

# The UKZN Griot

Columnists. What do they do? Why? With what consequences? Remember David Bullard? His brief was to provoke. Well, he provoked once too often – was accused of racism - and got fired. The *Sunday Times* even fired him from writing about cars.



WORDS: KEYAN TOMASELLI

Then there was Darrel Bristow-Bovey who was fired from many newspapers. One of my students approvingly described him as postmodern journalist. But BB was so postmodern that he forgot to acknowledge his sources. Ken Owen once wrote a column for the paper he edited, *Sunday Times*, and got fired for criticizing his own company. He went sailing. Pinky Khoabane recently got dragged to the Equality Court by an irate reader. UKZN has had its own columnists, Derek Wang once cast a lens on Natal University's foibles in the campus rag. A host of others used the LAN to satirise their dissatisfaction. Some were subjects of restraining orders. One died and others immigrated. The genre was lost. The survival rates of columnists' are not encouraging.

So where does this leave me? Corporate Affairs has invited me to write a regular column for *ukzndaba*. It wants to reinvent the paper. No more 'grin and grab' pictures of pouting individuals – the surest way to lose reader attention. Our politicians who insist that their mugs accompany indigestible departmental adverts have not learned this basic design lesson. Cutting edge design and flow that support the stories published attracts readers. Also, it's a good idea to create a sense of institutional identity and buy-in. Engagingly presented stories about academic action, not egos is the draw card.

So, how to proceed? I studied other columnists who still have their jobs. Greg Ardé, now published in the *Sunday Tribune*, is still trying to replace Durban's invisible Mayor. He wants the Mayor's job while retaining his current job. Seems like a good idea in a recession. Ben Trovato has a whole page in the *Sunday Times*. If he gets fired, at least he'll have a good nest egg while he rein-

vents himself as a car guard. My favourite is Fred Khumalo who manages to traverse with good humour the contradictions between tradition and modernity, while Justice Malala cuttingly exposes political failings. But he's protected by the ethics of press freedom and his employer.

As a scholar of African cinema and orality I pulled out my publications on griots, imbongis and Medieval bards. I re-examined West African cinema which popularized and reinvented griots in the modern age. The characters in these films, and indeed, their directors, cast a withering eye on corrupt African elites, abuse of power and self-aggrandisement. Maybe that's why their directors mostly live in Paris. These are the editorialisers, the satirists, the columnists of both early and modern Africa. Praise singers all, they reserve the right to offer critique in the courts of kings and queens, presidents and prime ministers, dictators and tyrants, and democratic leaders of all kinds. Our own Prof Fikile Mazibuko was last year given a fond and critical farewell by our very own imbongi, Sihawukele Ngubane.

Columnists, like comics, are magnets. Their job is to encourage readers to sustain their interest through the boring parts of papers and magazines, to thread their attention through the classifieds to the last page. I mean, you know, there's always that expensive advert on the back outside cover that must be amortized. Columnists have license. They are paid to be critical. They are expected to be controversial. Watch this space. I am not sure if I will survive this column. But *ukzndaba* will surely prosper with its new makeover.

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UKZN students braved unfriendly weather to support The People's Bus.

## The People's Bus visits UKZN campuses

UKZN students were entertained by The People's Bus on 4 March.

WORDS AND PHOTO: LUNGA MEMELA

The People's Bus is a Brand South Africa initiative, undertaken in partnership with MAN Truck and Bus South Africa. It aims to mobilise the nation through bringing FIFA 2010 World Cup Team information and excitement to every South African province. The Bus was launched on 19 February to encourage South Africans to be good hosts, fly the flag, sing the National Anthem with

pride, learn and do the diski (soccer) dance and celebrate Football Fridays.

Taking staff and students by surprise The People's Bus did *shosholozza* - drift swiftly - onto the campuses and managed to gain their attention with its picturesque display of soccer fever and a host of exciting activities.

"I think it's a great initiative raising multicultural awareness and creating a soccer spirit for

2010 amongst the students," said Ms Nombuso Mkwana, who is majoring in Drama and Media at the Howard College campus.

"Its good for the country and for Durban Tourism prospects," added Ms Pusetso Tsoeua. Her friend, Ms Verona Sathiyah is "excited at the prospect of interacting with people from different cultures ... It is an exciting opportunity to learn about people from different walks of life."

## Sudoku

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|   | 8 |   |   |   | 1 |   | 4 | 2 |
|   | 1 |   | 9 | 3 |   |   |   | 7 |
| 4 |   |   |   | 1 |   |   |   |   |
| 7 |   |   |   | 4 | 2 |   | 6 | 9 |

### THE UKZNDABA TEAM

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Produced by Corporate Relations. Tel: 031 260 1245/8668/2957 [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)