

The UKZN Griot

Of Big and Little Griots

KEVAN C TOMASELLI

MY Griot column is spanning a number of little griots. These are single interventions penned by folks associated with UKZN. Here is one (bedded) example. In response to the indomitable HR summarily giving its staff an extra Women's Day (WD1) off during a Working Day (WD2) while imposing TRS migrations on the rest of us, Manfred Heiberg, professor emeritus and esteemed member of the Academy of Science, wrote:

Dear Prof Meyerowitz,
As someone who has been at the University for almost 47 years, it was a novelty to me that a major support sector would close down totally on a normal working day, in order to commemorate a public holiday that had been celebrated nationally two weeks earlier.

Initially I thought that the entire HR staff of the University, including the relevant College-based teams, had for some reason been forced to work all day on Women's Day, and were now apparently being given a day off in their throw-off.

However, someone that seemed to imply a very unusual set of circumstances. In particular, I recalled that Women's Day was followed by a Friday, on which the public schools were closed. That led

to significant numbers of staff taking one day's leave, and the results were evident in the ease with which parking could be found on campus. I therefore decided that that seemed to us highly unlikely.

I then wondered what this action was a precedent for future years, and that HR would annually close for a day in August, in commemoration of Women's Day of course.

My thoughts then rambled on – what of other sectors of the University, such as Finance, RMS, the academics, etc.: would they, too, all wish to close for a day in August, in commemoration of Women's Day of course.

Suddenly, I realised that possibly HR had hit on a very important point, that the rest of us in the University had missed entirely. Should we not in fact be commemorating ALL the public holidays that crop up during the

University's core business time, viz., term-time? ... I am thus very grateful to HR for drawing attention to the role of women, by commemorating Women's Day, albeit briefly.
But, is it a good idea if within the commemorative Women's Day, and the ignore all other public holidays? ... These include ... Human Rights, the Family Eviction, the Workers' Youth, and Heritage.
The matter of Recognition falls

outside term time, and might thus possibly be ignored.

If we ignore such public holidays in not commemorating them adequately, would the University not stand accused of ignoring these other important areas of our society? I think that the answer lies in having different parts of the University taking responsibility for commemorating different such public holidays by closing down. We probably have a sufficient number of sectors to cover all of the public holidays. That sounds like a great idea to me, which would, I believe, be welcomed by all.

Cops, possibly not necessarily by everyone, one is not quite sure how the students might react!
Nonetheless, could the Executive possibly consider this proposal for implementation in future years?

South Africa already has the most public holidays in the world. A few more could not hurt and, may in fact, be desirable given that HR wants to cummily include the end of the year break in our annual leave allocation, thus reducing it by five days. Perhaps HR is ensuring that it at least grants itself extra days by means of this kind of one plus one equals one working day for each of a growing number of public holidays each year.

(WD1+WD2=WD3) that the rest of us won't notice? Many will be too busy at work wondering why their salaries are again delayed, their letters unanswered, and whether or not new appointments have been 'captured' by the system. Soon, HR will be allocating itself 23 extra holidays, an extra month over the month already statutorily allocated to public holidays, not including annual leave – less of course the five days between Christmas and New Year. By my reckoning that's totals 67 days of leave of one kind or another not including weekends.

Not had if this extra leave is part of the TRS migration. Count me in for the post-Christmas period – no-one will be here anyway.

Since HR is a law unto itself, the cannon fodder who do come to work during WD2 might ask whether:

- a) all HR personnel celebrating an additional Women's Day (WD2), applied for one day's annual leave;
- b) any constituted division in the University is heavily empowered by means of a general circular when the public holiday statute is no longer deemed limiting to celebrate any day they like – the forstification of telling female feral cats they would be a good one – at all, these furry four-legged purring citizens of UKZN handle up their my car in the TB Davis parking lot when it is raining, and c) whether the scores of employees

whose monthly wages are sometimes lost, and the many new and re-appointments stuck or captured but not processed by the I-enabler system, will understand that their "capturing" is again delayed for a good cause. The unpaid being dragged off to debtor courts will surely understand that their predicament is well intentioned.

WD1+WD2=WD3 (WD3=Vice Debutors).

I look forward to my correspondents sending me the little griots that they have penned, even if not sent. We will start in true African democratic vein a network of griots/imbongis and, like the West African griots of old, we will travel from campus to campus, town to town, and residence to residence, praising as is our wont and, indeed, our cultural mandate, the follies of the King of HR.

Kevan C Tomaselli is Director of The Centre for Communication, Media and Society.

His griot columns are now being studied by some UKZN students as a new African art form.
Disclaimer: The views expressed in this column are the author's own.

