Christians as ‘resident and visiting aliens’: implications of the exhortations to the \( \text{παροίκοι} \) and \( \text{παρεπιδήμοι} \) in 1 Peter for the church in South Africa

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ABSTRACT
A socio-historic interpretation of the labelling of the addressees in 1 Peter as ‘strangers of the Diaspora’ (\( \text{παρεπιδήμοι διασπορᾶς} \)) and ‘resident aliens’ (\( \text{παροίκοι} \)) is given, in order to approximate the way in which the first hearers/readers of the letter were involved in their society and exhorted by the author to react to their situation. The implications of these exhortations for Christians in South Africa today are investigated.

1 INTRODUCTION
Many South Africans (especially Afrikaans speaking South Africans) currently experience their position in South Africa as being aliens in their own country. This paper does not want to validate or invalidate this experience, but wants to explore the alien motif in 1 Peter to establish its message for South African Christians experiencing this kind of political alienation.

First the alien motif in 1 Peter is established and definitions of the meanings of the important concepts are given. Then research on the status of foreigners in first century Greco-Roman society is utilised, the alien motif in 1 Peter is defined, and the situation in which the first readers/hearers found themselves, is constructed. Finally the implications of these exhortations for Christians in South Africa today are discussed.

2 THE ALIEN MOTIF IN 1 PETER
Peter uses three Greek words (\( \text{παρεπιδήμος}, \text{παροικία} \) and \( \text{παροίκος} \)) to directly refer to the alien motif,\(^1\) and another two (\( \text{διασπορά} \) and \( \text{Βαβυλών} \))\(^2\) to refer to it in a more indirect way.

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\(^1\) Many translations add the notion of ‘in the world’ or ‘here on earth’. In this way the alien motif in 1 Peter is given a cosmological—rather than social—colour.
\(^2\) Elliott (1981:39) also views these two words as pertinent to the alien motif in 1 Pt.
The occurrences of these words are now indicated, and the meaning of each defined. 3

2.1 \textit{Παρεπίδημος} (1:1; 2:11)

\textit{Παρεπίδημος} has two occurrences:

* 1:1: \textit{ἐκλεκτὸς παρεπίδημος διασποράς Πόντου}...
  (to the elect, strangers scattered throughout Pontus...)

* 2:11: \textit{παρακαλῶ ὡς παροίκους καὶ παρεπίδημος ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν
  σαρκικῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν}
  (I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from sinful desires)

Van Rensburg’s (1992:300-301) definition of this word, which is an extension of the definition of Louw & Nida (1988, 1:133) is accepted: ‘a person who for a period of time lives in a place which is not his normal residence, with no political activist notion’.

2.1 \textit{Παροικία} (1:17)

\textit{Παροικία} has only one occurrence:

* 1:17: \textit{ἐν φόβῳ τῶν τῆς παροικίας ὕμων χρόνον ἀναστράφητε}
  (...live your lives as strangers in reverent fear)

Van Rensburg’s (1992:301) definition of this word, an extension of the definition of Louw and Nida (1988, 1:732), is accepted: ‘An undefined time or occasion of one’s living in a place as a foreigner (in the literal sense of the word), without the implication that the person does not have a home’.

2.3 \textit{Πάροικος} (2:11)

\textit{Πάροικος} has only one occurrence:

* 2:11: \textit{παρακαλῶ ὡς παροίκους καὶ παρεπίδημος ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν
  σαρκικῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν}
  (I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from sinful desires)

Van Rensburg (1992:300-301) views this word as nearly synonymous to \textit{παρεπίδημος}, and defines its meaning as exactly the same: ‘a person who for a period of time lives in a place which is not his normal residence, with no political activist notion’.

3 Van Rensburg (1992) argued for definitions of the meaning of each word in its context in 1 Peter. The semantic model according to which the definitions were done, is the synchronic structuralist view of meaning, as represented in the Louw-Nida Lexicon (Louw & Nida 1988).
2.4 Διασπορά (1:1)

Διασπορά has only one occurrence:
- 1:1: ἐκλεκτοίς παρεπιδήμοις διασποράς Πόντου...
  (to the elect, strangers scattered throughout Pontus...)

Louw & Nida’s (1988,1:732) definition of this word is accepted: ‘the region or area in which persons have been scattered (particularly a reference to the nation of Israel, which had been scattered throughout the ancient world).

2.5 Βαβυλών (5:13)

Βαβυλών has only one occurrence:
- 5:13: ἀστάξεται ὑμᾶς ἐν Βαβυλώνι σενεκλεκτῇ
  (She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings)

Louw & Nida’s (1988, 1:834) definition of this word is accepted: ‘the capital of Babylonia’.

3 FOREIGNERS IN FIRST CENTURY GRECO-ROMAN SOCIETY

Two types of foreigners can be distinguished, namely the πάροικοι and the ξένοι.

3.1 The πάροικος foreigner

The πάροικοι had higher status than the ξένοι (Elliott 1990:37-38). Schaefer (1949:1695-1707) cites the occurrences of the word πάροικοι; he shows that the πάροικοι in the list of a city’s inhabitants are always placed after the πολίται (citizens), but before the ξένοι, the freed persons and the slaves.

The Greek word πάροικος (and its Latin equivalent peregrinus) was the usual word to indicate the status and class of foreigners (Elliott 1990:36; Schmidt & Schmidt 1977:842; Berger 1953:626).

In Roman law the status and rights of the πάροικοι were stipulated carefully. Different restrictions were applicable to them.5 Foreigners could

4 It is better to focus not so much on the region/area of the scattering, but rather on the resultant status after having been scattered.

5 Πάροικοι did not have any political rights. They could not participate in political meetings; could not do military duty; could only enter into a lawful marriage if they have been awarded the ius consub; could not draw up a testament in the same way as it was possible for a Roman citizen and could not act as witness in this regard; could not be an heir of a Roman citizen; could only enter into a business transaction with a Roman citizen when the ius commercii was received. They could go to the Roman courts, and they could join in some activities as if they were Roman citizens (Berger...
receive the status of πάροικος on the grounds of a long enough stay in a city. This status could also be given to slaves, freed slaves or others from the lower classes to ensure their good will or loyalty (Schaefer 1949:1698; Magie 1950:149, 225, 1036–1037).

To be classified as a πάροικος had its pros and cons. For the lowest classes, the homeless and foreigners from barbaric background, the acquisition of πάροικος status opened the door to some political and judicial privileges (Schaefer 1949:1701) and greater mobility to the higher classes (Elliott 1990:25). Such persons, however, remained foreigners without the rights and privileges of citizenship. They were open prey for political and economic exploitation, continued disrespect and suspicion from the citizens, as well as competition and jealousy of those from the lower classes (Elliott 1990:25, 26).

There are not enough data available to make an accurate assessment of the numbers of πάροικοι in the Hellenistic period (Elliott 1990:26). Schaefer (1949:1701) stresses that the numbers were high. He argues that in Rhodos in the 3rd century BCE there were 1000 πάροικοι for every 6000 citizens, and that there are indications that the πάροικοι numbers grew much in the next centuries.

3.2 The ξένος foreigner
The ξένοι (also designated as παρεπιδήμοι) were of lower status than the πάροικοι. Ξένοι usually refer to visiting aliens (Selwyn 1952:118; Schmidt & Schmidt 1977:842; Bietenhard 1979b:690).

The ξένοι were without rights, except where a ξένος was attached to a patron (Bietenhard 1979a:687; Stählin 1977:6). The ξένοι were more exposed to political and economic exploitation, suspicion and jealousy than the πάροικοι (Stählin 1977:2–3).

4 INTERPRETATION OF THE ALIEN MOTIF IN 1 PETER
Different scholars have done important work on the alien motif in 1 Peter. The interpretations vary from a literal (i.e. social and political), to a figurative and spiritual understanding of the motif.

4.1 Figurative and spiritual interpretation of the alienity
Talbert (1986:144) interprets the alien motif in 1 Peter as figurative and spiritual. He explicitly differs from Elliott (1981:43), but does not motivate
his viewpoint. Of the alien concepts in 1 Peter 1:1–2, 1:17 and 2:11 he merely says: ‘This, I think, is figurative language referring to people who, because they are Christians, do not belong to the present age but live as resident aliens in this world. They were outsiders, strangers both socially and religiously.’

It seems as if Malherbe (1983) also understands the alien motif as figurative and spiritual. Referring to 1 Peter he (1983:52–53) states: ‘While Christians are “aliens and exiles” in this world (2:11) and do form a brotherhood (2:17; 5:9), they are, nevertheless, a responsible part of society and represent a quality of life that is intelligible enough to outsiders to function as missionary witness and defence.’ He goes on to say that the household codes, if one interprets them in this way, become a very important witness to the internal life of the Christian community. This community had its own character, and had to function in a society that was highly suspicious of Christians.

Balch (1981) does not comment extensively about the addressees being aliens. However, it is clear that he does not view their being aliens as literal, but probably as figurative. Interpreting the plan of 1 Peter he (1981:129) argues for example that 2:11–12 functions as an introductory exhortation ‘to aliens to behave so that their conduct will not be slandered by the resident nations, who will eventually praise the alien’s sovereign.’

Goppelt (1978:41) considers 1 Peter as the only New Testament writing which covers the motif of Christian alienity within the structures of society. He (1978:6, 41, 59, 177) comments that the letter focuses on the Christians’ relationship with the institutions of society. The letter, he argues (1978:176), does not address a possible revolt against the authorities, but an ascetic-spiritual ‘emigration’ of believers. The believers do not want to accept their social responsibilities. He (1978:42) comments that a person who believes, becomes a stranger to society, but at the same time has a great responsibility towards the institutions of society. Continuing to ‘do good’ within the societal structures prevents conformity.6

Furnish (1975) interprets the alienity as spiritual and metaphoric. He maintains that God elects Christians, and therefore they only have temporary sojourn in the world (1975:3).

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6 This interpretation of Goppelt determines his view on the structure of 1 Peter: the first section (1:1–2:10) provides the basis for the social difference of the Christians, viz their Christian living; the second section (2:11–4:11) develops the paradox that, to be a stranger in society, the believer should as a Christian participate in the institutions of society; the last section (4:12–5:14) maintains that persecution by society is inevitable, and that it inevitably results in the believer’s participation in the suffering of Jesus.
Kümmel (1975:418) views the alienity as spiritual. In his commentary on 1 Peter 1:1 he is of the opinion that the letter is addressed to heathen Christians, and that the ‘elected strangers of the Diaspora’ should therefore not be taken literally. He believes that the author is addressing Christians as members of the true people of God who live scattered all over the world as strangers, because their real home is in heaven.

Wolff (1975:334, 338), after having considered the social context of the addressees, considers the addressees to be the elect. He argues that a person becomes a Christian by becoming a stranger. The concept πέρικος, therefore, is not a description of their present circumstances, but is part of the author’s strategy to persuade them how they should view themselves. It is what they must become, now that they are Christians.

Although Chevalier (1974) gives substantial attention to the social context of the addressees, he also considers their alienity as a status which came about when they became Christians. Their being πέρικος, therefore, did not exist before their conversion (1974:395), but is to be understood as purely spiritual.

Beare (1970:196) argues that the whole of 1 Peter 1:13-4:11 is a baptismal sermon, and that encouragement under persecution is not at all the purpose of the section. His interpretation becomes clear in what he (1970:135) writes on πέρικος and παρετίπημος as they appear in 2:11. He maintains that the words are almost synonymous, and that the author uses them in a spiritual sense to refer to the earthly life of all Christians. The author, argues Beare, points out to his readers that the Christian’s true home is in heaven, and that, while they are on earth, they are ‘abroad’. This is the reason why they should ‘abstain from sinful desires’ (2:12), because these are part and parcel of their earthly living. Sinful desires are no longer fitting, because they know that their real home is in heaven. Beare fully spiritualises the alienity, and interprets it as merely figurative.

Lohse (1954:72,85) also spiritualises the alienity. He (1954:89) writes that the addressees are being reminded that they are aliens and strangers on earth, but that they will enter their heavenly abode with joy.

4.2 A literal interpretation of the alienity

The most extensive study on alienity in 1 Peter is Elliott’s 1981 publication. Elliott (1981:23) maintains that there is a correlation between πέρικος and οίκος, and that this correlation is not only linguistic, but is also sociological and theological.

He (1981:48) argues that the concepts πέρικος, παροικία and παρετίπημος identify the addressees as ‘...a combination of displaced persons who are currently aliens permanently residing in (πέρικος, παροικία) or
strangers temporarily visiting or passing through (παρεπιθήμοι) the four provinces of Asia Minor.' He maintains that the concepts not only signify the geographic displacement of the addressees, but also the political, judicial, social and religious restrictions and alienation which geographic displacement necessitates. He (1981:48) comments that παροικος probably indicates persons who moved from agricultural areas to urban areas, resulting in lower social status in the new environment. They could therefore have been part of the immigrant labourers and merchants who either settled permanently in the cities, or stayed there for a shorter period during their journeys. The addressees are identified as people of the διασπορά (Elliott 1981:48). The author's identification of his own locality as 'in Babylon' is viewed by Elliott as an indication that the Christians to whom 'Peter' writes find themselves, as Israel in the Old Testament, in a situation of real (i.e., literal) social and religious alienity. Elliott (1981:49) summarises his view about the identity of the addressees: 'Resident aliens and visiting strangers who, since their conversion to Christianity, still find themselves estranged from any place of belonging. They are still displaced “paroikoi” seeking an “oikos”.' This means that already before their conversion to Christianity, they were aliens and strangers.

Selwyn (1952), in his commentary on 1 Peter 1:17, also does not spiritualise the alienity. He sees Peter writing the letter—as a baptismal catechism—with the help of Silvanus in 63 CE from Rome. He (Selwyn 1952:144) remarks that the author writes about the fact that they have little freedom of expression in the societies of Asia Minor.

4.3 A combined interpretation

Van Unnik (1980:73), in a reprint of a 1942 publication, is of the opinion that the two concepts in 1 Peter 2:11 have a double reference. The addressees are proselytes who became Christians, and have become aliens in two ways: on earth in general they are παροικος, and in the synagogue they are παρεπιθήμοι. This he concludes from the connection between παρεπιθήμοι and διασπορά in 1:1. In another article (1980:118, a reprint of a 1956 publication) Van Unnik says that 1 Peter's view of the believers is the following: 'The life on earth is compared with that of a colony; the Christians as citizens of the city of God live here as strangers and sojourners.'

4.4 Conclusion

The first readers/hearers of 1 Peter were aliens, not merely in a metaphoric figurative way, but in the literal socio-political sense of the word. They did not only become παροικος when they converted to Christianity, but already were παροικος before their conversion.
This label, however, does not merely describe their social position. In the letter the abusive, and in some ways derogatory, title is transformed to a proud self-identification by giving it a deeper and theologically positive sense. In a way the label is part of the process of adoption by the Christians of the honourific titles of the Old Testament people of God, and in another way it has been transformed into a proud self-identification in its own right.

The author of 1 Peter argues that God actually wants to use the social and political παροικοι status of the addressees to his own glory, and thus gives it a deeper dimension. He exhorts them to live up to this ‘new’ status, in spite of their present derogatory social and political situation.

5 A CONSTRUCTION OF THE SITUATION OF THE FIRST READERS/HEARERS OF 1 PETER

The addressees of 1 Peter experienced discrimination because of their political status as aliens, as παροικοι and παρεπιθηκοι. Since becoming Christians, their situation had become more difficult. They were tempted to simply capitulate or to take the law into their own hands and to avenge their suffering. Their circumstances were so difficult that they were on the brink of throwing in the towel. They no longer felt that they could face the consequences of their status as παροικοι and παρεπιθηκοι. All the injustice and persecution caused them to feel that they had no vision for the future, simply because they were overpowered by their difficult circumstances.

They were under pressure to be assimilated into the mainstream of unbelievers, and therefore to share their views and attitudes. On the other hand they could maintain such a low profile as a result of the pressure that they could no longer testify through word and action to their acceptance of Jesus Christ as their only Lord.

Peter wants to give them a new perspective on their situation. He does this by reminding them of, and by reinforcing their awareness of, specific truths in their faith and the prescriptions regarding their behaviour—and by reapplying old truths to new circumstances. He wants to lead them to the point where they can see that election by God does not necessarily exclude adversity, such as they were experiencing because of their status as aliens. He wants them to understand that similar experiences should not be regarded as something strange—they should rather expect such things, and realise that they are a test of faith. By persisting in doing good in spite of injustice, the believer shows that he acknowledges only Christ as Lord of his life. Such persons will overflow with joy when Christ returns.

The letter is therefore (as becomes clear from the closing verse of the section which gives guidelines for attitude towards and reaction to discrimin-
tion (2:11-4:19)) an encouragement to the readers to commit themselves to their faithful Creator and to keep on doing good (4:19).

4:19 ἀοτε καὶ οἱ πάσχοντες κατὰ τὸ θελήμα τοῦ θεοῦ πιστῶ κτίσμα παρατεθέσθωσαν τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτῶν ἐν ἁγιασμῷ.

So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good. (NIV)

This is already hinted at clearly in 2:11-12, where the author gives his basic exhortation to the ‘aliens’:

2:11 Ἀγαπηταί, παρακαλῶ ὡς παροίκους καὶ παρεπιδήμους ἀπέκθεσαν τῶν παρεκκλησίων ἐπιθυμίων αὐτῶν, στρατεύονται κατὰ τῆς ψυχῆς.

2:11 I urge you as resident and visiting aliens not to surrender to those desires that fight against you. (FvR)

12 τὴν ἀναστροφὴν ὑμῶν ἐν τοῖς ἐθνεσιν ἐχοντες καλὴν ὀνομα τῷ κυρίῳ ἐν τῷ καὶ θεῷ ἐργῶν ἐκπτεύοντες δοξάσασθαν τὸν θεὸν ἐν ἠμέρᾳ ἐπισκοπῆσας.

12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. (NIV)

In 2:15 it is made more concrete:

2:15 ὅτι οὕτως ἐστίν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ ἀγαθοποιοῦντας φιλοῦν τὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀνθρωπίνην ἀγνοοῦν.

2:15 For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. (NIV)

In 3:14-15 the same theme is elaborated:

3:14 ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ πάσχοντες διὰ δικαιοσύνην, μακάριοι. τὸν δὲ φόβον αὐτῶν μὴ φοβηθῆτε μηδὲ ταραχῆτε, ἐν τῷ ἡμῶν ἀγαπαστέ τῷ ἡμῶν καρδίας ὑμῶν. ἐπομοῦ αἰεὶ πρὸς ἀφολογίαν παρτὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος.

3:14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened. 15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. (NIV)

1 Peter, therefore, does not give a theological recipe to escape from the social situation. Rather the letter provides a rationale for continued social involvement. When suffering discrimination, believers should do two things:

* They must excel in the universal good values (e.g. obey all human authorities (1 Pt 2:13-17); obey your masters, also those who are cruel (1 Pt 2:18-25); be a good marriage partner, 1 Pt 3:1-7).

* They should show that Christ is Lord of their lives by not surrendering to their ‘desires’ and retaliating, but by continuing to do good (because it is what the Lord wants).
In this way they must not simply repeat the Christian *muthos*, but develop true Christian *ethos*: social institutions, norms of conduct, and patterns of behaviour consonant with the Bible and effective for the maintenance of their corporate identity and distinctive style of life (cf Elliott 1986:77).

6 IMPLICATIONS OF THESE EXHORTATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS IN SOUTH AFRICA TODAY

Before drawing the implications of the exhortations in 1 Peter for Christians in South Africa, it is important to note a very important difference between the social political situation of the first readers/hearers of 1 Peter and Christians in South Africa today. By the grace of God, South African Christians are protected by the constitution, so that all South Africans, including Christians, are citizens (even foreigners have rights!). The laws of the country protect each citizen.

Therefore, each Christian, when experiencing discrimination and a feeling of alienation, should use these constitutional rights. Only then, after appeal to constitutional stipulations have failed, should the exhortations of 1 Peter to the 

\[ \text{παροίκοι καὶ παρεπιδήμοι} \]

be applied in their literal sense.

In essence this means that South African Christians, when suffering discrimination and after appeal to constitutional stipulations has failed, should do two things:

* They should excel in the universal good values as stipulated by the constitution.
* They should show that Christ is Lord of their lives by not surrendering to their ‘desires’ and by retaliating, but by continuing to do good.

South African Christians experiencing discrimination should therefore not simply repeat the Christian *muthos*, but develop true Christian *ethos*: social institutions, norms of conduct, and patterns of behaviour consonant with the Bible and effective for the maintenance of their corporate identity and unique life style.

WORKS CONSULTED


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