



PAPERCHASE: Shahieda Razak was among the book lovers who flocked to the Cape Town Book Fair, which began on Friday and ends today . Picture: SAM CLARK

White pensioners most xenophobic – Canadian survey

Sibusiso Nkomo

WHO is most xenophobic in South Africa?

White, DA-supporting pensioners, according to a survey by Canadian researchers.

The study was quoted yesterday by author Michael Neocosmos, a professor of Sociology at the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape, during a discussion at the Cape Town Book Fair.

Speaking about his new book *From 'Foreign Natives' to 'Native Foreigners'*, Neocosmos said the study would probably surprise many, but added that most South Africans had “a

fear of the African other”.

The reasons for the fear, he said, came from:

- What those in government said, their attitudes towards migrants and how immigration laws vilify African foreigners.

- The police, who were more likely to question the origins of a darker-skinned man and ask why he was “in our space”.

- The press reporting “that we must make sure we keep them out” because the country’s borders were porous.

- Nativism and chauvinism, believing being born in South Africa made one special.

- Exceptionalism, with



RESEARCHER: Professor Michael Neocosmos

South Africans considering themselves different from other parts of the continent.

He said the situation in South Africa today was similar to the one Frantz Fanon had described in the 1960s about post-independent Algeria, where “foreigners” were being chased out.

Neocosmos’s main fields of research are rural development in Latin America and Africa; development, migrant labour, ethnicity, citizenship, state and civil society, political transition in Southern Africa.

Suren Pillay, a democracy and governance researcher at the Human Sciences Research Council in Cape Town said post-apartheid South Africa had been engaging in the politics of fear since the 1990s.

Politics was no longer contested and stressed access to resources and structural discrimination.

“In our sanitised space, civil society is passive and we have this ‘hope’ all will be okay. In the 1980s struggle we affirmed a new nation that would be inclusive, but now we have gone backwards and have an absence of morality,” Pillay said.

He said the authorities “hide”, saying there was no such thing as xenophobia and blaming criminality. People thought “wearing our shame” after the xenophobic attacks in 2008 had absolved them, he said.

sibusiso.nkomo@inl.co.za

