

## Driving Democracy

MUCH has been said about our electoral system at national and provincial level, which is based on proportional representation (PR), and where our elected public representatives are not accountable to the voters but to the political party bosses who placed them on their list in the first place.

At local government level, however, we have a mixed system – a combination of the PR and the winner-takes-all approach, with the latter allowing voters to cast a ballot directly in favour of a candidate of their choice.

So anyone who says they are *gatvol* or who can't be bothered to vote is mistaken. Our vote can make a difference.

We need to make this right count, by casting a ballot directly for those whom we believe will best represent our interests on issues that affect us daily – from the services we receive, to the rates we pay – in the villages, towns and cities where we live, study, work and raise our families.

There are communities all over South Africa that understand that, in a municipal poll, they indeed hold the power and can vote directly for the candidate of their choice.

We saw this in the run-up to today's election, with ANC supporters rejecting those candidates imposed on them by their party, and the fielding of independents of those who enjoyed their trust instead.

President Jacob Zuma's call for ANC supporters to still vote for the governing party, with the bizarre and costly promise that unpopular ward candidates imposed on communities by the ANC would be forced to resign and by-elections held instead, proves this point.

It is up to you to use that right to ensure that at least at local level, you are represented by ward councillors who deserve your vote.

The Mercury will not presume to tell readers who to vote for today by endorsing a political party or mayoral candidate.

We believe in the right to make a free choice – one that too many South Africans were denied for far too long.

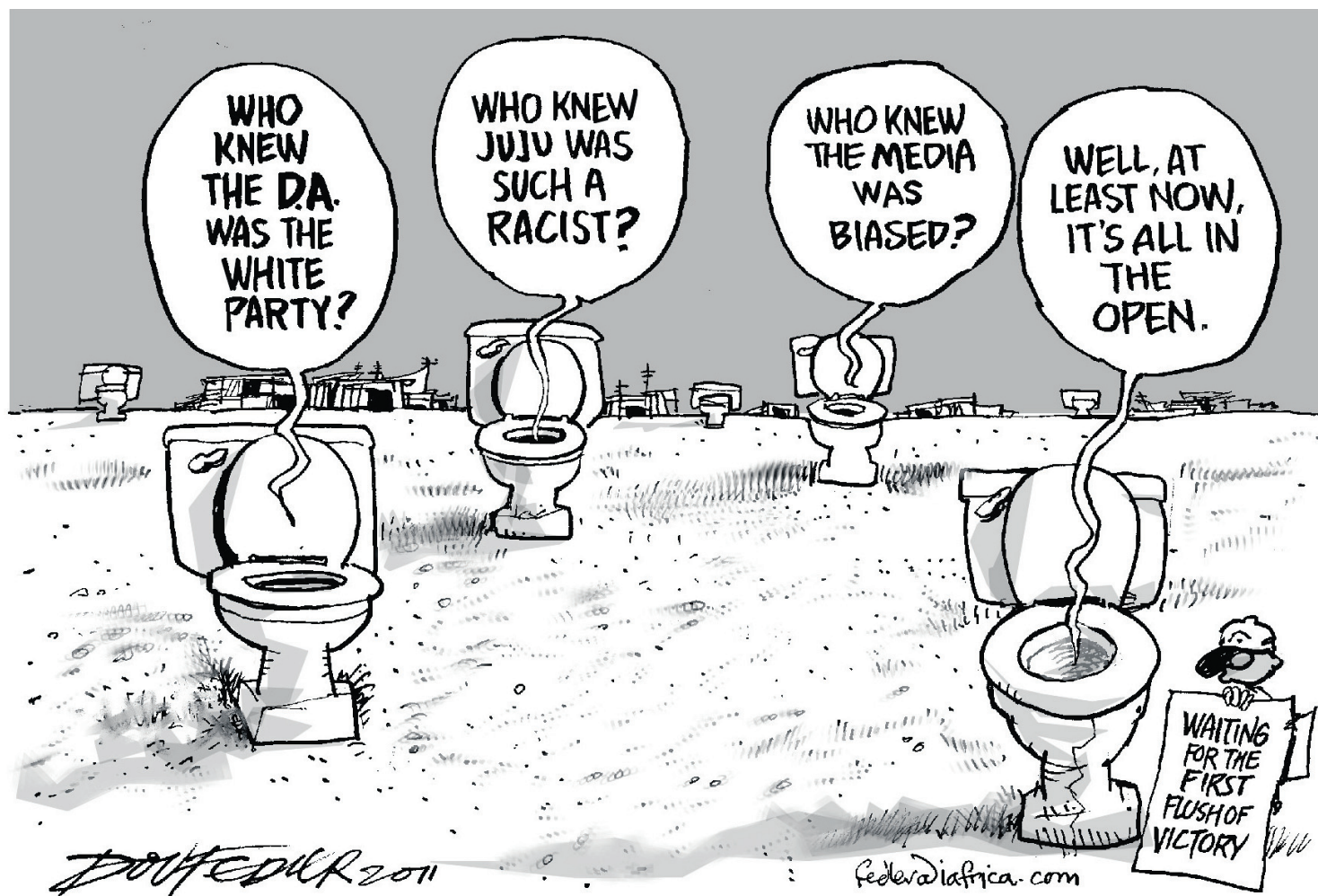
Go out and vote in force, Mzansi – we should not be mere passengers in our own democracy.

## Libyan Stalemate

IF A VICE is indeed closing in around Muammar Gaddafi, as General Sir David Richards, the British chief of defence staff, claimed, then its jaws have some way to travel before they meet. In two months the general has swung from justified caution about the aims to pressurising other Nato countries to escalate the bombing and widen the target list. Why the change? It could be that after 2 000 strikes Richards realises the mission is no closer to achieving its aims.

The rhetorical vice was given a further twist on Monday by the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court who named Gaddafi, his son Saif and his brother-in-law and intelligence chief Abdullah Senussi as war crimes suspects.

But chief prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo is not requesting the intervention of international forces to implement the arrest warrants. He said that the Libyan authorities had the primary responsibility to arrest the three. This means that nothing will happen until either the regime falls or a deal is brokered and the warrants are not enforced. Either way, the stalemate continues. – The Guardian



You & Me  
ROD SMITH

A reader writes:

I discovered my husband is involved with another woman. He says it is just a friendship. He speaks to her on the phone at least four or five times a day and texts her a few times a day, including in the evenings before we go to bed.

All the calls and texts are done secretly. He promised to stop these, but he hasn't. She says she loves him and doesn't want to lose him.

He says that he loves me and does not want to hurt me or break up our marriage. He does not want anything to change, but has said he would be happier if things were more open.

He refuses to stop the relationship, or even cut down on the contact.

A: If this were "just a friendship" it would require no secrecy and you could be part of every encounter and at every level.

Your husband is making powerful choices that are dismissing of your long-term place in his life. It is time for you to make your own set of choices about whether you are willing to share your husband.

Gather your community or trusted friends, let them in at every level, and then act on your own behalf – whatever you determine that to be.

□ Rod Smith is a family therapist who lives in the US. E-mail questions to [Rod@DifficultRelationships.com](mailto:Rod@DifficultRelationships.com)

# Remembering those less fortunate

*Celebrating democracy at home, struggling for freedom in Palestine*



IMRAAN BUCCUS

HAD WE not defeated apartheid, this year would have marked 63 years of oppression in South Africa. But, with incredible mobilisation and international solidarity, the evil system of racial capitalism was defeated and in 1994 we had our first democratic election.

The euphoria of liberation was indeed overwhelming. And today, we celebrate democracy in South Africa with a third successful local government election.

But, as we celebrate democracy in South Africa, Israel, a country that continues to brutalise Palestinians, marks 63 years of its existence. And a few days ago, on May 15th, Palestinians observed over six decades of occupation, dispossession and oppression – referred to as the *Nakba* or catastrophe – the day of forced removals in Palestine.

This year's observance of the *Nakba* was marked by incredible state security violence against demonstrators.

Many in the world still remember it. One Palestinian, Ali Hamoudi was eight years old in 1948 and he painfully recalls the day.

"I remember I had to hide with my family in a cave near

my house for nine days. There were seven of us in the cave, and there was not much room to move around. We could hear the Israelis passing by, but they could not see us because the cave is well hidden."

There was large-scale intimidation and siege, with fires being set to Palestinian homes, mines being planted, more than 500 villages being destroyed and other terrorist activities being carried out. In the end, nearly 800 000 Palestinians were forced out of their homes and into refugee camps in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and elsewhere. These refugees have not returned home.

Most Palestinians have a personal narrative of loss – a relative killed, or a branch of the family that fled north while the others fled east, never to be reunited; or homes, offices, orchards and other property seized.

That cogent and eloquent defender of the Palestinians, the late intellectual, Edward Said, also recalled how, in 1948, his entire family was

turned into a scattering of refugees. "None of the older members of my family ever recovered from the trauma," he wrote in one of his famous works, *The Politics of Dispossession*.

And 13 years ago Said commented on the "Israel at 50" celebrations: "I still find myself astonished at the lengths to which official Israel and its supporters will go to suppress the fact that a half century has gone by without Israeli restitution, recognition or acknowledgment of Palestinian human rights... the Palestinian *Nakba* is characterised as a semi-fictional event... caused by no one in particular."

Here in South Africa we know and can understand, perhaps more than others, the plight of the Palestinians.

While Israel will be celebrating 63 years this year,

Palestinians have nothing to celebrate.

Just as pass laws restricted the movement of black South Africans, the movement of Palestinians, especially in the West Bank, continues to be restricted by check points, road blocks and a concrete wall.

The apartheid wall means that a journey of 20 minutes takes seven hours. It cuts farmers from their land, children from their schools, mothers from medical services for their babies, and grandparents from their grandchildren – even apartheid South Africa's Bantustans were not surrounded by gates.

In a UN report some years ago, Professor John Dugard said Israel was unwilling to learn from South Africa and observed that the human rights situation in the occu-

pled territories continues to deteriorate. Significantly, Dugard made shocking parallels between the situation in Palestine and South Africa saying that the "large-scale destruction of Palestinian homes, levelling of agricultural lands, military incursions and targeted assassinations of Palestinians far exceed any similar practices in apartheid South Africa".

And a South African parliamentarian recently related these similarities between Israel today and apartheid South Africa.

Addressing Parliament she said: "Madam Speaker every time I relate to my own children how it felt to live in apartheid conditions, detention without trial, State of Emergency. How we would be woken up at night as kids when police searched our homes. How, as students, we used to throw stones at the police who were shooting at us – like in Palestine today."

"The response I get from my children is 'mom, why did you allow them?' This they say without understanding how mighty the army was. I

am sure children in Palestine wish to be in a situation where the present conditions they live under could be history".

Today, even while we celebrate the reconciliatory efforts between Hamas and the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) in Palestine, the levels of oppression and brutalisation of Palestinians continues. Who can forget the attack on Gaza a few years ago?

The area remains devastated and is often in darkness because Israel shuts them off.

Just as the world remembered us in our dark days, so too should we remember the oppressed peoples of the world. Especially the Palestinians on a day like the *Nakba*. Their tears are surely our tears. And, as a people oppressed for so long, we can perhaps understand the *Nakba* more than others.

So, as we vote today, we should spare a thought for those who yearn for democracy and justice as they observe the catastrophe of May 15, 1948.

● Imraan Buccus is a research fellow in the School of Politics at UKZN and at the Democracy Development Programme.

E-mail [merletter@inl.co.za](mailto:merletter@inl.co.za), fax 031 308 2715, or post letters to: The Editor, PO Box 47549, Greyville 4023. Letters must carry the author's signature, name and address.

## forum

E-mailed letters should also include a physical address and telephone number. The editor reserves the right to edit or shorten letters. Letters with pseudonyms will only be published in exceptional circumstances.

## Mayor's propaganda paid for by ratepayers

I AM DISGUSTED by the large advert in Monday's Mercury under the logo of eThekweni and headed "15 years of service delivery" – a message from the mayor, Obed Mlaba.

The advert ends "Thank you for your support". Who is he asking us to support? The council?

Is the council standing for election? Or the mayor? The whole thing is so blatantly dishonest as to fool no one that this is anything else but not very subtle ANC propaganda – without so much as a mere mention of a political

origin. It really is stooping rather low even by the party's standards when, three days before the elections, a municipal council asks for support.

What bothers me as much as anything else is that this obvious deceit, issued under the auspices and logo of eThekweni, will probably be paid for by us, the general ratepayers. The effrontery of our ANC hierarchy knows no bounds.

Durban  
COLIN FLEMING

## Puppet show doesn't fool us

WHEN are Jacob Zuma and Julius Malema going to learn that well-adjusted individuals do not believe the charade that they act out on a daily basis, with their horrendous "Punch and Judy" show.

If Zuma is addressing farmers, he assures them that they will not lose their land and that everything will be rosy.

At the same time, the real

message of intent is being broadcast by his partner in the puppet show, Malema, stating that they will lose everything and receive nothing, as, after all they, the farmers "stole" the land.

South Africa must beware as there is a two-headed "hydra" among us.

Umhlanga  
G DUNN

## MAKE YOUR MARK FOR CHANGE

TODAY, voting day, I would like to pose the following questions to voters:

Are you:  
● Living in a shack for years without normal services?  
● Living in an RDP house that is falling apart while the builder lives in a mansion in an upmarket

Durban

suburb and drives luxury cars?

● Living in an area where the verges and footpaths are unkempt?  
● Having to drive over potholes and uneven roads?  
● Having to put up with unqualified and incompetent municipal staff?

Durban

● Unhappy with having millions of rand of ratepayers' hard-earned money wasted on subsidising and supporting uShaka, the Moses Mabhida Stadium and the ICC annually?  
● Unhappy with new street names which seek to erase the memory of those

Durban

who built this city? or  
● Wondering who your local councillor is, or have never met him or her?

If you answer yes to even one of the above, then go out and vote for change.

BRIAN P KENNEDY  
Durban

## Forget apartheid and build a positive future

DOES Romanus Zulu really believe that apartheid would ever be brought back ("They have done much to uplift poor", The Mercury Forum, May 17)?

Our children and their children do not see the difference in colour:

Durban  
DID MIKE Jackson borrow Michael Sutcliffe's rose-tinted glasses when he wrote the column on Durban's revamped beachfront (The Mercury, May 16)?

It's about time he realised that the apartheid days have been over since 1994 and that he should rather look at a brighter future for the generations to come.

Does he think the government is paying for the

Durban  
As a resident I can confirm that during Easter, school holidays and Christmas it is absolute hell for local residents.  
His so-called domestic

grandchildren and their grandparents or is it once again the taxpayer? Nothing in this world is free; you have to work for it.

When are people like Zulu going to stop using apartheid as an excuse and instead build a

Durban  
tourists bring their own food and drink and, as a parting gift, scatter it all over the place. The stench of urine is also nauseating.  
As for the Golden Mile, it is a

positive future, which definitely is not the government. At present it pays to work for the government, commit a crime, get sentenced and still be paid.

BAS HEILBRON  
Umtentweni

## Our beachfront is not something to get boastful about

Durban  
shocker and no wonder business is not interested in renting premises.

Durban  
GORDON SMITH

Durban  
IT WAS interesting to read the report of President Jacob Zuma's address to farmers in Greytown, during which he said that to vote for any party other than the ANC virtually amounted to a "spoilt ballot paper" (The Mercury, May 12).

Durban  
Kloof  
His message is clearly that to all intents and purposes, South Africa is a one-party state. So much for our wonderful democracy.

## Choose local leadership wisely

TODAY'S local elections are very important because local government directly affects us all as it deals with local needs and essential services of the communities.

Local councillors are responsible for managing our municipalities and local councils and deal with issues regarding rates, refuse collection, electricity, water supply and sewerage, recreation facilities and amenities, clinics, libraries and other basic needs. Unfortunately, out of the three levels of government, at present, local government is the most dysfunctional, incompetent and corrupt.

## Zuma rhetoric gives lie to democracy

Durban  
Kloof  
His message is clearly that to all intents and purposes, South Africa is a one-party state. So much for our wonderful democracy.

Therefore, our vote must be an informed and a wise selection.

The leadership in our local councils must be selected from a team of people who have proven themselves as accountable, hard-working, knowledgeable, honest and strict adherents to our constitution.

Almost every local community is affected by lack of service delivery and essential services.

Make a difference in people's lives, especially the working class and the underprivileged, by voting. Your vote matters.

ABDULLAH SAEED  
Pietermaritzburg

## Zuma rhetoric gives lie to democracy

Durban  
Kloof  
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SHEILA MCCALLUM  
Kloof