

# The UKZN Griot Of Educators and Fordism



"I'm taking early retirement because I want to teach. Can't stand educational fordism."

WORDS: KEYAN G TOMASELLI

This complaint about the production line that the tertiary sector has become in the so-called postmodern era, made to me while a colleague and I were taking a leak in a MTB men's room, reminded me of the absolute astonishment that usually greeted my comments at public lectures in the USA during the 1980s.

These always drew forth the question: 'How is it that your University allows you to be so politically radical?' Yes, I was a Marxist in those days. And, my Centre did have the protection of a security gate at a time when these were unheard of, just in case someone tried to bomb us like they did Laurie Schlemmer's office. My response was that the four anti-apartheid liberal universities were democratic beacons in a sea of neo-fascism: 'we elect our Deans and if they do not represent our concerns then we can unelect them'. The noise was sometimes deafening as my US colleagues raged on about their own Deans – many of whom acted like petty tyrants – who often got in the way of them doing their jobs. This, in the society that claims to be the model of democracy globally.

In the mid-1990s, I remember Mervyn Frost, then Professor of Politics, warning of the fordism to come. Corporatism duly arrived

in the late 1990s and was fine-tuned at the time of the merger in 2004. Prior to 2000, Deans represented their constituents – the academics on whose behalf they worked and to whom they were accountable. A reversal has since occurred. Deans are now responsible to upper management, senior administrators; anyone but academics. Many Deans do try to balance between inexorable top-down, bottom-up pressures, but this is the surest way to getting an ulcer. An analogy is when the newspaper industry corporatised in the early 1990s and editors found themselves held accountable to their marketing and subscription departments. Their autonomy and editorial freedom was compromised. Some left the profession in protest to pee in more conducive environments. Hence, my pissing buddy claiming that being a lecturer is nowadays anything but. This, of course, is a recurring theme in my columns.

In the UK, academics started an e-zine on "The Death of the University". The situation there is much more dire, as the ruling Conservatives try to impose the ultimate spreadsheet regime. *Malice in Blunderland* (edited by TL Martin, 1973) is the best reference for discussing these matters. Martin discusses kludgeman-ship,

the study of glitches. Murphy's laws hang out here: 'If something can go wrong, it will'. The revision of Murphy's First Law adds that: 'If anything can go wrong, it will, and generally at the moment that the system becomes indispensable'. Just think of what happens when the LAN is down, or the electricity goes off. Everybody goes home.

There is a chapter on Hierarchy, how bureaucracy has permeated every aspect of our lives. The Peter Principle is best known in this category. Martin's Law, Comitology, states that: a committee is a group of people who, individually, can do nothing, but collectively can meet and decide that nothing can be done. Fuglemanship is the art of science and leadership, another word for (mis)management. Machiavelli is this category's key character. Lastly, is Academocracy, the study of the educational bureaucracy. Martin's book was written at an earlier time when the academy was engaged in education.

Where *aca-democracy* means academic democracy, *aca-dementia* could signify collective academic psychosis. *Academ-entia* describes the institution globally. So, my real concern, then, in this column is how to hack through academentia. In the education system the people are represented

by two separate divisions: the academics who generate knowledge and the administrators who manage the academics. In many tertiary institutions there are more managers/administrators than academics. One might ask the question why? The only way I can answer this question without getting fired is not to ask. So, I respond to it by referring to a tautology written on a bowl that my mother bought when I was a child:

Why do rabbits have more fun than people?

Because there are more rabbits.

Why are there more rabbits?

Because rabbits have more fun than people.

Maybe the managers have more fun than academics? They reproduce faster – bureaucratically, that is. Why do they reproduce faster? Because there are more managers. Why do academics no longer have any fun? Because the managers have taken the fun out of the academy. Filling in spread sheets is no fun (unless one is an accountant or an administrator). Responding to our Deputy President's lament that South Africans want everything for free, one might quote Barzun's Lament: 'Education is a passion and a paradox. Millions want it and commend it, at the same time they are willing to degrade it by

trying to get it free of charge and free of work'. This is the result of open admissions, free marks, grade inflation and the popular assumption that institutions can afford to accept everybody.

Too many students result in overload in the toilets, and academics will no longer have anywhere to debate why the academy is the most inappropriate site if one wants to be a lecturer. A well-known political economist once commented that he found it very difficult to trace the source of decisions made by the Nationalists during the apartheid era as many of them were made while at the urinal!

So, my advice to my toilet friend is take the package, go out and educate, procreate and multiply. Democracy must be re-made in different spheres.

*Tomaselli is Director of the Centre for Communication, Media and Society. He and his colleague use the most heavily trafficked men's room on the campus. Pity the cleaning staff whose job it is to keep it clean.*

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

## Sudoku

		8		6	2	4		
6	7						8	
	3	4			8	6		
			2		3		1	
				7				
	5		1		6			
		2	5			3	4	
	4						7	6
		7	6	8		2		

## Concert honours jazz legend

The Centre for Jazz and Popular Music in conjunction with the School of Music hosted a concert and jam session in honour of the late Mr Zim Ngqawana on May 17. The celebrated jazz musician, UKZN alumnus and former staff member passed away after suffering a stroke. Ngqawana's life was celebrated by musicians who had a long association with him, including staff and students who either studied with him or under his tutelage. The session also featured the poetry of long-time friend Professor Ari Sitas, percussionist/storyteller Mama Nomusa and multi-instrumentalist Ndikho Xaba.



Zim Ngqawana - Photo Supplied: [www.musicreview.co.za](http://www.musicreview.co.za)

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