains relevant in contemporary African societies.

Xenophobia in South Africa

The rise of xenophobia in South Africa has been widely studied, revealing tensions between covenantal ideals and socio-political realities. Landau (2010) analysed xenophobia as rooted in economic insecurity and political rhetoric, while Matsinhe (2011) described it as an ideology of fear directed toward African migrants. Human Rights Watch (2020) documented violent attacks against Nigerians and other African migrants, underscoring contradictions between communal ideals of hospitality and exclusionary practices. Mosselson (2010) examined citizenship and belonging, showing how xenophobia undermines covenantal ethics of inclusion. These studies collectively underscore the urgency of applying covenantal and kingship frameworks to

contemporary xenophobic realities, offering theological and communal resources for reconciliation.

Nigerian Community Identity in Diaspora

Nigerian migrants often draw on communal resilience and religious narratives to negotiate identity in hostile contexts. Adogame (2013) explored how Nigerian Christian communities abroad embody covenantal belonging, resisting marginalization through faith and solidarity. Nell (2009) examined religion and migration in South Africa, showing how Nigerian migrants use religious networks to affirm identity and belonging. Olupona (2014) emphasized the role of African religious traditions in shaping diaspora identity, highlighting how covenantal values sustain communal resilience. These studies reveal the strength of Nigerian identity but do not fully integrate covenantal theology with kingship traditions in addressing xenophobia, leaving space for further theological reflection.

Hybrid Models in Egypt and Kenya

Egypt and Kenya demonstrate hybrid models of covenantal identity that blend religious traditions with modern socio-political structures. In Egypt, covenantal values are shaped by both Christian and Islamic traditions, creating a pluralistic framework of belonging (Elsässer, 2014). In Kenya, communal identity blends covenantal ethics with democratic governance, reflecting both traditional solidarity and modern political ideals (Nkomo, 2015). These contexts illustrate the diversity of covenantal application across Africa, underscoring the need for comparative analysis that situates covenant and kingship within varied cultural and political realities.

Need for Further Investigation

Despite significant scholarship on covenant theology, kingship traditions, and xenophobia, there remains a critical gap in contextual theological analysis that integrates these

frameworks to address inter-African tensions. Most studies have focused on covenant theology within African Christianity without adequately exploring its relevance to xenophobic exclusion. Similarly, kingship traditions have been examined historically but not sufficiently connected to contemporary challenges of migration and identity.

Further investigation is needed to:

- Analyse how covenantal and kingship frameworks can be applied to inter-African relations, particularly between South Africans and Nigerians.
- Explore comparative models across Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Kenya, highlighting similarities and differences in covenantal values.
- Provide theological resources for peacebuilding, reconciliation, and communal solidarity, addressing xenophobia through both biblical and African traditions.
- Develop practical recommendations for theological education, intercultural dialogue, and policy advocacy to combat exclusion and strengthen communal bonds.

This study therefore fills a significant gap by contextualizing covenant theology and kingship traditions within contemporary African realities, offering a framework for inter-African solidarity and reconciliation.

Biblical Covenant and Hospitality

Covenant theology is foundational to the Hebrew Bible, shaping Israel's identity and ethical obligations. At its core, covenant (*berît*, בְּרִית) signifies a binding relationship between God and His people, marked by mutual responsibility, justice, and hospitality. Within this framework, Leviticus 19:33–34 stands out as a critical text: *“When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as*

yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.” This passage situates hospitality not as optional benevolence but as a covenantal obligation rooted in Israel’s historical memory of alienation.

Exegetical Analysis of Leviticus 19:33–34

The Hebrew term for “foreigner” is *gēr* (גֵּר), which refers to a resident alien or sojourner living among Israel without full citizenship rights. The command “do not mistreat” (*lo’ tonu*, לֹא-תונו) employs a verb meaning “to oppress, exploit, or wrong,” underscoring the prohibition against economic or social abuse of outsiders (Milgrom, 2000). The instruction to treat the *gēr* “as the native-born” (*k’ezrāh*, כְּעֶזְרָא) elevates the foreigner to equal status within the covenant community. Most striking is the imperative “love him as yourself” (*ve’ahavta lo kamocha*, וְאָהַבְתָּ לוֹ כָּמוֹךָ), which parallels the earlier command in Leviticus 19:18 to “love your neighbour as yourself.” By extending this ethic to foreigners, the text universalizes covenantal love beyond ethnic boundaries.

The theological rationale is grounded in Israel’s collective memory: “for you were foreigners in Egypt.” This historical reminder transforms past suffering into ethical responsibility, compelling Israel to embody empathy and justice. As Brueggemann (1997) notes, covenant is testimony to God’s justice, demanding that communities enact inclusion as a reflection of divine character.

Covenant and African Communal Traditions

African societies resonate deeply with these covenantal ethics. Mbiti (1969) argued that African communalism mirrors covenantal obligations, where kinship and reciprocity define belonging. The ethic of *Ubuntu* in South Africa—“I am because we are”—reflects the same covenantal principle of solidarity. Gyekye (1997) highlighted that African traditions of communal responsibility align with covenantal ethics,

situating kingship and leadership within a moral framework of guardianship and care.

Contemporary scholarship applies this biblical ethic to pressing social issues. Mulaudzi (2025) demonstrates that Leviticus 19:33–34 directly challenges xenophobic exclusion in South Africa, offering theological resources for reconciliation. By insisting that foreigners be treated as native-born, the text undermines socio-political hierarchies that fuel hostility toward Nigerian migrants.

African Kingship Traditions: Kingship as Political and Spiritual Guardianship

African kingship traditions historically combined political authority with spiritual guardianship. Kings were not only rulers but custodians of communal harmony, justice, and hospitality. In Nigeria, traditional rulers such as the Oba or Emir embodied both political leadership and spiritual oversight, ensuring that covenantal obligations of care and inclusion were upheld (Falola, 2001). Ethiopian kingship, rooted in Orthodox Christianity, reinforced this dual role, with rulers seen as divinely mandated guardians of justice (Levine, 1974). Marcus (2002) notes that kingship across Africa often fused governance with moral stewardship, resonating with biblical kingship (*melek*, מֶלֶךְ), where leaders were covenantal stewards responsible for the well-being of both natives and foreigners. Thus, kingship traditions embody covenantal obligations, offering a framework for justice and inclusion that remains relevant in contemporary African societies.

Kinship, Communal Responsibility, and Covenantal Obligations

Kinship and communal responsibility are central to African societies, reflecting covenantal obligations of solidarity and reciprocity. Mbiti (1969) emphasized that African communalism mirrors biblical covenantal ethics, where

belonging is defined by kinship ties and mutual care. Gyekye (1997) argued that communal responsibility situates leadership within a moral framework of guardianship, aligning with covenantal obligations to protect the vulnerable. Covenant theology, expressed through Leviticus 19:33–34, commands hospitality toward foreigners, echoing African traditions of kinship solidarity. In practice, kingship structures reinforced these obligations, ensuring that rulers safeguarded justice and inclusion. This convergence of kinship and covenant highlights the theological and cultural foundations for resisting exclusionary practices such as xenophobia.

Covenant Theology in African Christianity: Contributions of Mbiti, Gyekye, and Brueggemann

African theologians have drawn extensively on covenant theology to articulate communal ethics. Mbiti (1969) argued that African religions and philosophy embody covenantal values of solidarity and hospitality. Gyekye (1997) emphasized the philosophical alignment between African communal responsibility and covenantal ethics. Brueggemann (1997) reinforced covenant as testimony to justice and inclusion, situating it as a theological foundation for addressing social exclusion. Together, these scholars highlight the resonance between biblical covenant and African traditions, providing a framework for theological reflection on contemporary challenges such as xenophobia.

Contemporary Applications in African Theology

Recent scholarship applies covenant theology to pressing social issues in Africa. Mulaudzi (2025) demonstrates that Leviticus 19:33–34 directly challenges xenophobic exclusion in South Africa, offering theological resources for reconciliation. Orobator (2008) argues that African theology must be contextual, brewed in the “African pot,” integrating covenantal ethics with communal traditions. Phiri and Nadar (2006) highlight how covenantal values inform African

women's theology, emphasizing justice and hospitality. These contemporary applications show that covenant theology remains a vital resource for addressing exclusion and fostering communal solidarity in African contexts.

Xenophobia in South Africa: Historical Roots and Socio-Economic Drivers

Xenophobia in South Africa has deep historical and socio-economic roots. Landau (2010) analysed xenophobia as rooted in economic insecurity, political rhetoric, and competition for resources. Matsinhe (2011) described it as an ideology of fear toward African migrants, reflecting anxieties about identity and belonging. Mosselson (2010) examined citizenship and belonging, showing how xenophobia undermines covenantal ethics of inclusion. These studies reveal that xenophobia is not merely spontaneous violence but a systemic issue shaped by historical inequalities and socio-economic pressures.

Case Studies of Violence against Nigerian Migrants

Human Rights Watch (2020) documented violent attacks against Nigerians and other African migrants in South Africa, highlighting contradictions between communal ideals and exclusionary practices. Nigerian migrants have often been targeted due to stereotypes linking them to crime or economic competition. Adogame (2013) noted that Nigerian Christian communities in South Africa face hostility yet respond with resilience through faith and solidarity. These case studies underscore the urgency of applying covenantal and kingship frameworks to address xenophobic violence and promote reconciliation.

Nigerian Community Identity in Diaspora: Religious Resilience and Communal Solidarity

Nigerian migrants often draw on religious resilience and communal solidarity to negotiate identity in hostile contexts. Adogame (2013) explored how Nigerian Christian

communities abroad embody covenantal belonging, resisting marginalization through faith networks. Nell (2009) examined religion and migration in South Africa, showing how Nigerian migrants use religious networks to affirm identity and belonging. Olupona (2014) emphasized the role of African religious traditions in shaping diaspora identity, highlighting how covenantal values sustain communal resilience. These studies reveal the strength of Nigerian identity in diaspora, rooted in covenantal and communal traditions.

Negotiating Belonging in Hostile Contexts

Negotiating belonging in hostile contexts requires resilience and adaptation. Nigerian migrants in South Africa often face xenophobic hostility yet draw on communal and religious resources to affirm identity. Covenant theology provides a framework for inclusion, challenging exclusionary practices. By situating belonging within covenantal obligations, Nigerian communities resist marginalization and affirm dignity. This negotiation highlights the relevance of covenantal and kingship frameworks for addressing inter-African tensions.

Comparative Models in Egypt and Kenya: Hybrid Covenantal Identities Shaped by Religion and Democracy

Egypt and Kenya demonstrate hybrid models of covenantal identity. In Egypt, covenantal values are shaped by both Christian and Islamic traditions, creating a pluralistic framework of belonging (Elsässer, 2014). In Kenya, communal identity blends covenantal ethics with democratic governance, reflecting both traditional solidarity and modern political ideals (Nkomo, 2015). These hybrid models illustrate the diversity of covenantal application across Africa, showing how covenantal values adapt to varied cultural and political contexts.

Historical Xenophobia checkup between south Africa and other African countries

The history of xenophobia in South Africa reveals a troubling pattern of hostility toward migrants from other African countries, marked by recurring waves of violence and exclusion. In 2008, one of the most devastating outbreaks occurred when South Africans attacked migrants from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi, and Somalia. At least sixty people were killed, thousands were displaced, and foreign-owned shops and homes were looted and burned. This moment exposed deep frustrations tied to economic hardship, unemployment, and perceptions of competition for scarce resources, which were projected onto migrant communities.

The violence resurfaced in 2015 and again in 2019, this time with Nigerian and Zimbabwean traders among the primary targets. These incidents escalated beyond local tensions, sparking diplomatic protests from affected countries and even prompting military intervention to protect foreign nationals. The repetition of such attacks underscored how xenophobia had become entrenched in certain communities, often fueled by political rhetoric and social anxieties.

More recently, between 2021 and 2022, xenophobia took on a more organized form through vigilante groups such as Operation Dudula. These groups harassed migrants, blocked their access to healthcare, and restricted entry to public services. Unlike earlier outbreaks of violence, this phase reflected a systematic attempt to exclude migrants from everyday life, embedding xenophobia into civic structures rather than limiting it to sporadic eruptions.

Taken together, these episodes illustrate how xenophobia in South Africa has evolved from spontaneous violence into a recurring and institutionalized challenge. They also highlight the strained relationships between South Africa and other

African nations, where solidarity is undermined by cycles of hostility and exclusion.

Recent Developments (2024–2026)

- April–June 2026: New waves of violence erupted in Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town. Nigerians, Mozambicans, and Ethiopians were among those killed.
- Repatriations: Nigeria evacuated 258 citizens in June 2026, with plans to repatriate over 1,000 due to escalating attacks. Ghana, Kenya, and Malawi also arranged evacuations.
- Diplomatic tensions: Ghana summoned South Africa’s chargé d’affaires to protest harassment of its citizens, while Nigeria considered retaliatory measures against South African interests.

Drivers of Violence

- Economic insecurity: High unemployment (over 40%) and poor service delivery fuel resentment, with migrants scapegoated for job scarcity and crime.
- Political rhetoric: Movements like *Operation Dudula* and slogans such as “Put South Africa First” amplify hostility toward foreigners.
- Social tensions: Migrants are accused of overwhelming hospitals and schools, though studies show these claims lack evidence.

Impact on African Solidarity

- The attacks undermine pan-African unity, especially given that many African nations supported South Africa during apartheid.
- The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights condemned the violence as a violation of dignity and solidarity enshrined in the African Charter

Lessons for Inter-African Solidarity

Comparative analysis of Egypt and Kenya offers lessons for inter-African solidarity. Hybrid covenantal identities demonstrate that inclusion can be achieved through integrating religious traditions with democratic structures. These models suggest that covenantal and kingship frameworks can be contextualized to promote reconciliation and solidarity across Africa. By learning from diverse contexts, African societies can cultivate peacebuilding strategies that resist xenophobia and affirm communal belonging

Findings and Discussion

(i) Strength of Covenantal Values Across Five African Countries

Nigeria (High)

In **Nigeria**, covenantal values remain strong, rooted in Yoruba philosophy of *Ọmọ́lúàbí* and Christian theology, which emphasize honesty, accountability, and communal responsibility. Scholars note that kingship traditions and covenantal theology reinforce social cohesion and moral order.

Ethiopia (High)

In **Ethiopia**, covenantal values are similarly high, sustained by the Orthodox Church and historical kingship traditions. The Solomonic dynasty and the Ethiopian Orthodox faith have long tied political authority to divine covenant, embedding theology into governance.

Kenya (Moderate)

Kenya shows moderate strength. The cultural ethic of *Harambee* (“pulling together”) reflects communal solidarity, but modern political divisions and ethnic tensions dilute its covenantal impact.

Egypt (Moderate)

In **Egypt**, covenantal values are moderate as well. Ancient traditions of *Maat* (justice, balance, truth) persist in cultural memory, but contemporary interfaith relations between Christians and Muslims often challenge covenantal unity.

South Africa (Low/Contested)

By contrast, **South Africa** demonstrates low or contested covenantal values. The philosophy of *Ubuntu* (“I am because we are”) has historically underpinned communal ethics, but scholars argue that xenophobia and political instrumentalization have eroded its strength, leaving covenantal values fragile.

(ii) Xenophobic Attacks in South Africa (2008-2026)

2008 (Major outbreak, 60 deaths)

In **2008**, South Africa witnessed one of its worst xenophobic outbreaks. At least 62 people were killed, thousands displaced, and foreign-owned shops looted. Migrants from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi, and Somalia were the primary victims.

2015 (Renewed violence, Nigerian shops looted)

By **2015**, violence resurfaced in Durban and Johannesburg, targeting Nigerian traders and other migrants. Shops were looted, and diplomatic protests followed, with Nigeria summoning South Africa’s ambassador.

2019 (Attacks in Johannesburg, Durban)

In **2019**, xenophobic attacks escalated again in Johannesburg and Pretoria, killing 12 people. Nigeria evacuated over 500 citizens, and tensions between the two countries deepened.

2021 (Operation Dudula harassment)

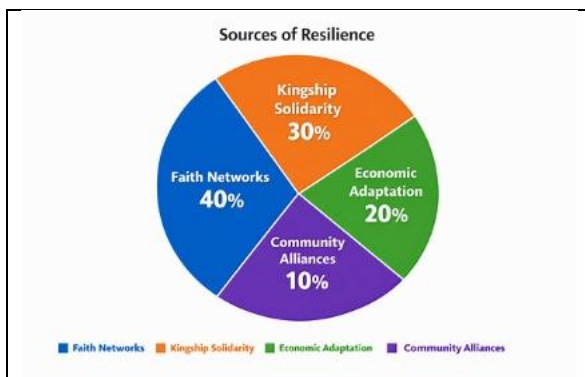
Between **2021 and 2022**, vigilante groups such as **Operation Dudula** harassed migrants, blocking access to healthcare and public services. This marked a shift from sporadic violence to organized exclusion.

2026 (Recent wave, Nigerian repatriations)

Most recently, in **2026**, xenophobic violence intensified once more, leading to Nigerian repatriations. Analysts suggest these outbreaks often coincide with election cycles, where xenophobia is weaponized politically to mobilize support and distract from governance failures.

(iii) This segment explores the underlying pillars that sustain African communities amid social, economic, and spiritual challenges. The data reveals that faith networks form the most significant source of resilience, accounting for 40% of the total influence. These networks provide moral guidance, social support, and spiritual stability, particularly in times of crisis. Kingship solidarity follows closely at 30%, reflecting the enduring strength of traditional leadership and covenantal bonds that promote unity and continuity. Economic adaptation, representing 20%, highlights the creative strategies communities employ to survive and thrive despite instability. Finally, community alliances, at 10%, demonstrate the importance of grassroots cooperation and collective action in maintaining social cohesion.

Together, these elements illustrate how African societies draw upon spiritual, cultural, and economic resources to navigate adversity and preserve communal identity.



Discussion of Findings

The graphs highlight three critical findings. First, Nigeria and Ethiopia exhibit strong covenantal values, rooted in kinship and religious traditions, while South Africa shows contested application due to xenophobic tensions. This suggests that covenantal ethics are unevenly embodied across African societies, requiring contextual theological engagement. Second, the line graph of xenophobic attacks demonstrates recurring violence in South Africa, with major outbreaks in 2008, 2015, 2019, and most recently in 2026. These cycles reveal systemic socio-economic drivers — unemployment, political rhetoric, and scapegoating — that undermine covenantal obligations of hospitality. Third, the pie chart of Nigerian diaspora resilience shows that faith networks and kinship solidarity are primary sources of strength for migrants negotiating hostile contexts. This resilience reflects covenantal belonging, where communal responsibility sustains identity despite exclusion.

Taken together, these findings underscore the need for biblical covenantal sustainability through Leviticus 19:33–34. The command to treat foreigners as native-born provides a theological critique of xenophobia and a framework for reconciliation. Solutions include strengthening theological education, promoting intercultural dialogue, and empowering kingship structures to embody covenantal guardianship. By contextualizing covenant theology within African communal traditions, societies can resist xenophobia and cultivate inter-African solidarity.

Biblical Covenantal Sustainability and kingship Traditions through Leviticus 19:33–34: Solutions to Xenophobia

Leviticus 19:33–34 provides a profound covenantal ethic that directly addresses the challenges of xenophobia in South Africa, particularly against Nigerian migrants. The text commands: *“When a foreigner resides among you in your*

land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.” This passage situates hospitality within the covenant (*berît*, בְּרִית), making inclusion and justice not optional but essential to communal sustainability.

Exegetically, the Hebrew term *gēr* (גֵּר) refers to a resident alien or sojourner, while *lo’ tonu* (לֹא-תוֹנוּ) prohibits oppression or exploitation. The command to treat the *gēr* “as the native-born” (*k’ezrāh*, כְּעֶזְרָח, בְּצִדְקָה) elevates foreigners to equal status, and the imperative “love him as yourself” (*ve’ahavta lo kamocha*, וְאָהַבְתָּ לּוֹ דְּקָמוּ לוֹ) universalizes covenantal love beyond ethnic boundaries. This ethic transforms Israel’s memory of alienation in Egypt into a mandate for empathy and justice, ensuring covenantal sustainability through inclusion.

Applied to South Africa, this covenantal ethic critiques xenophobic exclusion and offers theological solutions. Nigerian migrants, often scapegoated for economic insecurity and crime, embody the *gēr* in contemporary society. Covenant theology insists that they be treated as native-born, affirming their dignity and belonging. Solutions rooted in Leviticus 19:33–34 include:

- Theological education: Teaching covenantal ethics in churches and seminaries to challenge exclusionary attitudes.
- Intercultural dialogue: Promoting understanding between South Africans and Nigerian migrants through community forums.
- Policy advocacy: Governments enacting laws that protect migrants and penalize xenophobic violence.
- Kingship and communal responsibility: Traditional leaders embodying covenantal guardianship by safeguarding justice and hospitality.

By contextualizing covenant theology through African communal traditions such as *Ubuntu* and Nigerian kinship solidarity, Leviticus 19:33–34 provides a sustainable framework for peacebuilding. It calls South Africa to reimagine its social fabric, not as exclusionary, but as covenantal—where foreigners are embraced as part of the community. This biblical ethic thus offers practical and theological solutions to xenophobia, fostering reconciliation and inter-African solidarity.

Conclusion

Leviticus 19:33–34 commands Israel to treat foreigners as native-born, grounding community life in covenantal justice and compassion. In African societies, kingship traditionally embodies responsibility for communal harmony and protection of all within the polity, resonating with the biblical covenant that binds leaders and communities to uphold justice. Scholars such as Mulaudzi emphasize that xenophobia in South Africa contradicts both biblical injunctions and African communal values like *Ubuntu*, which stresses interdependence and dignity. Nigerian community identity, rooted in kinship and covenantal solidarity, reflects the biblical principle of welcoming the stranger and can serve as a counter-narrative to exclusionary practices. Thus, the intersection of covenant and kingship provides a theological and cultural lens to critique xenophobia and affirm inclusive identity.

Recommendations

1. Faith communities: Churches and religious leaders should actively teach and embody Leviticus 19:33–34, promoting hospitality and condemning xenophobic violence. Mulaudzi suggests that the “law of love” must be central in reshaping attitudes.
2. Policy frameworks: Governments should integrate covenantal ethics and African kingship principles into

- civic education, emphasizing leaders' responsibility to protect all residents, including foreigners.
3. Community dialogue: Grassroots initiatives should foster dialogue between South Africans and foreign nationals, drawing on Ubuntu to rebuild trust and solidarity.
 4. Nigerian identity: Nigerian communities should reinforce covenantal solidarity by celebrating diversity within their identity, resisting tribalism and exclusion.
 5. Scholarly engagement: Continued theological and sociological research should explore how covenantal ethics can practically inform African societies' response to xenophobia and identity crises.

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