



## Shell Shock

**H**YDRAULIC fracturing, or fracking, is a term that was virtually unheard of in South Africa until very recently. Now fracking, which involves setting off underground explosions and then injecting a slurry of water, sand and highly toxic chemicals under high pressure to release shale gas, has entered our daily vocabulary, and for many, it has become an expletive.

Three companies, Royal Dutch Shell, Falcon Oil, and Bundu Oil and Gas, have lodged applications for exploration drilling for gas over 200 000km<sup>2</sup> of Karoo, a massive 15 percent of South Africa's total land mass. But the fracking process is fraught with problems, and several states in the US and in Canada have either banned fracking, or placed a moratorium on it until comprehensive environmental impact studies have been carried out.

The biggest concern about fracking is that there simply is not enough research on the Karoo to answer the very many big questions that arise about the process.

Where will the water come from? Each well that is drilled will need around 20 million litres of water. Shell has said it will truck in the water, but that 25 million litres is the equivalent of around 660 tankers each carrying 30 000 litres.

And should gas extraction go ahead on a large scale, there will be hundreds, if not thousands, of wells across the Karoo. Shell has also proposed using salt water, but fracking chemicals do not combine well with saline water. And those chemicals are highly toxic, and can lead to endocrine, heart, respiratory, skin and nervous disorders.

Most alarming of all is the possibility that the fracking process could lead to cross-pollution of the Karoo's aquifers. Scientists say there is a danger that deep, saline water could escape upwards, contaminating the potable surface aquifers.

There are many more unanswered questions around the disposal of toxic waste, the massive impact on the road infrastructure of what is, after all, heavy industrial activity, and the inevitable environmental damage that is a by-product of the extraction process elsewhere.

Even the most optimistic estimates say that if vast amounts of gas are found, it will still be exhausted in 10 to 15 years.

Geologically, the Karoo is 300 million years old in places. It is our own Jurassic Park. At the very least, the government should declare a complete moratorium on any exploration until such time as exhaustive – and not speculative – scientific studies have been conducted on every possible environmental, social and economic impact.

## A Specific Case

**M**UAMMAR Gaddafi has long been a murderer who has never paid for his many crimes. The UN Security Council resolution authorised member nations to take "all necessary measures" to protect civilians in Libya and was perhaps the only hope of stopping him from slaughtering thousands.

The resolution was an extraordinary moment in recent history. The UN, the US and the Europeans dithered for an agonisingly long time and then – with the rebels' last redoubt, Benghazi, about to fall – acted with astonishing speed. There is no perfect formula for military intervention. It must be used sparingly – not in Bahrain or Yemen. Libya is a specific case: Gaddafi is erratic, widely reviled and has a history of supporting terrorism. If he is allowed to crush the opposition, it would chill pro-democracy movements across the Arab world. – The New York Times



You & Me  
ROD SMITH

### DO I speak up?

"My SISTER and her husband constantly belittle our lives. We, my husband and I, are not as wealthy, we are not as successful in our careers, but at least we are 100 percent honest. While they are not blatantly dishonest, they do make their living in questionable ways, and it pays them very well.

"The point is that my husband is now disinclined to spend time with my extended family. Do I speak up or just suffer in silence? Do I insist my husband joins me at family events, or do I go alone and make an excuse for him?"

A: Suffer in silence? Never. Speak up? Of course you speak up. I'd suggest you gently tell both your sister and her husband (together) your truth. Tell them, whether they are able to hear you or not. Since their "questionable" pursuits are none of your business, I'd suggest they are not worth mentioning.

Attend any family event you want, whether your husband wants to go or not. Don't push him. Don't determine his level of involvement with your family or allow him to determine yours. If anyone wants to know where he is or why he is not with you, suggest that person ask your husband his or her questions directly.

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

# World-class intellectual engagement

Great minds have assembled at a symposium that embodies one of democracy's most important characteristics – open debate

**A**MIDST the global drama of the thwarted revolution in Libya, the clampdown in Bahrain and the Yemen, not to mention the tragic events in Japan, I accompanied my students to the Time of the Writer Festival last week. It may seem that in the midst of these momentous events, stepping back from the action to reflect is one luxury too far. But, in fact, the festival was thrilling and plugged its audience right into the hurly burly of the now.

Sahar El Moungy from Egypt had been in Tahrir Square and she gave us a gripping account of how events had unfolded. Controversial young Durban writer Azad Essa had been on the Al Jazeera newsdesk as the dictators fell in Egypt and Tunisia and he gave a fascinating account of how Al Jazeera had covered the north African revolts.

Closer to home the Zim-

babean writer Petina Gappah had some choice words for the Mugabe dictatorship.

As always, the festival had some of the biggest names in letters. Achille Mbembe, certainly the most internationally celebrated academic working in South Africa, was there, as was grand old man of the Durban literary scene, Aziz Hassim, and the rock star of social justice writing, Raj Patel.

The opening night featured a deeply moving talk by the retired Constitutional Court judge Albie Sachs on the pressing topic of freedom of expression. Sachs spoke about the tension between Jacob Zuma and the cartoonist Jonathan Shapiro.

He gave a subtle and careful account of his personal relations with both men, and their families, and concluded that we should empathise with both Zuma's hurt at the way Shapiro has depicted him and Shapiro's concern about Zuma's personal and



IMRAAN BUCCUS

political integrity. He described this position as the uncomfortable one of sitting on the fence. He didn't intend this to mean that we shouldn't take a position in these matters. He meant that we should try to actively empathise with both parties and stressed that this is the opposite of apathy.

Njabulu Ndebele, one of our most respected literary elders, gave a brilliant but gentle rebuke to Sachs. Ndebele explained that he is researching boxing in Mdantsane, in the Eastern Cape, for his new novel.

He told the audience that he has met some kind and gentle young men who are demons in the ring and argued that while Zuma may be an affable man while chatting

to Sachs "man to man" he was a different person in the ring, in the political game. There was also an exceptional exchange between Sarah Nuttal, a cultural theorist and postmodernist from Wits, and the best-selling radical author Raj Patel. Nuttal argued that the writing of the Left in South Africa ran out of steam years ago.

In her view, it tends towards a conspiratorial view of the world that cannot grasp the various ways in which people make their lives in the here and now. She has, in the past, excoriated some left-wing authors for their tendency to catastrophism and she has written in detail about how middle class young black people have turned consumer cul-

ture into an exciting space for self-fashioning. For her the shopping mall can be a site for liberation.

Patel's work is full of humour and warmth.

He is no Left miserabilist who thinks that life is only about getting a few litres of water or kilowatts of power more for the masses. In that sense Nuttal was attacking a caricatured view of the Left that would certainly not include an author like Patel or, for that matter, Arundhati Roy or John Berger.

But for Patel, who comes to an analysis of the mall through a study of the point of production and in particular the rural economy, the mall sits at a pinnacle of a system of oppression. Patel does not deny that the middle class may have fun in the mall, but he stresses that the middle class is a class that most people are not able to be a part of. He wants, he said, joy and fun for everyone. While Nuttal sees middle

class consumption in the mall as the practice of freedom, Patel looks to movements like La Via Campesina, of which he is a leading member, to build a better world from the Left and from below.

In a city with limited opportunities for world-class intellectual engagement this kind of debate is really exciting and stimulating. Over the years the Centre for Creative Arts at the University of KwaZulu-Natal has brought people of the stature of Mahmood Mamdani, Chris Abani, Breyten Breytenbach, Amitav Gosh, Arundhati Roy, Meena Kandasamy and Zakes M'da to our shores. We should treasure it. It's a real asset to the university and the city.

● Imraan Buccus is attached to the School of Politics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and Democracy Development Programme.

E-mail [merletter@ml.co.za](mailto:merletter@ml.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.

## Department's defence an offence

**I**N RESPONDING to my letter regarding its estimated 82 000 unaccounted-for weapons, the Department of Defence somehow forgot to explain why Parliament's watchdog public accounts committee, Scopa, demanded an explanation from Defence Minister Lindwe Sisulu about missing weapons.

Why would such an inquiry be necessary when – as the department strives to explain – there is no problem?

Records of weapons should always be up to date and verifiable. An "audit" is just an evaluation of the systems that should already be in place.

Why would the media state that, according to a "report by the auditor-general, an estimated 82 000 weapons belonging to the SANDF and the Navy are unaccounted for?"

When the media reported, "provincial police spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Andre Traut said criminals got hold of assault rifles in a number of ways, including stealing from police and the SANDF", did he lie?

Further, it was reported: "To get their hands on an AK-47, and an R4 rifle, criminals need only place an order with fellow criminals. This is according to

an Institute for Security Studies arms researcher and a member of a Cape Town gang."

To my knowledge only the SAPS, SANDF and some security companies own such weapons and we can be sure that if private companies can't account for their assault rifles, there would be charges laid – excuses about audits taking 18 months wouldn't be tolerated at all. And yet, the department responds by claiming my observations are "mischievous".

CHARL VAN WYK  
Cape Town

## Forensic audit long overdue

**C**O-OPERATIVE Governance MEC Nomusa Dube's announcement of a forensic investigation into allegations of fraud, maladministration and corruption in the city is most welcome and certainly overdue (The Mercury, March 18).

Dube's bold statement that "whoever will be implicated or found to have done anything wrong, their heads will roll" is most appropriate because of the lack of accountability of the eThekweni administration. The cavalier attitude of officials regarding the allegations is not acceptable.

JUNAID ESSOP  
Durban

## Human Rights Days misused for agitprop

**W**E SHOULD record history and learn from it. However, this should be done objectively, accurately, and without emotion. The article by Navi Pillay (The Mercury, March 21) recycles the popular myth about Goree Island in Senegal, and the "infamous door of no return from which countless Africans were sent in chains to the Americas".

Very few slaves were transported from Goree. The vast majority were transported from other sites that were more practical for the loading of slaves. Goree and its celebrated door are a product of good marketing, notably by Boubacar Joseph Ndiaye, who

carved himself a career out of promoting the place.

This does not make the trade any less reprehensible, but when you are seeking to establish a truth you undermine your credibility if you get your facts wrong.

Terry Lester, the Anglican sub-dean of Cape Town, also writes that the crowd at Sharpeville had come to burn their passes as an act of political protest.

All the evidence suggests that most of them were there as curious, and apolitical, bystanders. And, Lester tells us, the police "emptied their guns on them, killing 69 people, mothers and fathers, sons and

daughters, whose red blood spilt on the dusty street of Sharpeville".

Year after year we get this kind of emotion-laden writing. Interestingly, it only turns up on anniversaries of black deaths at the hands of white people. I suppose that's because white people never get killed, or maybe their blood isn't red, or it has some magical quality that stops it from spilling into the dusty streets.

Sharpeville, and slavery were tragic indeed. The truth of what happened is horrifying enough. And from it we should learn that such things should never happen again.

This week, on Sharpeville

Day, many of our politicians addressed rallies to remind black South Africans that they are always the victims, while the whites are always the perpetrators. And they'll be doing it again on June 16. While I fully agree that these anniversaries should be recorded, I do not think we are going about it in the right way. Thank heavens we don't have a Blaauwkrans Day, a White Farmers' Day, an Amy Biehl Day or a St James Church Day. Then we could all get down to the business of hating each other.

RON MCGREGOR  
Cape Town

## New apartheid is alive – finish and klaar

**A**PARTHEID by any other name is still apartheid. Legislation whereby the state provides opportunities, employment, benefits or rights on the basis of race, colour or gender is apartheid – finish and klaar.

To reason that it is justified because of past injustices or to improve or safeguard

opportunities for a section of the population – whether it be the majority or the minority – for whatever reason, then there could well have been reasons for past differentiation.

So if past differentiation resulted in South Africa being labelled the polecat of the world, present differentiation

can well be seen in the same light (or is it bluff darkness?).

Let's not bluff ourselves. The truth is the truth. What could Nelson Mandela have meant when he said, "Never, never, never again...?"

VA VOLKER  
Pietermaritzburg

## Job reservation based on race is absurd

**T**HE EXCELLENT cartoon (The Mercury, March 18) illustrates the absurdity of the proposed employment bill.

To legislate about jobs for races ignores the fact that since liberation, and before

that, a growing number of people have parents from separate groups. How will public servants deal with them?

Instead of increasing employment, the proposed bill may discourage employers

from appointing new workers. The recent row about Cape coloureds also show there's still racism in the government.

J MATTHEWS  
Durban