



## The UKZN Griot. Of Web of Science and Satirical Columns

Keyan G Tomaselli\*

It's official. "The Griot" is now honourably mentioned in Thompson Reuter's Web of Science.

How? Quite simply, in 2013 a UKZN student wrote her Honours Special Topics project on The Griot. Phoebe Sakarombe read the columns, conducted a reader reception survey and interviewed me. We rewrote the essay into an article published in the *Journal of African Media Studies* (JAMS), titled: 'Griots, Satirical Columns, and the Micro Public Sphere'[1]. I had pre-tested the paper in a seminar invited by PMB, and I composed from the columns an invited chapter for an academic book on "Transformation". The column has also inspired an article for "Educational Research for Social Change" on the issue of academentia[2] .

The June 2015 column that was re-published in the July *Mail & Guardian* Getting Ahead supplement[3] earned for UKZN the advertising value equivalent of a whopping R125 809. Must say, now that I am retired from UKZN, it's good to know that I am still earning my keep. Just shows, one can get anything indexed on WoS. More so, the JAMS article will earn publication incentive subsidy for UKZN so maybe I'll make it back into the Top 30 researchers for 2015.

I missed the Top 30 accolade in 2013 because one of my co-edited books on a new indigenous archaeology approach[4] that earned subsidy for my University of Cape Town (UCT) and University of Pretoria (UP) co-editors, was not considered sufficiently worthy by UKZN for submission to DHET.

Not that this bothered me in the slightest. Innovation always comes at a price. My unsuccessful appeal confirmed the value of the study. UKZN did not get to be No 1 in the research rankings by being lenient, opportunistic or nepotistic. My topics have always evaded instrumentalist selection categories – whether books or National Research Foundation (NRF) ratings. It's a sacrifice that one must pay along the way to lead the way.

And, of course, that irritating British voice on the switchboard reminded us that UKZN was No 1. We did not get there by harmonizing our book selection criteria with IKS (indigenous Knowledge Systems) considerations in relation to the promotion of new African paradigms. So, like physicist Paul Higgs, I will have to wait until I am 80 for my Nobel Prize, and share it with my UCT, UP, UKZN and McGregor Museum colleagues.

A free flight to Norway in first class is high on my most wanted list. My entrance will be explosive, dynamite, provided that I can get a visa. And, anyway, our Minister of Education who is still dealing with fall-out says that all good academics should work to 80. My real claim to fame is yet to come, though I did once share a semiotics panel in a small southern Italian town with the great and ebullient Umberto Eco, he of *The Name of the Rose* and other semiotic labyrinths. As much as the book was unconventional, so was its distribution, through mall bookshops, libraries and informal markets in out of the way places.

NRF ratings reviewers commented on one of the co-editors contribution's in "Engraved Landscape" as showcasing new modes of inquiry, supplementing written with oral sources, and animating information that may have been suppressed by the official archive. These reviewers, as did the editor of *The South African Journal of Science*, suggest that we've created a new paradigm in exploring new visions. Some of the journals in which I am debating what is academic and what is not are 'accredited' and some are not. That's the brilliance of my strategy. It's not the funny money. It's the readership, the impact on the field, the accessibility to readers, the Nobel Prize (the recognition, not the dosh). When I presented at the UKZN 2015 IKS conference, organised by the SARChI Chair, my and Lauren Dyll-Myklebust's paper on the IKS methodology developed for the project got an honorable mention as being the most innovative.

When one designs a book for readability, illustrates it visually, and includes three languages, two of them indigenous, then clearly, for some, it cannot be simultaneously academic. Peer review counts for nothing since "popular" appearance disqualifies science. The committee did not recognize the publisher, well-known to my UP colleagues and indeed, to DHET also. Peer review pontification is never perfect and as we know, committees usually meet to agree on what is already known and to justify why nothing can be done.

Do not for one minute assume that I am complaining. Far from it. Just think of the many technologies in use today that were rejected by entrepreneurs as being foolish fleeting fads: the telephone, the PC, the car and the photocopier. Theories that took time to get acceptance include plate tectonics and continental drift, atomic theory, endosymbiosis, set theory, genetics, and let's not forget Galileo's Medieval traumas. Evolution is still given a run for its money by creationists, so who am I to fuss? Some universities even submit technical reports to DHET for publication incentive funding, so what's the bother? One local media research company once discussed its "mythology" before presenting its "findings". Myth, method, madness – it's all mystifying mumbo jumbo.

The Griot column is but a step to peer-reviewed publication even if it is not in itself peer-reviewed though it is sometimes pilloried.

- *Keyan G Tomaselli is a UKZN Professor Emeritus and a Sometime UKZN Fellow, and a Distinguished Professor, University of Johannesburg, where his IKS team occupies offices in the dusty Greek and Latin corridor.*

*Disclaimer: The views expressed in this column are the author's own.*

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[1] <http://ndabaonline.ukzn.ac.za/uploads/Griots-Satirical-columns-and-the-micro-public-sphere.pdf>.

[2] 'Hacking Through Academentia: Autoethnography, Data and Social Change', [http://ersc.nmmu.ac.za/view\\_edition.php?v=4&n=2#](http://ersc.nmmu.ac.za/view_edition.php?v=4&n=2#)

[3] <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-07-03-a-tale-of-life-between-two-varsities>

[4] Lange et al, "Engraved Landscape". Tormentoso. <http://www.biesjepoortboek.co.za/>