

## Vibrant And Free

ON OCTOBER 19, 1977, the apartheid state launched an assault on black newspapers and journalists. The World and Weekend World and the Christian newspaper, Pro Veritate, were banned by then-minister of justice Jimmy Kruger, who accused them of "publishing inflammatory material that threatened the nation's security". The editor of the World, Percy Qoboza, and other journalists were arrested and jailed.

Thirty-three years later – as opposition mounts to the ANC's mooted media appeals tribunal and to the Protection of Information Bill now before Parliament, and the issue of press freedom returns to the national agenda – we should beware cheap and easy comparisons with the apartheid era.

South African journalists today operate in a vibrant environment that is completely different from that in which Qoboza and his colleagues practised their profession.

But nor should we be complacent. Freedoms are never won once and for all; their preservation demands constant vigilance.

The South African government is not alone in wishing for a less critical media – that is the desire of governments everywhere, and it is up to civil society to fight off predictable attempts to encroach on the rights of citizens to know.

Nor is the government wrong in some of its criticisms of today's print media. Some of these criticisms – a failure to capture the unfolding story of South Africa's transformation, especially outside the cities, inaccurate reporting and an exclusive focus on the government as responsible for developing democracy – were aired at the weekend meeting with the SA National Editors' Forum.

The meeting went some way to defuse tensions between the media and the government, with both sides acknowledging failures of various sorts and agreeing on some steps to be taken, in particular on improvements to the present system of regulation. That is all very encouraging.

But fresh battles between the state and the press are inevitable – and necessary. A compliant media would be a very poor tribute to Qoboza and all those like him who fought so hard for press freedom.

## Get A Lift

LIFE without motor vehicles is unimaginable. Private cars are part of modern-day living. Without this mode of transport, life in many cities of South Africa – owing to the shameful state of what passes for public transport – would be unthinkable.

Yet how many of us pause to think of the bad influence cars have on our lives? The stress, noise and the overcrowding they bring to our cities?

How many motorists, for instance, know or care that nearly 40 percent of the transport sector's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are produced by private cars in cities?

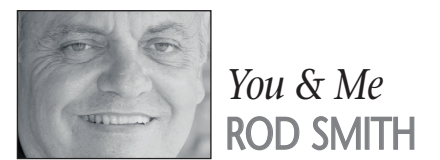
Every September 22, people across the globe get together to remind us all that we do not have to accept our car-dominated society. This day – World Car-Free Day – is a celebration of cities and public life free from the noise, stress and pollution of cars. A growing number of people around the world organise events to showcase alternatives to the car on this day.

In South Africa, October 20 has been designated Car-Free Day by transport authorities. Motorists are encouraged to arrange car pools or use public transport tomorrow.

This, then, is the perfect opportunity to urge our city planners to jack up public transport. Otherwise, such days will be meaningless.

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**You & Me**  
**ROD SMITH**

**DISTINCTNESS** (uniqueness, separateness) usually facilitates greater intimacy rather than detracting from it. Couples often think a relationship needs more "glue" (togetherness, common interests, more time together) when, in fact, a relationship might be better served by each person finding a more interesting, more adventurous, more distinct individual life.

If you cannot be distinct and have the necessary self-awareness to be alone, it is unlikely you will be able to withstand the togetherness pressures of a truly powerful, intimate, equal and respectful relationship.

He or she who cannot hold his or her own without a partner will feel overpowered, overcrowded or consumed when in an equal, respectful, intimate relationship. This is true unless he or she, in the name of love, gets lost in the relationship and "disappears". Under such circumstances the "weaker" party will experience the relationship as a takeover rather than as a shared, mutual, adventure.

- To work at your distinctness:
- Express your opinion even if it is contrary to what your partner expects or wants to hear.
- State what you want and don't want even if it places stress on the relationship you have.
- Maintain many and diverse non-romantic friendships.
- Pursue interests outside of your romantic relationship even if your significant other has no interest in the same endeavours.

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

# Government, heal thyself and our physicians

*The brain drain will continue unless medical experts are given reasons to stay. When they leave, our standards of health care fall*

**A**GAINST all odds South Africa seems to have a tradition of cultivating world experts in the field of medicine and medical science.

Even when we were a country in the doldrums, our international reputation for heart surgery could not be ignored. Chris Barnard was as popular as a movie star, and was in fact seen in the company of many celebrities.

These memories came flooding back when I was afforded the honour by Professor Madaree, president of the Colleges of Medicine of South Africa (CMSA), of giving the oration at the admission ceremony. Among the hundreds of post-graduate fellows, the kernel of our young medical fraternity who received awards were the old guards like Professor Jack Moodley whose outstanding work and research in obstetrics and gynaecology has had an immense impact on women's health in Africa and beyond.

While medicine may be regarded as the noblest of professions, it is really people like these old stalwarts who are deserving of praise.

The work that is being done in medicine within the confines of the theatre or laboratory often goes unrecognised and unacknowledged.

Without their professional intervention, our health-care system would be in a greater mess than it currently is.

With too few new graduates opting to stay in academia and research, our pool of teaching cohorts is rapidly di-

minishing. Doctors today are opting to get into private practice for financial reasons and also for personal reasons such as autonomy and freedom from institutional interference or lack of infrastructural support. It is not surprising that we are currently facing a serious crisis in retaining our professionals.

As I stood in front of the gathering of the refreshingly multi-hued medical specialists, I was wary of the fact that at least half of them would be tempted to leave our shores for greener pastures at some point or the other.

Well documented research supports this view. Their reasons may be diverse, but in any event they will make a serious dent in our national health-care services.

### Capital

The loss of ordinary citizens is not comparable to the loss of highly skilled technicians and medical specialists in whom a country has invested considerable capital in training. The training of a single medical student costs a country a substantial amount and it behoves a government to seriously address the realities of this grave loss by providing attractive incentives and valuing professionals for their expertise.

I was recently embroiled in a heated discussion about the



**Devi's Diary**  
**DEVI RAJAB**

future of our country.

The young professionals were mouthing the usual platitudes about security and vocational opportunities for "pinks and browns".

South Africa is going down the tubes, they said. Should we stay or should we go now?

We all have to be a part of the solution, I said lamely to people who feel excluded on the basis of their race and who have little connection to the past struggle. There is nothing wrong in wanting to resettle in another part of the world for any number of reasons. After all, South Africa has had many settlers.

The Indian community in South Africa is a living example of a mass exodus into Africa as a result of indentured labour. The movement of people all around the world is not new. Neither is it wrong for people to want to improve their social and financial positions and to offer their offspring a better chance at life.

However, what is disturbing about South Africans wanting to emigrate is the vehemence with which they find it necessary to denigrate their country of birth. Mother Africa from whose breasts

they suckled is being violated in the most callous ways.

Yet under apartheid, the groundswell of opposition was never quite like this.

Now we see the effects of open and raw racism. There is anger, stereotyping, racial slurs and general intolerance for any other view different from the old ways.

People cite affirmative action and crime as a reason to leave. There is no hope for our children they say. But while this may be true in some cases, it is not necessarily so in others.

While not every black person is thriving in the new South Africa, there are many non-blacks who are doing exceptionally well under the new government. In fact I recall that when I had returned from the US with advanced qualifications in the 1970s I could not find a job and I could only find work at ethnic institutions whereas white South Africans seemed to enjoy unlimited access and mobility.

Blacks didn't cry foul and knuckle under. They bit their lip and suffered one frustration after another. But what is disturbing now in the new

South Africa is the growing corruption at the highest level of political leadership. No matter how beautiful a country and its people may be, when corruption enters the core of government, it affects the entire nation.

For this and other reasons the migration of doctors from their home countries is not a new phenomenon.

Medical professionals, mainly from sub-Saharan Africa, are actively recruited by developed countries. Doctors in South Africa are esteemed for their high standard of training which they receive locally a quality which renders them prime candidates for employment.

Various factors are involved in the high push-pull theory of migration.

### Push

It has been reported that push factors usually play a greater role in doctors' decisions to leave their countries of origin, than do pull factors in the host or recipient countries. And this is where the blame should squarely fall on the shoulders of our government and not entirely on foreign first world countries.

Push factors motivating migration most frequently include dissatisfaction with remuneration packages and working conditions, high levels of crime and political in-

stability, lack of future prospects, HIV/Aids and decline in educational systems.

In a recent study it was noted that nearly 86 percent of Africans practising in the US originate from only three countries: Nigeria, South Africa and Ghana.

Furthermore, 79 percent were trained at only 10 medical schools. Physician migration from poor countries to rich ones contributes to worldwide health workforce imbalances that may be detrimental to the health systems of source countries. The migration of over 5 000 doctors from sub-Saharan Africa to the US has had a significantly negative effect on the doctor-to-population ratio of Africa.

In South Africa it is estimated that only 35 percent of our doctors cater for the 35 million people who use public sector health care, with the remaining 65 percent treating the 7 million who belong to medical aid schemes. Access to specialist clinicians is even more slanted. Simply put, says a report from the Donald Gordon Medical Centre, the poor have very little chance of being treated by a specialist.

The finding that the bulk of migration occurs from only a few countries and medical schools suggests policy interventions in only a few locations could be effective in stemming the brain drain.

As a country, we need to wake up to this threat to our national health.

● Devi Rajab is a psychologist.

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## 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.

## Let's protect Hawaan forest from intrusion

SOME years ago, the Umhlanga Festival was a great event on our calendar.

It included the Ski Boat Fishing Competition, the largest in the world with competitors from around the world participating.

We had go-kart and motorcycle racing in Lagoon Drive and numerous activities in the village itself. Umhlanga was really on the map.

For some reason these events fell away. Efforts are being made to revive the festival. We all must be in favour of this.

However, one of the events being planned is a 20km foot race. This is an excellent idea, except that the organisers are asking permission for the end of the race to be either run or

walked through Hawaan Forest. Umhlanga is the custodian of this forest, which is probably the only remaining pristine coastal forest in the country.

For years, Bill Duffy successfully protected the forest from intrusion. Now he is gone, but that does not mean that the citizens of Umhlanga can turn a blind eye to intrusions into the forest.

I can see no justification for a race to be run through Hawaan. Residents who agree with me should make their feelings known through our newspapers, our councillors and any other significant bodies.

KEITH T KITCHING  
Umhlanga

## PARENTS THE BIGGEST PROBLEM

AS A recently retired teacher, I sympathise with the teacher at the Durban primary school who has been accused of discrimination and human-rights violations by a parent (The Mercury, October 15).

Many parents have become the biggest discipline problem in

schools today for two reasons: they undermine school ethos by demanding that things be arranged to suit their views and standards; and by their readiness to blame teachers for everything that happens to their offspring. This is nothing more than a shabby attempt to cover up for their

own failings as parents. School has always been about uniformity and conformity. Given the size of classes today and the huge teaching loads of teachers, it is vital that uniformity and conformity prevail.

But when exceptions are demanded, a Pandora's Box of new difficulties is opened,

including those who plead religious circumstances.

If such obligations clash with the uniformity and conformity a school promotes, parents should enrol their children at institutions compatible with their beliefs.

RETIRED TEACHER

## Our sheep mentality is Malema's stronghold

MANY people are critical of Julius Malema because of the radical ideas he espouses.

It is, however, not Malema who is the problem. There are many people who have radical

views on many issues. The problem lies with the ordinary people, the masses, who are the enthusiastic followers of those who espouse radical views.

People like Stalin, Hitler, Mugabe, Idi Amin and many others – who have been responsible for the untold misery of millions of people – would have been unheralded

vuvuzela blowers if it had not been for the masses that followed them.

V A VOLKER  
Pietermaritzburg

## South Africans are funding firearm theft

THE RECENTLY announced revelation that some 7 000 firearms have been lost or stolen from the SAPS over the last three years is a cause for great concern (The Mercury, October 13).

The tragic irony is that South African citizens are staring down the barrel of firearms which they have effectively paid for. The large number of firearms stolen from the SAPS also makes a mockery of the purported reason for the promulgation of the Firearms Control Act.

Essentially, thousands of law-abiding licensed firearm owners were forced to hand in their legal firearms to the SAPS, ostensibly to reduce the number of firearms in circulation, yet the numbers

stolen from the SAPS and the SANDF must outweigh the numbers stolen from private citizens.

The type of weapons are also a major source of concern, as the items stolen include semi-automatic assault rifles, high-calibre firearms and large amounts of ammunition. All these now rest in the hands of criminal elements.

It is essential that stronger measures are put in place to ensure better safekeeping of SAPS and SANDF weapons, and that every effort is made to track down those responsible for the theft and that the weapons are recovered.

JOHN STEENHUISEN  
MPL, DA caucus leader,  
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