

The UKZN Griot Of Entrances and Exits

If you are reading this,
then I must have survived
my first column.
Second life?

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"TIA!" This acronym popularised by the feature film, *Blood Diamond*, stands for "This is Africa!" It's a term of exasperation for a continent in which nothing ever seems to get done properly.

TIA came to mind one morning in late March when I and my passenger were negotiating the gemors that greets anyone trying to enter Howard College via Mazisi Kunene Avenue at peak periods. Cars are double and triple parked, facing every which way; loud thumping taxis are offloading students in the middle of the turning bay; sometimes driving the wrong side; parents, wanting to save their little darlings the 50 metre walk from the turnoff point, block both entrances and exits; huge buses, service vehicles, pedestrians, and mobile no parking signs placed on red lines impede flow. Noise, pollution and confusion greet esteemed visitors who are often bewildered by their first encounter with the University before they have even entered it. This entrance, however, is a microcosm of the chaotic lawlessness that typifies many Durban roads.

Getting through the last 50 metres of my morning commute takes me into blood pressure-raising territory. This ailment will surely bankrupt our various medical schemes which charge us ever more and deliver ever less. How many working and study hours are lost annually just trying to pass through the gate?

I once worked as an urban geographer in the Johannesburg Town Planning Division. So on my arrival at Natal University (NU) in the mid-1980s I devised a solution to the gemors. I remember writing endless letters and proposals and sending these to the Director of Administration, RMS, and anybody who had a postbox (e-mails were then still a glint in the Pentagon's eye). Over the years I repeatedly drew attention to the delays of entry onto campus, queues of long-suffering students abandoned to the elements, congestion, and the daily threats to life and limb experienced by students alighting in the street, on the traffic islands, and anywhere where vehicles stopped, started or jerked along.

The institutional responses were always the same: 'South Ridge Road (as it was known then) is municipal property. The guards have no authority over



drivers or pedestrians. Write to the Metro!"

ICD which usually stands for Implantable Cardiac Defibrillator in the university context means 'It can't be done'. This popular administrative discourse at the time complemented TIA. At Natal University no one seemingly took responsibility. So I wrote to a DVC. He was too busy restructuring the institution to find the time to restructure the entrance. Recently, a DVC lost her temper trying to get to a pressing engagement while taking a detour over the kerb.

I keep hearing the term, ubuntu; indeed I engage it with my cultural studies students. But I don't see it in operation on this campus. Is it rhetoric without substance? Ubuntu would start at the kerbside – ensuring safety of one and all entering the campus; shelters would protect students from the elements as they patiently wait for their pick-ups. Ubuntu planning would ensure safe movement of vehicles and reduce the blood pressure of those driving them.

So I think the time has now come to reorder the two acronyms: TIA becomes "Intelligent Transport Arrangements" (ITA) and ICD can be applied to "do it competently" (DIC). In the 'old' days of TIA and ICD the university administration was overburdened, and the student population small. The entrance to HC did not then mimic the utter chaos of a downtown taxi rank. (Come to think of it, such ranks are usually quite ordered, even if the bullets are sometimes flying.) When the cops do visit they simply ticket cars parked on the islands. Directing the traffic is not on their agenda. The symptoms, not the cause are their concern. I applaud those guards who gently try to persuade illegally packed drivers to move on. These drivers disrespect the guards and ignore them.

But, hope is on the horizon. We have a new head of Corporate Relations, or whatever they are calling themselves now. If the mess that greets our esteemed visitors from Joe Public to Bill Gates can be substituted with a safe, clutter-free and functioning drop-off and collection arrangement, then Corporate Affairs' job is made easier. Not to

mention the endlessly harassed guards. Transformation is about positive image and good behaviour also.

What I learned from the storyteller/imbongi Mazisi Kunene, who served on the Centre for Communication, Media and Society (CCMS) Advisory Committee, is that ubuntu starts with small actions. Like respect for the individual within the framework of the community. Consideration, sharing and being one-through-another are key attributes often forgotten as the term is made meaningless though opportunistic self-serving politicisation. The ridiculous mayhem that each of us has to negotiate just trying to enter (or exit) Howard College disrespects both individuals and the community (the institution).

Representation starts with the grassroots issues – the SRC should be addressing safety, consideration and efficiency for students if the University and municipality won't. Small interventions at individual levels contribute to the bigger institutional picture. We must all play our parts somehow.

Like Shakespeare's Jacques, I hope to continue with my part next time round.

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