

# The Times

## Jonathan Jansen: I am a foreigner - to hatred

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**Jonathan Jansen: When I read with horror that scores of Zimbabwean refugees were camping along the N1 highway to flee the Rainbow Nation, in response to threats of what would happen to them once the World Cup ended, I again found myself drawing on that profound source of intellectual inspiration, the animated film Finding Nemo.**

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Jonathan Jansen

*Photograph by:*

" There is a dark side to such passionate love of country: it excludes " Jacob Zuma  
As Marlin (Nemo's father) drifts off by himself, despondent that he cannot find his son, Dory (the fish with Alzheimer's, as one youngster put it) begs him over and over again not to leave. Then Dory makes a telling observation about their relationship that I will never forget: his final plea to Marlin comes with the words: "I look at you, and I'm home."  
How I wish a South African resident could look a Malawian refugee in the face, and the two say to each other, "I look at you, and I'm home."  
Dory's words speak of home not as a literal place or a strip of land but as a heart relationship between human beings.  
Anyone who has lost a mother will know what I mean; going home just isn't the same after your mother has died. Because home was not the house; it was that bond of love between mother and children.  
A brilliant movie maker, Molly Blank, renders a powerful account about xenophobia in her new documentary, Where Do I Stand?. She tells the story of the 2008 attacks on foreigners in which 62 people died; the story is told through the voices of five South African youngsters. Some of them were involved in the looting and attacks.

As they reflect on their criminal deeds, the young people come to understand that those they harmed were human beings, with the same fears, anxieties and aspirations that they have.

Then something profound happens: the attackers begin to repair the damage. They make public statements of regret, but then they also take their business back to the Somalian shopkeepers, walking past the shops of native vendors to make the point. Other young people in the documentary find ways of caring for their brothers and sisters in different ways. One student hides a makwerekwere (a derogatory word for foreigners) in his sparse home.

The young people take a stand. And slowly but surely, black and white, they begin to share their homes and their lives with those living between two desperate worlds: their home countries and this refugee nation.

What happens, clearly, is that the moment of human recognition dawns on these young South Africans: "I see you, and I'm home".

We South Africans need to look in the mirror after this World Cup and ask ourselves an uncomfortable question: Why do we celebrate Ghanaians and other Africans on the soccer pitch but persecute them in the townships?

I saw rich and poor natives of our land weep when Luis "Hand of God" Suarez robbed Ghana of a sure goal en route to the World Cup semi-finals. I see no such solidarity of emotion as the bloody hands of natives shove threatening letters under the shack doors of our neighbours from the region. What kind of hypocrisy is this?

This was always my fear about the wave of nationalistic fever that spread across the land during the World Cup; there is a dark side (if you will forgive the pun) to such passionate love of country - it excludes.

Our pan-African solidarity is superficial; a cosmopolitan view of the world is lacking. And for this we pay the price in blood.

Make no mistake, the people who are now pursuing foreigners will sooner or later turn on the rest of us.

There will always have to be a scapegoat for misery, real or imagined. The people who kill foreigners one day will quickly divide the rest of us into a "non" group (you complete the "non-").

I have had my fair share of people (some very well-educated) calling me "non-" because they believe they are whiter or blacker than others of us. Watch out for these killers.

I am about to buy and distribute T-shirts that carry the words "I AM A FOREIGNER".

I am a foreigner to xenophobia, to race-hatred, to stereotyping, to the physical and emotional abuse of our neighbours, to mindless patriotism. I hope millions of South Africans will wear such T-shirts.

The foreigners are us, and we are them. Find a foreigner, grab him by the shoulders and then say boldly: "I look at you, and I'm home."

- Molly Blank's DVD on healing and hope in the wake of xenophobia, with teacher resources, can be obtained by visiting the website [www.wheredoIstandfilm.com](http://www.wheredoIstandfilm.com)