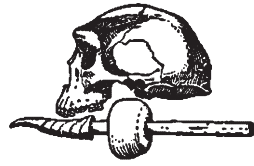


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Editorial

Kuhlwile, sengiyindlela: The curtain closes as the darkness of the night takes over

I used the last two editorials to reflect on my term as the Editor-in-Chief of the *Bulletin*. I was specifically focusing on the strategic issues I had wanted to address during my term of office. I have been successful in some, and not so in others. But I would like to believe that I have laid a strong foundation for the incumbent, Dr Natalie Swanepoel, to take over a ship sailing on steady waters. In this editorial, I specifically focus on four issues, namely, (i) my historically important appointment and what it meant to me, (ii) experiences during my term, (iii) my legacy, and (iv) my appreciation.

My appointment

I first joined the Editorial Team of the *Bulletin* in 2010. This was an outcome of the transformation drive that had been initiated by the 'Gang of 3' in 2007, through which ASAPA unanimously approved the Transformation Charter (Ndlovu 2009; Smith 2009). Sadly, these transformation initiatives have failed.

From the very beginning of my appointment as the Assistant Editor, it was my goal to one day be at the helm of the journal. I had already served on other editorial positions, first as a member of the Editorial Team and later Editor-in-Chief of *e-pisteme*, a postgraduate journal at Newcastle University in the United Kingdom. Being an Assistant Editor of the *Bulletin* was providing me another avenue through which I was gaining valuable experience, ensuring that I would one day be ready for the 'main office'. It came sooner than I expected; in April 2015, that I became the acting Editor-in-Chief when I and the then Book Reviews Editor were the only team members who did not resign at the end of March 2015. My formal appointment came on 19 June 2015, and I was thrilled. I am truly grateful to the 2011–17 ASAPA Council that trusted me with the position, enabling me to become the "first African to take over the editorial reins of such a prestigious publication" (Ndlovu 2015: 135). This was, in my view, a brave decision that signalled the beginning of a new era. It is a decision that was 'silently' questioned in the corridors of gossip, but I remained focused on the responsibilities entrusted to me. I shall be forever grateful to the ASAPA Council that appointed me as the Editor-in-Chief. I had worked hard to reach this level and I equally wanted to leave a legacy when I one day step down. Overall, I was thrilled with the challenging appointment. As my tenure is ending, it is a good time to reflect on the many experiences I had.

Experiences during my term

My name has been synonymous with transformation in South African archaeology, a subject many people do not want

to honestly engage with. I have been branded many things because of my association with the change that is desperately needed in the discipline. I expected, therefore, that not everyone would be welcoming of my appointment, and that helped me develop an even thicker skin as I had already faced many transformation-related challenges in the discipline. Even with thick skin, I cannot claim that it was easy. Instead, it was emotionally draining. The corridor talk, which is a glorified name for gossiping, was just intense throughout my tenure. This gossiping, meant to degrade me, began while I was in an acting position and intensified after my formal appointment. I felt highly disrespected and undermined, but it really did not surprise me. One can have many conspiracy theories about why such behaviour was happening but I will leave this to the imagination of others. As a management technique, I did not want to expend energy focusing on negativity, but it was very unsettling and endless.

There were many nasty incidents I encountered, but I briefly highlight four of them to illustrate just how challenging my term of office was.

Almost immediately after my appointment in June 2015, a complaint was 'lodged' because the publication of the December 2015 issue was apparently late. Yet, I discovered that its publication followed the same trend other December issues of the *Bulletin* had followed for over a period of 10 years. Once I provided such evidence, the complainant disappeared into thin air. The fact that I had to be on the defensive from the very beginning meant I was starting my term as Editor-in-Chief on a negative note.

Second, some authors completely disrespected me. They went to the extent of believing it best to bypass me and deal with my subordinates, the editors, instead. Sometimes they would lie about me, creating an impression that I was never responding to their enquiries, which was far from the truth, unless I was meant to respond within seconds of them having communicated with me. Even when I did respond, they would still write directly to my subordinates. I guess they needed affirmation about what I was communicating to them. It seems my subordinates had a lot more authority than I did in the eyes of these authors. I dealt with such behaviour by simply accepting that they probably found my team to be composed of more trusted souls who could be believed more than me, even if they were telling them the same response I had already given. In the eyes of these specific authors, I was nowhere near a trustworthy soul, an unglamorous status I gladly accepted.

Third, there were colleagues who went further, and alleged

that my Editorship was downgrading the status of the *Bulletin*, whose accreditation was under severe threat. I was told on countless occasions that authors want to take their manuscripts to other journals which were much more efficiently managed than the *Bulletin*, under my management. I responded by welcoming such moves. The same complainants did not, to my knowledge, question why the *Southern African Field Archaeology* was still accredited many years after it last published an issue. Was I such a terrible Editor-in-Chief that even an almost 'non-existing' journal was better 'managed' in its absence from the academic horizon? Nevertheless, I always argued that the 'health' of a good journal is judged by it being an issue ahead, at any given moment. What this meant, especially for a journal that does not have an online platform, was that the turnaround time from submission to publication was about one year. As an author myself, I have experienced the same with other international journals, and I find it acceptable particularly when I know the quality of the journal. As an Editor-in-Chief of the *Bulletin*, I was never desperate for research articles because I secured submissions to the journal. That to me is one of the many indications that the journal was in good hands. What authors were failing to appreciate was that the journal is not in a desperate state leading to it scraping around for publications such that they can get decisions on their manuscripts immediately. Instead, we had a thorough review process that was regularly hindered by delays in the submission of reviews. This was the basis for my Editorial published in December 2018. Besides all these challenges, I am leaving the *Bulletin* in a healthy status and with research articles that can provide for two further issues. I found it interesting that some of these authors who forever gave me problems, were the same professionals who would not do reviews, yet they magically expected others to do so for their own manuscripts submitted for consideration in the *Bulletin*. Interestingly, but not surprising, the same individuals who continuously told me about dissatisfactions from authors have not complained about the dominance of the Field and Technical Reports by two specific academic institutions. In my view, this is a greater concern they should have occupied themselves with, but did not for reasons I'm not privy to. I have raised this issue of concern and it is now in the hands of the next Editor-in-Chief to deal with because it is not an ideal situation.

Fourth, having been with the *Bulletin* since 2010, I knew very well that my predecessors did not have to deal with the disrespectful behaviour I was continuously encountering. While they had challenges of their own, the ones I faced were not of my own doing, but based on people who just found it difficult to accept that I was the Editor-in-Chief. I stayed focused so that I do not give them something to be happy about. This is why the lateness of the December 2018 issue is the biggest failure I am not happy with. I took full responsibility, no matter the circumstances that led to such a failure.

More importantly, I expected to receive more support from my 'bosses', the 2017–21 ASAPA Council. I am of the respectful view that the kind of support I expected was not always forthcoming. Instead, lies about me were believed – my voice was drowned by such noise. I expected the ASAPA Council to remind those who were making spurious allegations against me to follow the complaints policy I had instituted for their concerns to be addressed. This never happened, unless I insisted. Instead, I jumped from one hurdle to another. The best solution, in the minds of my superiors, was to establish the Bulletin Management Committee (BMC) in September 2018. I am of the strong view that the existence of the BMC was to 'deal with Ndokuyakhe Ndlovu' in the same way South African

media wrote about the existence of the 'Patricia De Lille clause' in one of the major political parties. It was a 'safest' approach to dealing with the 'crises'. Its establishment led to unnecessary tensions and confusion over reporting lines as I now had to account to three structures, namely, the BMC, ASAPA Council, and SAAS Council without clear guidelines. I defined the activities behind the establishment of the BMC, a structure that did not exist within the five-year ASAPA-SAAS 2015–2020 agreement, as an interference not experienced by any of my predecessors who had been given much more freedom than I was. I had to be managed more closely because of spurious claims that were continuously made against me by largely 'nameless' people who, in my view, wanted me out. Late 2018 was the most difficult period of my tenure. I even considered throwing in the towel at one stage, but was not prepared to lose the 'battle'. In retrospect, I am glad I did not give in under pressure from all directions. This is the context within which the delayed release of the December 2018 issue must be judged. Indeed, I had my own family challenges which impacted upon me, but the reality is that the December 2018 issue was largely finished by November of the same year. I must indicate, however, that my relationship with the BMC began thawing after a meeting held early in July 2019. This was almost a year into its existence. I became re-energised and focused yet again.

Most importantly, I remained dedicated throughout my term even when the challenges I faced were disheartening.

My legacy

I must begin by accepting that I did not achieve every goal I had set for myself as Editor-in-Chief. On a positive front, I want to specifically identify four highlights: (i) administrative policies, (ii) transformation, (iii) the publication of a Special Issue, and (iv) the design of the new cover for the *Bulletin*.

Transformation

I have always been a proponent of transformation. It was important, therefore, that when I had the power to make changes, I appropriately used this authority to make a meaningful impact in the production of archaeological knowledge. This required that I invest a significant amount of energy and resources to engage with various young African authors with a view to have them publishing their research articles in the *Bulletin*. The pinnacle of my transformative achievement was the publication of the December 2019 issue, with four research articles authored by young African authors. In addition, one Field and Technical Report as well as an article in a Discussion Forum were also authored by African authors. This was an illustration of my hard work towards ensuring that meaningful efforts are undertaken to transform the production of archaeological knowledge. Even this current issue (no. 212) has two of the four research articles authored by African scholars. I have played my role in entrenching transformation.

Transformation is a very emotional subject to discuss. I consider this politically-defined intervention to be an interruption of an existing social equilibrium which lucratively favoured some over others. Disturbing such social equilibrium, which has existed for many generations, is a long, difficult, and painful process with very little returns. Many famous slogans have been crafted over the generations to dislodge the 'steel and concrete columns' that have entrenched societal inequality. These emotive statements and physical actions have seemingly not resulted in politically important changes. Change, it seems, is much more difficult to implement. This is why social justice has never succeeded anywhere in the world. Many, some more famous than others, have fought against injustice and thus wrote their names in the history books. The

reality is, long after the deaths of Martin Luther King, Malcom X, Che Guevara, Frances Baard, Winnie Mandela, Samora Machel, Patrice Lumumba, Thomas Sankara, Oliver Tambo, Lilian Ngoyi, Nelson Mandela, we should not be having humanity unite under the 'Black Lives Matter'. Such should be so obvious an issue that it should not even be debated within societies. 'Black Lives Matter' is a clear indication of the failure of transformation and the entrenchment of inequality. All the ongoing initiatives under the umbrella of 'Black Lives Matter' are representative, sadly, of another episode of life that too shall pass, until another emotionally draining unfortunate act takes place and helps gather people around in solidarity.

Memory about our painful past is more prominent during episodes of pain. Once we learn to live with such pain yet again, another social equilibrium is maintained, and life moves on. Rhodes fell from UCT when our memories about his atrocious actions were refreshed in our minds. Yet, a few years after Rhodes statue was removed, not much has changed. In fact, we have continued to live amongst the same colonial statues waiting for another moment that will bring us together yet again. Like everywhere else around the world, we are yet again hearing calls about the need to remove some statues from our heritage landscape. This too, shall pass, once we achieve the social equilibrium yet again.

So, lack of transformation in archaeology should be seen as a general failure of the society we exist within. It is a reflection of the society that cannot achieve social justice for humanity. We should not, therefore, be surprised that almost three decades after the political transition in South Africa, archaeology is failing to be meaningfully transformed. Not in just the quantitative number of 'brown faces' having their African names written on the doors of their offices, but in terms of transforming the paradigms through which we interpret the archaeological record. This is the platform we need for a transformed system through which the production of knowledge can be enhanced.

Special Issue

Through funding secured from the National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) by myself and Dr Catherine Namono, it was possible to publish a Special Issue of the *Bulletin*. This was another significant achievement arising out of the 2017 ASAPA conference I organised as the Chairperson of the Local Organising Committee. It was a significant milestone that a Special Issue from an ASAPA conference was published. While I was delighted, I was very disappointed that the Special Issue was published without the special cover as I had originally intended. The issues behind such are beyond the scope of this editorial, but it was very sad to publish the Special Issue without the new cover as I had originally intended.

Design of a new Bulletin cover

What was meant to be a once-off process to design a cover for the Special Issue of the *Bulletin* has led to the cover of the journal being changed. I had been disappointed that I could not publish the Special Issue with a new cover as per my proposal that was approved by both Councils of ASAPA and SAAS. But I am more delighted that such design efforts were not wasted. It will be such an honour to receive the copies of the *Bulletin* with the design I initiated and coordinated throughout the approval processes.

I am happy to have played a lead role in the design of the new cover for the *Bulletin* even though this was not the original intention. I look forward to seeing the new cover in use hopefully for the next few years.

Administrative policies

Having policies is important because they are the valuable documents that provide guidance under all administrative circumstances. I particular instituted two policies during my term in office, these were the complaints and publications policies. The latter was informed by my view that members of the *Bulletin's* Editorial Team should not be publishing within the same journal they are editing. While I was outvoted, I still took a principled personal decision to never publish in the *Bulletin* while I am serving as the Editor-in-Chief. I look forward to considering the journal as a platform to publish my future research.

Looking back, I am glad I ran the race until the end even when I had many 'road blocks' along my route. Arriving at the destination after the challenges I encountered is something I cherish significantly. Had I failed, I would not be talking about any legacy to be proud of.

My appreciation

I wish to thank everyone I worked with during my term as the Editor-in-Chief. The first is the ASAPA Council under which I was appointed. They showed much confidence in me and I hope I have made them proud of the work I have done over the years. I also thank all members of my Editorial Team that have worked with me over the years. While I became the face of the *Bulletin*, it was through their efforts that much was achieved. I initially worked with Munyadziwa Magoma, Justin Pargeter, Dawn Green, Geeske Langejans, and Catherine Damerell. Over time, Justin Pargeter and Geeske Langejans moved on, and they were replaced by Justin Bradfield and Jerome Reynard. I further thank the current ASAPA and SAAS Councils for the road we have travelled together, bumpy as it may have been. What I truly appreciate, more than anything, is that my editorial independence was respected and not interfered with. But I had to insist on such when attempts to interfere became evident. I had great support from the editorial board, especially Prof. Lyn Wadley, Dr Webber Ndoro, and Prof. Alan Morris, through the difficult moments. They provided helpful advice. I also thank Nico Dippenaar for all the support he has provided over the years. He has always gone beyond the call of duty to assist me in managing the *Bulletin*. I'm truly grateful.

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Congratulations to our Editorial Board members who have been appointed for a five-year term. In no particular order, they are: Prof. Lyn Wadley; Prof. Chap Kusimba; Prof. Paul Lane; Prof. Morongwa Mosothwane; Prof. Alinah Segobye; Prof. Laurajane Smith; Dr Ancila Nhamo; Prof. Peter Mitchell; Prof. Herman Kiriama; Dr McEdward Murimbika; and Prof. Wazi Apoh.

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