



Editing for change: From global bibliometrics to a decolonial aporetics of form in South African journal publishing



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The scholarly journal is an increasingly homogenised global institution marked by pro forma writing, standardised processes of review and production and uniform design aesthetics. Recognising that this model does not necessarily serve the interdisciplinary agenda of a small community of music scholars in South Africa, the journal *South African Music Studies* has resisted absorption into large corporate publishing houses. The importance of remaining independent became clear in 2015 and 2016 when the most important student revolts since 1976 forced the editors to reconsider the responsibility of the journal to publish content that responded in interesting and significant ways to the national #FeesMustFall crisis. This paper discusses some of the strategies followed by the editors to foreground – and indeed, to privilege – Africa-centred modes of writing and reasoning during this turbulent time. These decolonial strategies included reconceptualising the role of editor as a proactive figure and employing novel modes of structural and visual design. Not without its pitfalls, this editorial approach and its resultant controversies raised important legal questions about freedom of expression and about the scholarly journal as an institution of knowledge production and transformation in Africa.

Keywords: South Africa; decolonial music scholarship; #FeesMustFall and academe; decolonising academic publishing; SAMUS: South African Music Studies; publication metrics.

In 2015, just as we were settling into our new roles as co-editors of the small society journal *South African Music Studies*, we found our editorship and our journal implicated in a series of challenges. For the journal, this was an inopportune time for disruption. After a period during which the board was unable to appoint a permanent editorship, we were running a year late in our publication schedule and had received alarmingly few submissions. Many of those submissions we did receive required extensive and difficult revisions. The South African system of peer-reviewed subsidy and the imperative of demonstrating regular publication for institutional advancement means that delays to peer-reviewed publications potentially discourage authors from publishing in such journals. Whilst this could account for the quantity of submissions received by *SAMUS*, the national journal(s) serving the small field of music studies in South Africa, including *SAMUS*, have long functioned as vehicles for scholarship by less-established academic writers, often requiring not editorship as such, but mentorship in the expectations of academic writing.

But some of these problems also related to the structural changes that had occurred within the small community of music researchers in South Africa in the mid-2000s. Mirroring South African civil society, music studies were split into two distinct branches. Whilst a disciplinary split between musicology and ethnomusicology is prevalent throughout the world, this split had particular political meanings in postapartheid South Africa: the Musicological Society of Southern Africa – as it was then called – studied white music, especially that of the Western classical tradition, in a mostly formalist, conservative way; the *Ethnomusicology Symposium*, a group of progressive scholars outspoken in their critique against apartheid, studied everything else (Lucia 2005:xxxv–xxxvi); the mouthpiece of the former was the *South African Journal of Musicology* (*SAMUS*), the proceedings of the latter were published in a more zine-like (and subsequently much-photocopied) fashion by the International Library of African Music (ILAM) between 1981 and 2002.

In 2005, volume 25 of *SAMUS* was published for the last time as the academic journal of the Musicological Society of Southern Africa. When it next appeared in 2007, edited by Christine Lucia, who had assumed the editorship in 2004, *SAMUS* was published as a double volume,

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having become the official journal of the new South African Society for Research in Music (SASRIM) – a society formed through the amalgamation of the Musicological Society of Southern Africa and the Ethnomusicology Symposium in 2006 (Muller 2005:159–161). Although the acronym *SAMUS* remained unchanged during the society's transition (thus ensuring the continuation of the journal's accreditation status), the publication had changed its title from *SAMUS*, acronym of *South African Journal of Musicology*, to *SAMUS*, *South African Music Studies*.¹

Thus, *SAMUS* had managed to continue *and* change as part of the transition. Whilst this signalled new and exciting possibilities given the journal's expanded authorship, readership and review board across previous lines of exclusion, it also resulted in a loss of support of some of the most established scholars in the field. In her first editorial of the new *SAMUS*, Lucia (2007) wrote that, 'just as the society is cross-disciplinary within the field of music, so is the journal' (p. iii). Quoting Barbara Titus, she noted that SASRIM and its new journal had emerged not only from disciplinary factionalism, but from 'a far more destructive form of segregation' (Lucia 2007). The shadow of apartheid thus loomed over the decision to bring disciplines and scholarship together, but Lucia also noted the pragmatism of the development: 'South Africa is a large landmass with scarce resources and a scattered scholarly community that needs to work together' (Lucia 2007).

Foregrounding the ideological shift that was envisioned for the journal, Lucia's editorship of the 'new' *SAMUS* saw a number of changes. She introduced an extensive interview with a personality who has made a significant impact on South African music studies, starting with Andrew Tracey (2006/2007) and continuing with Mzilikazi James Khumalo (2008). In doing so, she managed to highlight the life work of a scholar important to the former Ethnomusicology Symposium in the journal formerly dedicated to musicology, shifting the focus from academic composition dominated by European-trained white composers to a composer renowned as both a choral conductor and composer of African choral music. As editor, Lucia also issued themed calls for papers, changed the cover of the journal to reflect the name change (*South African Music Studies*) and continuity (*SAMUS*) with an outline of the South African coastline opening up to the north as a graphic reminder of our newly united disciplinary society and the receptiveness to the continent on which we do our work. She appointed a new publisher and a new

editorial board (both of which remain unchanged) and presided over the publication of 'themed volumes', of which volume 29 (2009) on Kevin Volans was an example. The latter was an unambiguous acknowledgement of the importance of a composer whose early work had effected a breakthrough in ideas of how the boundaries between African music and Western art music could be problematised, and as such it signalled an acknowledgement of pioneering political and musical work that had elicited much criticism when it had first appeared. Continuities with the old *SAMUS* included the journal's familiar dimensions, layout and design and the academic decorum of the writing and style. These practices were largely upheld by the series of guest editors that succeeded her (see footnote 1).

This was the status quo to which we were appointed as co-editors in 2015. Our task was to bring the publication schedule up to date, but also to rethink the design and thrust of the journal going forward. At the outset, we agreed on what we thought of as a rather conservative agenda: we wanted the journal to reflect the debates that were actually happening between scholars in the field at our meetings and conferences, and we wanted to publish an academic journal in touch with the realities of South African life.

Potentially, the latter aspiration presented a problem. Music studies – at least the kind that have taken the strongest institutional foothold at most South African universities – are stubbornly resistant to the idea that aesthetics and politics converge (Froneman & Muller 2020; Muller & Froneman 2015). However, retreating into the ivory tower of South African academe has become increasingly difficult since 2015, when some of the most violent student protests since 1976 focused attention on unequal access to and ongoing patterns of discrimination at universities, as well as on students' demand for a decolonised education (Le Grange 2016). For music departments, these could be radical and frightening ideas and a direct onslaught on their sustainability. Arguing that these demands would be rightfully directed at such departments, Stephanus Muller pointed to 'indifference to the local', 'overwhelming orientation towards the past', 'deference towards geographically distant cultural centres', 'isolation from art', 'alienation from critical thinking' and a 'curious enchantment with what is derivative' as symptoms of a music discipline in crisis. If statues and works of art could be set alight in what he called 'an exteriority of force with no regard for the system's capacity to afford it', Muller predicted that demands for radical reform would eventually also engulf music departments that constituted 'enclaves of privilege' and embraced ignorance (Muller 2016).

Increasing financial strictures on South African universities could not help but affect music departments across the country. These departments, often staffed by a majority of practising musicians rather than academics, could easily be considered marginal within the intellectual life of the university, with time-honoured models of one-on-one instrumental instruction and low student-to-staff ratios making them expensive to maintain. In responding to the #Feesmustfall movement, we

1. Volume 23 (2003) had been the last volume edited by long-standing editor Beverly Parker and assistant editors Christopher Cockburn and Eric Akrofi. Volume 24 (2004) was published under the editorship of Christine Lucia and guest-edited by Stephanus Muller (the first such a guest-edited volume in the history of the journal), and volume 25 (2005) was edited by Christine Lucia with assistant editors Eric Akrofi, Lara Allen and Christopher Cockburn. After publishing the first edition of *SAMUS*, *South African Music Studies* as a double volume (26/27) in 2007, Lucia continued to edit volume 28 (2008) and was succeeded by Jaco Kruger and Nishlyn Ramanna as co-editors of volume 29 (2009). Ramanna and Jeffrey Brukman co-edited a double volume 30/31 (2010/11); Ramanna was the sole editor of the next issue, volume 32 (2012), and Ingrid Monson guest edited volume 33 (2013) with Jeffrey Brukman as co-ordinating editor. Willemien Froneman and Stephanus co-edited the journal from 2015 to 2018, during which time double volumes 34/35 (2015), 36/37 (2017) and volume 38 (2018) were published. These five volumes are the subject of this paper, although many of the strategies discussed here were retained and refined in volume 39 (2019) and volume 40 (2020) that appeared under the co-editorship of Stephanus Muller and Mia Pistorius.

viewed it as a decolonial imperative to publish a journal that responded to the history that was being made around us, one committed to unsettling the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo & Walsh 2018). In their reflections on the student protests of 2015–2016, prominent academics have subsequently published deeply personal and highly critical interpretations of these historical events on the intellectual culture of South African universities (Benatar 2021; Habib 2019; Jansen 2017). But there have also been other perspectives, notably not of senior university managers or academics, that have put forward different understandings of how the protests could be understood or put to work in reconsidering decolonial academic practices (Mbao 2016; Ngcaweni & Ngcaweni 2018; Thomas 2018; Wa Azania 2020). We held the conviction that music played an important role ‘in the self-expression and strategies of students’, and that:

[R]eflections on music practices are important to understanding and articulating intergenerational transmission of trauma, advancing democratization of expression, assertion of marginal identities and allowing the claiming of space by black bodies. (Muller S 2017:137–138)

Based on those convictions, our concern was with the praxis of decoloniality in the context of journal publishing in South Africa. How could we, in the words of Catherine Walsh, ‘make visible, open up and advance radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis and thought’ (Mignolo & Walsh 2018:17)? How could we get our readership to look at rather than away from the disturbing realities around us? How could we begin to re-assess our roles as scholars and researchers after the violence of the #Feesmustfall protests and the watershed of the Marikana massacre? What might it mean for our small discipline that universities had adopted the discursive mantra of excellence, whilst reconfiguring the intellectual and creative project into a client-service model of corporate responsiveness and responsibility (Cini 2019), and how could we as journal editors provide resistance against this co-option of the university?

Lucia’s commitments to creating a new journal for a new South Africa arguably set the tone for an epistemic revaluation of the South African scholarly journal in the wake of apartheid, an attempt to undo apartheid’s ‘university discourse in which a mnemotechnics of race enabled a technics of invention’ (Lalu 2019:51). The ‘strategic’ concerns highlighted in the *Report on a Strategic Approach to Research Publishing in South Africa* of 2006 by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), though, pointed towards an agenda rather more focused on neoliberal ‘excellence’.² From this report, one can deduce the role the academy envisioned for the scholarly journal in South Africa at the time. In the report, the word ‘apartheid’ is mentioned only twice – and then only to point to the imperative of ‘overcoming the isolationist effects of the apartheid era’ by increasing the international relevance of South African scholarship, mainly by advancing

international publication of South African research in ISI journals and elevating local journals to publications of ‘international quality’. Instead of probing the legacy of apartheid in South African scholarship, focusing on the content of local journals or prioritising transformation in South African scholarship, the concerns of the report were mostly bibliometric:

If the trends are compared for the same articles in terms of local versus foreign journals ... the numbers of articles appear to have nearly converged by 2002. There may soon be a situation, if it has not already happened, where South African scientists and scholars publish in equal numbers in local and overseas journals. If one looks at the situation in 1990 – the heyday of apartheid academic isolation – where only 36% of all articles were published in foreign journals with the situation in 2002 where nearly half (47%) were published in foreign journals, great strides have been made in breaking out of the isolation mould. (Academy of Science of South Africa 2006:34)

A ‘quality’ South African journal (so suggested the report) was one that had ‘acceptable impact factors, recorded moderate to high citations from non-South African authors and generally present[ed] an “international” profile’ (Academy of Science of South Africa 2006:58). The ‘substantive cluster’ of ‘parochial’ South African journals, on the other hand, did not have any international visibility; their content remained uncited outside of South Africa, and the production of content in many of them ‘was dominated by one or two institutions and in some cases by the same institution (or department) that publishes the journal’ (Academy of Science of South Africa 2006). Additionally, the report highlighted what was ‘strategically require[d] of the national publishers of research journals’: that ‘they should aspire to the same quality as their international comparators’, that this be done by adhering to ‘editorial best-practice and the use of a mix of both international and local reviewers, tested and tried by the editor(s) for full compliance with best-practice peer-reviewing’, that journals should provide electronic access to ensure a wide readership and that local journals be indexed in international databases to enhance their impact (Academy of Science of South Africa 2006:xv).

In the 2006 report, then, the key indicators of ‘quality’ were the extent to which a South African journal was cited by an international (mostly English-speaking) scholarly community and its compliance with the homogenised norms of the international journal publication industry. *Mutatis mutandis*, a ‘quality’ South African scholar submitted their work to ‘high-impact’ journals and adopted the theoretical concerns, language, style and conventions of these journals in order to access the top tiers of academia. As Fiormonte and Priego (2016) have pointed out, though:

It has to be emphasised that these mechanisms to index and rank university researchers’ outputs are not neutral. They remain designed with commercial interests in mind, and deeply biased from a cultural view. In fact, journals not published in English and not published by any of the top academic publishers, regardless of their distribution model, can remain virtually invisible to these proprietary metrication and reputation-

2. For other critiques of ASSAf’s neoliberal presuppositions, see Hofmeyr (2012) and Tomaselli (2019).

enhancing mechanisms ... scholars ... are forced to submit their work to these core journals – mostly published in English. (p. 2)

In a section titled ‘Special Considerations Concerning South African Visual and Performing Arts Journals’, the Academy of Science’s 2018 *Report on Grouped Peer Review of Scholarly Journals in Humanities II: Visual and Performing Arts* took a more nuanced approach to the tension between international visibility and local concerns in South African journal publishing. Although this report reiterated ASSAf’s goal to improve the quality of scholarly publication in the country, it now recognised that ‘no [visual and performing arts] journal can be really excellent and fit for its purpose if it is not in conversation with a living local tradition’ (Academy of Science of South Africa 2018:15). And yet, arts journals had ‘to participate in a global conversation if they want[ed] to serve their public well and make the research of their authors globally visible’ (Academy of Science of South Africa 2018). ‘The present debate on decolonization’, the report continued, underscored this challenge: that a journal:

[C]annot ... simply publish articles that imitate or repeat international research but should rather, in conversation with the living local tradition, try to publish research that breaks new ground and that reconfigures the local and the global, challenges global theories and procedures and develops insights relevant to Africa and to the global South. (Academy of Science of South Africa 2018)

These concerns were not new in South African music studies, nor to our shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented by language and writing in the postcolony. Six years before he published *Nagmusiek* (Muller 2014), a three-volume work predominantly written in Afrikaans, Muller reflected on the ongoing process of writing this book by detailing a painful splitting of registers, audiences, desires and scholarly responsibilities, culminating in the paradox that in order ‘to stake out an authentic voice in a postcolonial South African position in a global discourse dominated by English’, the line of communication with that global discourse needed to be shut down (Muller 2008). What Froneman identified as ‘the aporetics of peripheral writing’ in this project meant that *Nagmusiek*’s ‘canonical potential was severely restricted because it was not written in English, just as its decolonial ambitions were compromised by its canonical claims’ (Froneman 2018:191). This aporetic sensibility, articulated in a different context, informed our work on *SAMUS* throughout.

The exigencies of working in a small field (and one in which derivative scholarship had developed during the apartheid years not because of ‘local’ obsessions but because of an ideological and parochial over-commitment to the non-South African and the aspirationalism embedded in the delusions of establishing a European culture in Africa) meant that we had adopted an approach to the academic journal as an apparatus, rather than as a calculus of metrics ‘amenable to judicious bibliometric analysis’ (Academy of Science of South Africa 2006:xv) aimed at achieving parity with yet another construction of an international elsewhere of supposedly

exemplary quality. This approach to the publication of *SAMUS* acknowledged Foucault’s notion of the *dispositif* (Foucault 1980:194–95), not only in its recognition of the historical present and its urgent requirements (about which we write above), but also in its recognition of systems of relations inherent in discursive heterogeneity and how those relations maintain themselves, erase others and allow for shifts of position. In other words, an independent South African journal published by a disciplinary society, such as we envisioned the new *SAMUS* to be, would enable a continued and continuous engagement with the modes and politics of local knowledge production and not only mediate an eventual, internationally homogenised, countable knowledge product. In this regard, we took seriously the radical potential of what Keyan Tomaselli has described as small but legitimate ‘cottage-industry’ journals that do not score high on STEM-driven metrics for visibility (and are often excluded from DHET-accredited lists) but that nevertheless publish innovative material focusing on local and regional concerns and speak to audiences operating outside of the neoliberal publishing machine (Tomaselli 2019). But importantly – and unlike other journals who operationalise decolonial agendas through content, but keep intact homogenised notions of metric-based journal management, layout norms, style guides and form – we had intuited that an alertness to discursive activity outlining a decolonial rationality and sensibility required a sense of the apparatus also as a proposition of *material arrangements* radically problematising the notion of academic journals as neutral platforms enabling of bibliometric accounting practices.

This decolonial potential of the physical apparatus of the journal was hinted at in the 2018 peer review of arts journals: that the so-called ‘value-added features’ of journals, such as editorials, correspondence and book reviews, could serve as dialogic instruments between the local and the global (Academy of Science of South Africa 2018:15) and that supplanting, or at least, supplementing the traditional research article format with alternative scholarly work such as photo essays, scores and other performance-oriented formats operationalised the decolonial imperative in important ways – especially in the context of arts research (Academy of Science of South Africa 2018:15–16). In a very modest way, we endorsed the Baradian notion that meaning is entangled with matter and that the material practices of alternative academic writing, layout, design and curation – enabled by the independent status of *SAMUS* – were as important in producing decolonised forms of knowledge than the relational embeddedness of the articles we published.

Already in *SAMUS* 28, Lucia had started to write expanded editorials that engaged critically with the contents published in *SAMUS*. The pattern of earlier editorials was one of brief, self-effacing content delineation, but Lucia charted a different course, focusing in this editorial on the way in which ‘theory’ was employed in the different articles published in that edition and developing an editorial voice in the contextualisation of the links between articles and the broader discipline. Unfortunately, it was a precedent

discontinued in the rotating editorships of subsequent volumes, with a more expanded editorial only published again in volume 33 (2013) by Co-ordinating Editor Jeffrey Brukman (Ingrid Monson was the guest editor of that volume, focused on jazz studies). From the onset of our editorship, the double volume 34/35 (2015), the editorial was envisioned as much more than a summary of content or even a critical overview of how articles and themes connected or contradicted one another. The editorial was regarded as a text that established communication between editors and readers, engaged in argument, made explicit positions and curatorial decisions of content and addressed issues the editors regarded as important to the discipline generally as would be appropriate to the journal of a national disciplinary society. Our first editorial addressed disciplinary crisis, the second engaged with the Fallism of the national student movements and the third ruminated on ethics.³ The explicitly situated editorial was a result of the decision to present content in the journal in a radically new, curated fashion (in nodes), thus requiring explanation of how we thought about possible connections and amplifications of meaning in the content we had published. But it was also a deliberate decision to break from what we regarded as an unconvincing pseudoneutral stance in academic publishing generally that seemed to imply neutrality, objectivity and disinterested management. Editing for change, we felt, had to speak its name.

Central to staking out an editorial position in this way was the prior decision, as mentioned above, to do away with the traditional format of the academic journal and to organise the content in *SAMUS* in what we decided to call 'nodes'. Applicable in both its biological and technical forms, the term 'node' was meant to convey the idea that the journal content cohered around certain points of growth or intersected in certain coherent and/or unexpected ways. This reorganisation of material necessitated a new design for the journal and the idea of the 'node' became one of the principal design elements of the new look of *SAMUS* introduced in Volume 34/35. This design featured a minimalist white cover with the name of the journal embossed on the front and spine. A thumb-index visually demarcated the nodes on the exterior of the volume, whilst inside the journal we incorporated photographs by Willem Boshoff to create visual breaks between the nodes. Including art in the journal was a practice continued in Volume 36/37 and Volume 38: the former featured the work of Manfred Zylla and the latter featured still images from William Kentridge's multimedia installation *The Head and the Load*.

Organising *SAMUS* in nodes had a number of implications. It made explicit our editorial agency; it allowed us to organise writing around thematic content rather than form, leading to a juxtaposition of different kinds of writing suggested by content, as opposed to a segregation of content according to register or academic conventions; it positioned academic engagement as fundamentally dialogic; it contributed to discursive engagement and amplification by suggestively

grouping material together in ways writers might not have foreseen; it justified commissions for material to address certain lacunae or to balance controversial or important pieces; it enabled the inclusion of visual art and works of fiction, thereby stressing the connections between music and the other arts and bringing those discourses within the purview of music studies; and it flattened out the differentiation and hierarchies between peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed content (and their authors). The decision to create nodes in *SAMUS*, it should be clear, had significant impact in creating a critical voice for the journal. Aligned to the expanded editorial, this 'nodally organized' voice made it clear that editorial work was not primarily administrative drudgery or mere academic midwifery. On the contrary, it was interventionist, creative, activist, supportive, curatorial and participatory. It put paid to the idea that the most central activity of the academic endeavour, the communication of research through publication, was something that happened best in an oblivious aloofness of where and when the work was published or that the value of publication had devolved into academic rent-seeking (Muller S.M. 2017).

The nodes we published in double volume 34/35 included the ones entitled 'Academic Freedom', 'Tracing Lines', 'Andrew Tracey', 'Jazz', 'Music/Vision/Blindness', 'Performance' and 'Futures'. In double volume 36/37, our node titles had become more playfully creative, including 'All the King's Men', 'The Lit', 'The "De-" in Front of "Colonise"', 'The Edition', 'The Law of Genre', 'de lô' and 'Clare Loveday'.⁴ Volume 38 – the last volume we edited together – featured 'The Ethical Incomplete', 'Jazz Dialogics' and 'Todd Matshikiza: Towards Critical Perspectives'. The latter two nodes, as well as the node on 'Andrew Tracey' in double volume 34/35 and on 'Clare Loveday' in double volume 36/37, were guest-edited (by Stephanie Vos, Lindelwa Dalamba, Kathryn Olsen/Christopher Cockburn and Mareli Stolp respectively), and this involvement of guest editors allowed projects, interests, research foci and research teams to use *SAMUS* as a vehicle for publication with a considerable degree of devolved editorial control. As an initiative towards the democratisation of academic publishing culture and responsiveness to local scholars' publication needs, the decision to organise the journal content around content-based nodes effortlessly enabled a space for different contributors to develop new agendas without sacrificing the continuity of the journal. In this way, the nodal structure of the journal also had a pragmatic implication that impacted on perceptions of the academic journal as a disinterested conduit of content, administered by the conclave-like secrecy and undeclared ideological prejudices and preferences of peer review.

Twice in the 5 years we edited *SAMUS*, we were faced with difficult publication decisions regarding controversial material. In volume 34/35, an article that we felt made an

3. In the subsequent two volumes, edited by Pistorius and Muller, the editorials were entitled 'On Loss' (vol. 39) and 'Scholarship and cultures of care' (vol. 40).

4. The fact that the nodes in the subsequent two volumes edited by Pistorius and Muller took a somewhat darker turn (as did the editorials) confirms the notion that journal curation is not impervious to editorial style and concerns, nor to changing historical and disciplinary contexts. The nodes in Pistorius and Muller's co-edited editions were 'Racial Melancholia', 'Precarious Lives', 'Futures Imperfect' (vol. 39) and 'Regard', 'Reciprocity', 'Reform' and 'Resoundings' (vol. 40).

important contribution to exploring the complicity of Western art music composition and apartheid (Stimie-Behr 2015) necessitated the editors to approach the Executive Committee of SASRIM for support in obtaining legal advice on publication. And, reporting on the Contesting Freedoms Colloquium of 2014, we received a commissioned submission that again required careful legal consideration before we could proceed to publication in volumes 36/37 (King 2018). In both instances, the editors were supported by the Executive Committee of SASRIM in our assessment that the texts were important and that taking academic freedom of speech seriously meant that shying away from taking difficult editorial publication decisions or hiding behind academic diffidence to avoid publishing courageous scholarship or important points of view would be an abrogation of editorial responsibility. The processes of publishing these articles were as important as the publication of the work itself: the work was scrutinised by many different readers and refined many times over; the issues were vigorously debated by the Executive Committee of SASRIM; the importance of editorial independence was fleshed out and the nature and degree of academic freedom were considered. In taking on this kind of material and opening debate on controversial issues, we hope to have advanced certain benchmarks of critical public thinking in a country where the culture of freedom has to be asserted against a history of scholarship conducted in the shadow of obeisance, threats, censorship and intimidation.

Despite what we regard as a series of positive interventions and deliberate delinking strategies from a homogenising local (and global) publishing industry that values uniformity and efficiency above content and creativity, the reception of the new *SAMUS* was not uniformly positive. Our curatorial approach, concern with aesthetics and investment in the work of our contributors, combined with the logistics of producing an annual journal within a disciplinary environment where resources are limited, meant that publication of the journal mostly fell behind the annual cycles of SASRIM conferences or that of performance reviews and the reporting of research outputs at universities. Time was the cost of our vision of creating a new kind of academic journal grounded in a new kind of academic conversation, and our publication schedule was, understandably, a point of near-permanent contention with the Executive Committee of SASRIM and some of our contributors during the course of our editorship. The concern with timely publication was also the main point of criticism in the peer review report of scholarly journals in the visual and performing arts issued by the Academy of Science of South Africa in 2018. Whilst it highlighted the consistently high quality and originality of the articles published in *SAMUS* up to volume 33 and commended the journal for its focus on South African contemporaneity, the panel was unsympathetic to delays in the publication schedule experienced with volumes 34/35 because of the legal advice that had to be obtained. 'The difficulty of timely publication is viewed in a most serious light and should be urgently addressed', the report noted. 'There is an obvious danger here', it continued:

[I]e. that authors may look to publish their work elsewhere given current pressures on academics. It is suggested that non-problematic content is published on time, with an editorial note to explain any relatively 'thin' volumes. Otherwise the impression might be created that the journal serves controversy and in so doing muzzles its authors rather than giving them freedom of speech. (Academy of Science of South Africa 2018:33–34)

The implications of this reasoning are troubling. It seems to misconstrue editorial agency in defence of freedom of expression as the unwarranted wielding of authority and the disarticulating of editorial objectivity and robust defence of academic freedom as an overstepping of our editorial mandate and, absurdly, a way to silence our contributors. Comments such as these left us disappointed that the responsibility for effecting change did not disperse through the academic body in the ways we had expected. For the Academy of Science of South Africa, the danger to academic excellence as expressed in journal publication was not the publication of watered-down content, the potential legal prosecution of academics and editors, the erosion of editorial independence or the intrusion of universities on academics' freedom of expression – all of which we had confronted in our publication of challenging articles – but rather the prospect of disrupting the instrumentalised model of the academic journal that views it merely as an output-vehicle for academics in service of the University of Excellence.

Despite this, the most serious criticism of the model we had developed from the journal newly established by Christine Lucia as *SAMUS*, *South African Music Studies*, our editorship saw an increase in the number of submissions, more letters to the editor, more offers and suggestions for guest-edited nodes, more engagement and, undoubtedly, more controversy. We conceived of our editorial selves as agents-amongst-agents, trusting that our readers, contributors and peer-reviewers would increasingly recognise, value and support the journal for what we think it was supposed to be: an independent society journal coproduced by a community of scholars and artists, a flexible platform for scholarly debate and academic and artistic expression, a catalyst for transforming South African music studies and a powerful and tangible means of summoning a communal sense of responsibility and courage. In this sense, our 'editing for change' echoed what Sharon Stein has called the necessity to disrupt ways of knowing, being and relating as an approach to education (Stein 2019:683), which, broadly speaking, we viewed our editorship as contributing towards. Citing Spivak's description of education as 'the uncoercive rearrangement of desires', *SAMUS* took up the challenge of rearranging and for affording an expanded horizon of scholarly desire as constitutive of change in scholarly publishing in our field. Our commitment to decoloniality, articulated as our main theory of change throughout this article, meant that nothing about this approach could be prescriptive or normative (Stein et al. 2020); rather, to misquote from Trisos, Auerbach and Katti (2021), we were concerned with changing the ecology of our

discipline (rather than the other way round) by paying attention to the conditions of knowledge production in the bibliometrics-dominated discourse of South African journal publishing and insisting that these be qualified by creative and ethical editorial practices 'at a moment when the perils of entrenched thinking have never been clearer' (Trisos et al. 2021:1205).

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All authors contributed equally to this work.

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