

The Trial of African Solidarity (vol I): Is this the Africa we Fought for? Kuzituka Did'ho J-M

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Xenophobia is not just an African or a South African issue. The Brexit debate in the United Kingdom has facilitated the exhibition of the worst characteristics in human nature. It displays discrimination for political gain with regard to immigrants who have made a significant contribution to the life of the nation and its economy, despite the negative propaganda to the contrary. The aim of this book is to create safe spaces for people to share their experiences and dialogue about xenophobia, racism and race relations; to explore the relationships between black South Africans and African immigrants in South Africa (p.123)

The value of this book on xenophobia is that it is small yet packed with helpful information presented in a well-balanced manner. It is brief enough (138 pages) so that readers will not find it tedious reading and lucid enough that they will not have to struggle to understand it. The content is comprehensive and is well organised into ten chapters: national identity and immigration from Africa to South Africa as a country of refuge; rural exodus and African immigration; xenophobia in Johannesburg; South Africa as a country of choice; immigrants as small entrepreneurs; the role of education; marriage between locals and immigrants; the church as the process of home-making; and illuminations on the relationships between black South Africans and African immigrants.

A number of interesting points emerged for me in reading this book. I am reminded of the concept of historical African solidarity, which is determinative of African identity and which is disintegrating as the result of xenophobia. The author rightly places this “solidarity” on trial. I also note that the presence of foreign nationals in itself does not produce a negative response, but when it is combined with domestic (South African problems) the outcome is lethal. Acceptance of difference is another issue. It is not



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possible for people to give up their cultural heritage in order to settle here. This would place us in the same position as the missionaries who expected Africans to disown their cultures, which was considered extremely offensive. An underemphasised matter is the lack of support from the African Union for greater mutual acceptance throughout Africa.

This book succeeds in achieving its aim. It is a helpful contribution to a debate on a subject which challenges the communal basis of African society. It challenges misconceptions and goes deeper than surface assumptions and prejudices. It demonstrates the positive contributions that African immigrants have made to South African society and the South African economy. What I would have found helpful is a greater interrogation of the role of the African Union in healing the wounds inflicted by this parasitic growth in our country.