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SMF

from the editor



Maryam Adams. Photo: Sibulela Bolarinwa

I spent the first three years of my university career studying law, with hopes of becoming a lawyer. As the final year of my BA (Law) degree drew to a close, I found myself convincing my parents – and myself – that I should “jump ship”, because I was more suited to be a journalist. Much like my colleagues, I was idealistic and bright-eyed about all of the opportunities available in an ever-evolving industry.

What I naively overlooked was that working in a volatile and changing industry comes with its own challenges. This year I found that the reality of journalism is not entirely what I expected. Through listening to industry insiders – from veterans to the young voices shaping the media’s future – it became apparent that journalists are confronted with hardships and even attacks, both externally from society and internally from within the newsroom.

In this edition of *Stellenbosch Media Forum* (SMF), we tried to capture a holistic overview of the ways in which journalists are challenged and media freedom is threatened: from practical limitations, such as language barriers and insufficient funding models, to the ethical dilemmas around phenomena like cancel culture and balancing political agendas.

Through our considered reflection, *SMF* hopes to not only shine a light on journalistic hardships, but to sharpen our understanding of these contemporary issues and contribute to solving them.

Looking back at how my journalism journey started, I can now say with certainty that I am content with my decision and look forward to immersing myself in this industry for a very long time.

Thank you to every *SMF* journalist, for pushing the boundaries and not being afraid to ask the hard questions. It has been a privilege working with you. We all have to bear the slings and arrows of the journalism industry, but regardless of how outrageous the fortune may be, it is certainly nobler to give something of ourselves to tell a bigger story. **SMF**

Maryam Adams



To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles

- *Hamlet* (Act III, Scene I), William Shakespeare

2021 IN A NUTSHELL

VACCINATION ROLLOUT

South Africa received its first batch of Covid-19 vaccines on 1 February 2021. The vaccine rollout, however, had a rocky start after it was found that the AstraZeneca vaccine doses were only 10,4% effective against the Covid-19 variant first identified in South Africa. The South African government has since made the Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, and CoronaVac vaccines available to South Africans.



Photo: Tamsin Metelerkamp

JACOB ZUMA GOES TO PRISON

Jacob Zuma, former president of South Africa, was given a 15-month prison sentence by the Constitutional Court of South Africa after it found him guilty of contempt of court for failing to appear before a commission investigating corruption.

Zuma was sentenced on 29 June and arrested at his rural homestead in Nkandla shortly before midnight on 7 July. He was released on medical parole two months later.



Cartoon: Zapiro/Daily Maverick



Photo: Sourced/GCIS

DIGITAL VIBES SCANDAL

"Close associates of Health Minister Zweli Mkhize and other third parties pocketed roughly R90 million in suspicious payments emanating from a R150 million Covid-19 and National Health Insurance communications contract," reported *Daily Maverick* on 23 May 2021. Investigative journalist, Pieter-Louis Myburgh, uncovered that a contractor for the department of health, Digital Vibes, had paid for maintenance work at a property owned by the family trust of then Health Minister Mkhize.

SOUTH AFRICAN CHUCK NORRIS – LEO PRINSLOO

The driver with "nerves of steel", Leo Prinsloo, foiled a cash-in-transit (CIT) heist in Pretoria on 22 April 2021. In a viral video of the incident, Prinsloo seemed as cool as a cucumber while driving a CIT vehicle that was under attack.



Photo: Supplied/Liandri Lensley Photography

SOUTH AFRICAN PRODUCTION WINS AN OSCAR

The South African documentary, *My Octopus Teacher*, won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature at the Oscars in April 2021.

The documentary starring Craig Foster was directed by Pippa Ehrlich.

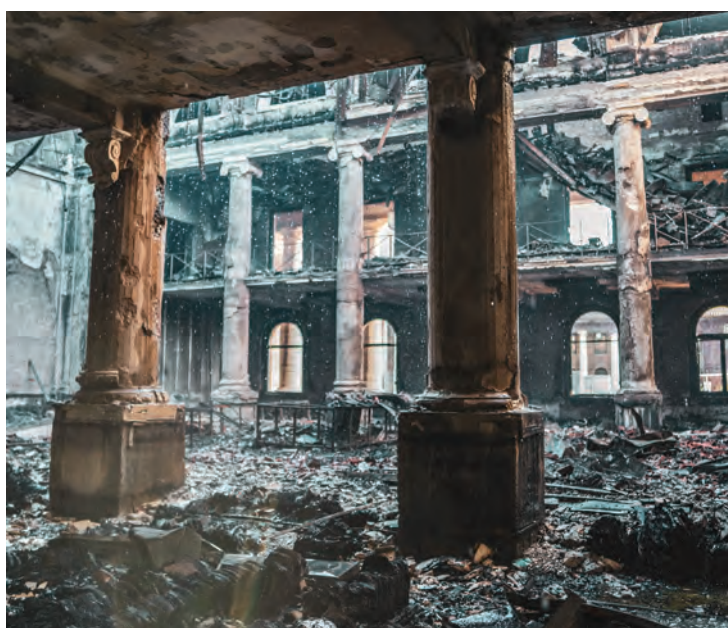


Photo: Sourced/Netflix

UNREST AFTER JACOB ZUMA'S ARREST

Following the arrest and imprisonment of former President Jacob Zuma, the South African provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng saw scenes of unrest, looting and crime between 9 and 18 July. While Zuma's arrest triggered the unrest, the situation was rooted in deep-seated social inequalities and segregated living conditions in the country.

These events are estimated to have cost the South African economy R25 billion, writes Ray Mahlaka for *Daily Maverick*.



University of Cape Town's library after the blaze.

Photo: Supplied/Tashin Singh

CAPE TOWN FIRES

A wildfire that broke out near Rhodes Memorial wreaked havoc in Cape Town on 18 April, and destroyed various buildings at the University of Cape Town (UCT). Some of the buildings that were damaged included the Rhodes Memorial restaurant, parts of UCT's library and the historic Mostert's Mill, which was the oldest surviving windmill in South Africa. More than 120 firefighters were deployed to the area.



Photo: Jacques Nelles/The Citizen



Photo: Insung Yoon/Unsplash

THE 'TEMBISA 10'

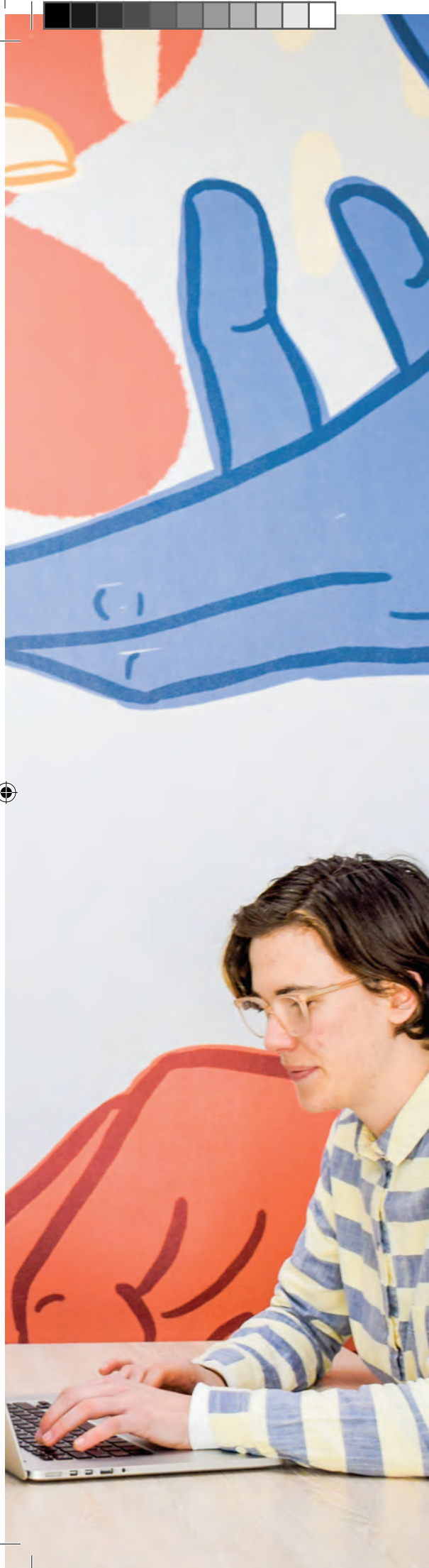
In what the South African National Editors' Forum called a "collapse of journalistic ethics and standards", *Pretoria News* – which forms part of Independent Media – broke a story on 14 June about a woman in Gauteng who allegedly gave birth to decuplets. If true, the birth would have broken the world record for most babies delivered in a single birth.

However, the story was later shown to be inaccurate.



Surviving as a DAVID among GOLIATHS

Sarah Fletcher (left) and Stephanie Fichardt
(right) from *Say When* magazine.
Photo: Alexander Brand



With major publishing houses, such as Caxton and Associated Media, closing down the majority of their magazine divisions, the state of the South African magazine industry seems dire. Its saving grace may lie in the hands of niche publications. Regardless of the topics they cover, these publications' niche markets make them essential to their readers.

By Alexander Brand

Being a smaller, niche publication allows you to employ technical editors who have the time and resources to give the necessary attention and tender loving care to the publication – and ensure they do not get “lost” in a massive media house.

This is according to Jane van der Spuy, the product manager of Technews Publishing Company (Technews), a technical publisher focusing on solutions-marketing in the technology sector.

“I don’t have much experience with how a big company like Media24 would work, but I feel like – in my subjective, unsubstantiated view – the magazines would be less loved and more of a commodity,” says Van der Spuy.

René Esterhuyse – a freelance journalist for the online art and social issues magazine *Blindeye* – enjoys the fact that she has a lot of freedom when she writes, partly due to the publication’s online platform. “You can engage creatively with your writing. There are not a lot of guidelines. It is a very creative space, so it is a really great space to grow in as a writer,” she says.

Blindeye is a publication born from “the desire to create a platform for local artists and artisans who are creating beautiful poetry, music, and art under our very noses”, according to their website. They have an average of 150 unique website sessions per month, according to Willow-Ruby van der Berg, co-founder of *Blindeye*.

“I think *Blindeye* does very well in terms of [its focus] at the moment because they are very in tune with what is going on currently in artistic and musical spheres,” says Esterhuyse.

As a business-to-business publishing house, Technews is fortunate in that

two of their magazines, *Dataweek* and *SA Instrumentation and Control*, have been industry “staples” for over 30 years. Therefore, these magazines are all seen as *de facto* leaders in the areas in which they publish, according to Van der Spuy. The two magazines had respective circulations of 2 584 and 3 845 between April and June 2021, according to the South African Audit Bureau of Circulations’ (ABC) second-quarter report.

Much of Technews’s reputation in the industry is thanks to the family-value-type company that they are. “We care about our relationships with our clients and each other, and I think it shows in the final product,” says Van der Spuy.

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

A similar culture of family values can be found at That Eclectic, a South African creative collective that aims to provide a platform for people to gather, express themselves and engage critically with one another, according to their website.

That Eclectic runs a niche magazine, *Say When* – formerly known as *That Zine* – which aims to be a “source of pleasure and nourishment meant to spark joy and facilitate reflection”, according to Drew Haller, editor-in-chief of *Say When*. The publication receives an average of 267 views per month on Medium, an American online publishing platform, where they publish six articles per month, according to Stephanie Fichardt, co-founder and director of That Eclectic. These articles are then used to create Instagram content to push engagement and interest.

Say When currently has ten contributors who, together with Fichardt, started a virtual



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literary archive to complement That Eclectic's event company in December 2020, according to Haller. The magazine has grown exponentially, and today they boast a "girl-gang" of writers, artists, graphic designers, illustrators, promoters and academics, says Haller.

"At the moment, it's an all-female team, and there's something really wholesome about that to me," says Saarah Fletcher, head designer for *Say When*.

The magazine has been influenced by the works of other smaller publications. "It's great to see other niche magazines like *Blindeye* on the rise too. These types of magazines influence and boost the arts and culture sector by giving their readers access to new media and art," says Haller.

That Eclectic makes use of newsletters to wrap up and deliver everything they share and produce to subscribers' email inboxes. These newsletters are produced by Fletcher.

"I also write articles, edit some, do designs and illustrations, or whatever else needs to be done that I can manage. That's one of the things that's so fulfilling about being a part of *Say When* – you're encouraged to give what you want to give, but also what you're able to give," says Fletcher.

HEAD ABOVE WATER

Say When is a relatively young magazine, having only begun in February 2021, so they are still running at margins that are close to nothing, according to Fichardt.

"We're looking to begin investing in things like a centralised website that hosts the publication, as well as the other ventures

That Eclectic has going on at the time. This will hopefully open up possible channels of generating income for the bodacious group of ladies whose creative offerings are growing more impressive by the volume," says Fichardt.

For now, the magazine relies on donations and revenue from its events to pave the way for future growth, according to Haller. "Thanks to social media and the nature of the internet, there wasn't a lot of capital needed to make this publication possible," she says. Medium has been great as a space in which to share *Say When*'s works in an online blog format, according to Haller.

Currently, both *Blindeye* and *Say When* are not profitable enough to pay their contributors or core editorial team, which is why they are more relaxed about their structures and schedules, according to Esterhuyse.

"For me, that is not really a problem, because I am doing it to gain writing experience," says Esterhuyse.

Blindeye does not have offices, according to Esterhuyse. The same goes for the *Say When* team, who work remotely, according to Haller. "Our individual locations vary from Durban, Stellenbosch, Paarl, Mossel Bay, Cape Town, Pretoria, California and Namibia," she says.

According to Haller, her nine-to-five currently entails working as a reporter for the Parliamentary Monitoring Group, an SEO copywriter for BrandSeed, and a freelance creative and academic researcher.

Haller is optimistic about the future of *Say When*, explaining that many publications start small with a blog or a

social media page where they share their works unassumingly. "Eventually, these things get traction, and they grow. I don't know what will become of us, but we're all really hoping that this side-hustle could become a full-time gig," she says.

SETTLED PUBLICATIONS

Two publications that can attest to the hard work it takes to keep a niche publication afloat are *Klyntji* and *Twyg*. According to their respective websites, *Klyntji* is an independent blog focusing on diverse and progressive arts and culture, while *Twyg* is a publication that creates content, events and campaigns to promote environmentally sustainable, circular, regenerative, caring and ethical practices.

Klyntji was founded by Francois Lion-Cachet in 2014. He ran it at his own expense, along with the occasional reader donation, for many years, according to Elodi Troskie, the content editor for the publication.

"In 2019, Elzanne Coetzee became involved as the text editor, and I joined in 2020 as an editor-at-large – both as volunteers," says Troskie.

Klyntji received external funding for the first time earlier this year, from the Trust for Afrikaans Art, Culture and Heritage (TAKKE), according to Troskie. "In terms of paying contributors and paying stipends, we never had money to do that, but we were lucky to receive funding from [TAKKE], which has now made it possible for us to pay minimal remuneration to contributors and our editors," says Lion-Cachet, editor-in-chief of *Klyntji*.



Source: *Journal*, *OATH*, *Dataweek*, *Bitterkomix*, *Chips!*, *Bat Butt*, *Ideas*, *The Afropolitan*, *Outside&In*, *On's Klyntji*, *ArtAfrica*, *Zonk!*, *BubblegumClub*, *iJusi*, *Instrumentation & Control*, and *The Lake*.



The funding from the trust is only used to produce content, according to Troskie. "These are not salaries at all. [W]e pay writers per story, so we only work on a per-story basis to be able to work out a budget," she says. They currently reach between 4 000 and 6 000 unique monthly browsers, according to Troskie.

Klyntji is a public benefit organisation (PBO) that recently completed the non-profit organisation (NPO) registration process. It is also waiting for its non-governmental organisation (NGO) registration to be finalised, says Troskie. "One of TAKKE's requirements is that we must be registered as a PBO," she says.

NEVER STOP HUSTLING

After two decades of experience working with media organisations such as the South African Broadcasting Corporation and the *Sunday Times*, Jackie May left the media industry without knowing what she would do next. She launched Twyg in mid-2017.

"I just thought, 'let me try something on my own'. I just felt like there was space in the media environment for something like Twyg. Nobody was doing something around environment and sustainability at the time, around lifestyle, in a way that I thought was compelling," she says.

She started with a business plan in mind, but it ended up being inapplicable. "I thought people would be putting ads onto the website, which is not really what has happened," says May.

So far, they have not had a single paid-for advertisement, according to May. "So, for the

first year, I was doing side-hustles. I didn't look for funding either. The second year, I got a grant which was fantastic, and that kept us going for the second year," says May. "I think, if I had known better [in the beginning], I probably would have worked harder at trying to find a funder," she adds.

The grant Twyg received was a storytelling grant from the British Council. "It was quite a big grant," she says. The British Council came to May and, even though she didn't apply for the grant, she still had to submit a big application after that.

Technews's revenue, on the other hand, comes from advertising – both print and online – unlike consumer magazines that get their revenue from both subscriptions and advertisers, according to Van der Spuy.

"All our magazines are ABC-audited, and subscribers need to complete the relevant documentation proving that they are relevant and would benefit from receiving the magazines, which in turn benefits the advertisers spending money with us," says Van der Spuy.

One has to become creative when funding a niche publication, especially when trying to avoid advertising income, according to Terena le Roux, editor and publisher of *Journal/Joernaal*. "*Journal/Joernaal* was planned without any advertising income. Left with only the cover price to cover our costs, it was important to set that fairly high. And then, of course, to keep our costs down as far as possible without running a sweatshop," said Le Roux.

Twyg also hosts an annual event, the Twyg Sustainable Fashion Awards, which is the first

event of its kind in South Africa, according to May. The awards celebrate and support fashion designers who use best practices to help change their industry, according to Twyg's website. This year will be the third time the awards are taking place.

The awards were very "intentional" for Twyg in its role as the main revenue driver this year. May is also in the process of launching a sustainability festival, Deliver Tomorrow Festival, to serve as an additional revenue driver.

Running a niche publication is not an easy task and it takes a lot of hard work, according to May. "You need to love the product that you are working on," she says, adding that you have to be passionate and sure that your product is needed.

Esterhuyse agrees and has no doubt that niche publications will never die out. "I think wherever there is a group of people with similar interests, there will be a space where that is relevant for them. I think throughout the years it has been like that, where you have subcultures with publications specifically aimed at them," says Esterhuyse.

Le Roux believes that cleverly curating content for niche target markets is the way forward for magazines. "It changes the relationship with your readers if they all share the same passions and questions," she says. "Keeping it tight keeps the ship afloat and keeps your readers happy. They can see that the focus is on them, and who does not appreciate being seen and understood?" **SMF**





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UNSHIELDED AVANT-GARDE

The need for freelance journalists in the media industry has rapidly grown over the past decade. However, a combination of economic and political struggles has oversaturated the journalistic job market. Freelancers have also had to adapt to a new digital media landscape. Despite this, formally-trained, up-and-coming freelance journalists seem to have a bright future.

By Alistair Seymour

It is no secret that the South African economy has been under increasing pressure and strain, which has led to a steady increase in freelance journalists entering the industry, says Niki Moore – freelance journalist and co-founder of *The SAFREA Chronicle*, an online publication of the South African Freelancers Association (SAFREA).

“Newspapers have always used freelancers for input. So, if you had a story, you could pitch it to a newspaper. The newspaper would invariably say yes and pay you per word,” she says.

For the past decade, most media organisations relied even more on freelancers as soon as they started experiencing financial problems, says Prof Wallace Chuma – associate professor of media studies at the University of Cape Town – via email correspondence with *SMF*.

This increase in freelance journalists in the market must be seen in the context of the number of journalists losing their permanent jobs over the years, says Kay Johnstone – a freelance writer for nine years – via email correspondence with *SMF*. This has resulted in a more competitive market, she says.

“The saturation of the market has been happening for a long time. It didn’t have much to do with the pandemic. It’s got everything to do with the economy and that the economy is flooded with young people who aren’t able to find a job,” says Moore.

According to the 2018 *State of the Newsroom* report released by the journalism department at the University of the Witwatersrand, the professional journalistic workforce in South Africa was roughly 10 000 people strong in 2008. By 2018, this number was estimated to have been cut in half. At the time, the report stated that many of the cases who fell victim to the job cuts were senior, experienced journalists who were not given the opportunity to reskill for the new multi-tasking, digital future of news.

“[The] financial problems [were] caused by declining ad spend, declining circulation for newspapers [and] the threats from online/digital advertising platforms,” says Chuma.

FRACTURED LIVES

Covid-19 exacerbated the effects of an already exploitative industry, both nationally and internationally, says Mandi Smallhorne, SAFREA executive and a freelance science journalist for the past 28 years. Many traditional journalists lost their jobs due to Covid-19, with the magazine and print industries being hit the hardest, says Dr Kate Skinner – former executive director of the South African National Editors’ Forum (SANEF) and executive director of the Association of Independent Publishers (AIP) – via email correspondence with *SMF*. “A number of our grassroots community print publications stopped printing. Overall

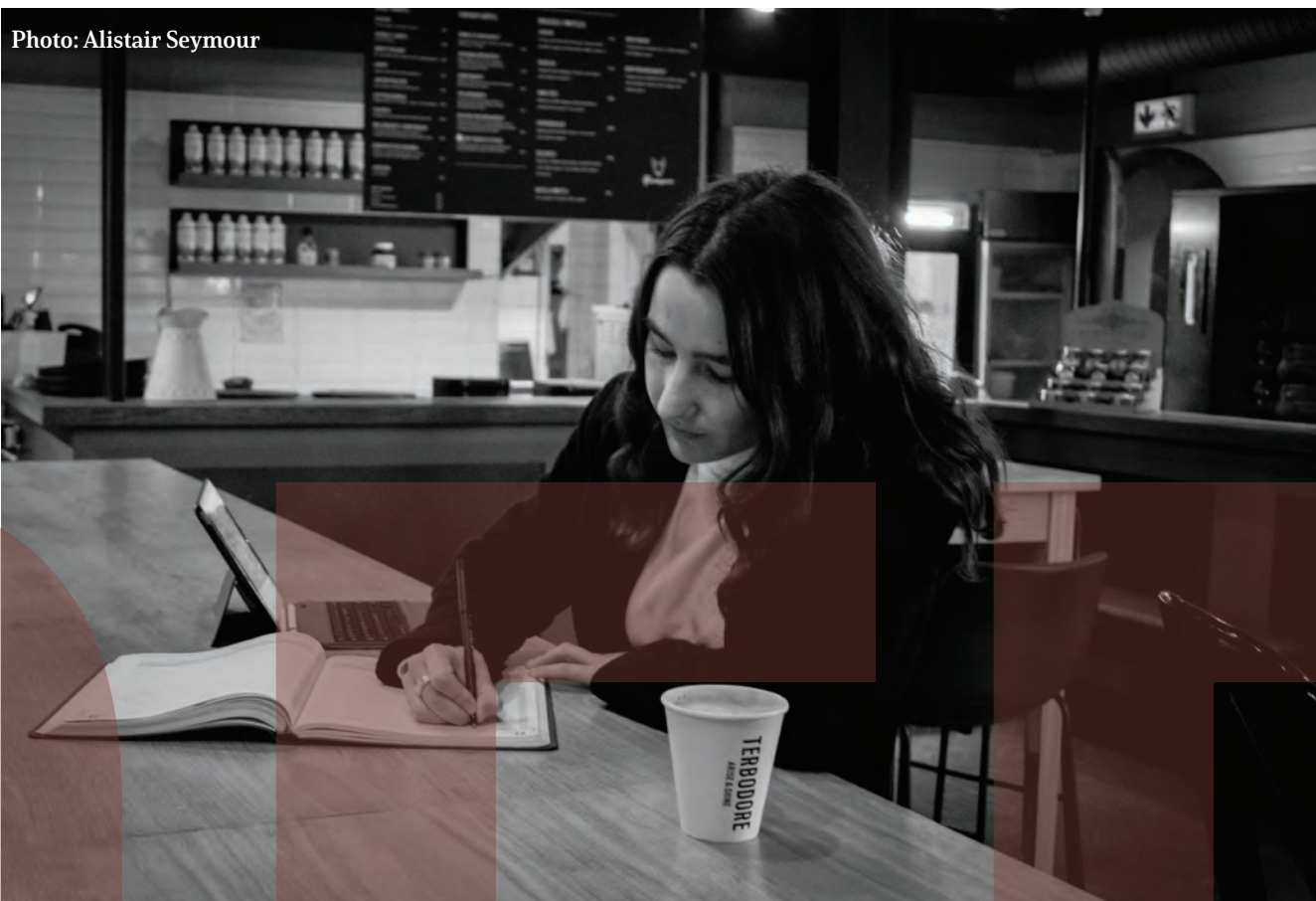


Photo: Alistair Seymour

I would say that the number of freelancers would have increased,” she says.

Some of the most prominent media companies in the country – including Media24, Caxton, Primedia and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) – had to retrench a considerable number of journalists, according to Skinner. On 7 July, Media24 released a press statement announcing that they would retrench close to 660 staff due to the closure or outsourcing of a significant portion of their print publications. Caxton reported an estimated 1 500 jobs lost in a yearly results statement released on 21 September 2020. The SABC confirmed they had retrenched a total of 621 employees in a statement on 21 March 2021.

Moore says that established freelance journalists were more prepared than those who were retrenched during the lockdowns. “[Traditional journalists] weren’t used to the discipline, and the hours, and the self-imposed deadlines, and the lack of networking, whereas [freelancers] had been better equipped to work from home,” she explains. Johnstone recalls being contacted during the past year by a number of ex-permanently employed journalists, requesting for her to pass on work if she had too much. “If only,” she says.

Community print media were also more prepared than

the mainstream media, says Mbali Dhlomo, editor of the community-based publication, *Intuthuko Newspaper*, via email correspondence. Dhlomo explains that this is because community news was already dealing with financial pressure and job losses before the pandemic.

However, community news publications were by no means exempt from the challenges the pandemic brought about. “Our community print media sector has been hard hit by Covid-19, and my guess would be that fewer journalists and freelancers have been employed over the last two years in our sector,” says Dhlomo.

IMPROVISE, ADAPT, OVERCOME

Freelancers – whilst facing the brunt of the economic and political ramifications that came with the pandemic, and an already diminishing newsroom – had to adapt, as they simply had no choice, says Moore.

Melody Emmett, a SAFREA board member with 18 years of experience as a freelance writer, says that journalists have had to reinvent themselves and have had to start “taking minutes of board meetings, running workshops, coaching, training and bartering/writing for other services”. Journalists also had to turn to other sources of income to be able to survive, relying on family members and friends for support, according to Dhlomo. “Those



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journalists were put on the street, and what options do [they] have? Did they retire? Did they have to take up other jobs? Or did they have to become freelancers?” asks Moore.

SAFREA started multiple initiatives to support struggling journalists, by providing food vouchers and working with SANEF to set up a relief fund for journalists and photojournalists alike, says Emmet. SANEF has just put out a fifth call for journalists to receive once-off allocated support funding, she explains. “The initial allocation was R5 000. [The total fund] has been increased due to generous donor funding. Again, the take-up has been significant,” Emmet adds.

“Due to salary cuts caused by a drop in sales and advertisement during Covid-19, I started freelancing because I honestly couldn’t afford rent anymore. Due to an increase in workload, [...] I also struggled with exhaustion and my mental health,” says Paula-Ann Smit, a freelance journalist who previously worked as an editor for the *Graaff-Reinet Advertiser*, a community newspaper.

However, this was not the reality for all freelancers. Some have been able to keep busy and either remain successful or even find more work, despite the woes that came with the pandemic – especially those that were able to develop expertise in niche areas, such as health journalism, according to Skinner. Emmet explains that some very “experienced niche journalists”, who mainly wrote on the environment, health and science, were successful because they “know how to repackage their stories for local and international publications”.

“Those journalists were put on the street, and what options do [they] have? Did they retire? Did they have to take up other jobs? Or did they have to become freelancers?”

FROM TOP TO BOTTOM

Publications have been hiring and utilising freelancers for quite some time, says Moore. This makes more sense from a financial perspective, as there isn’t a fixed compensation for these journalists to receive for their work. This is particularly true when the publications themselves are experiencing financial trouble, she says. Some well-established publications have been rumoured to sometimes struggle to pay their journalists at all, says Emmet.

“Most [freelancers] are living from hand-to-mouth in our sector because that is how we [publishers] are surviving at the present moment. So the little we get from clients, we share with them through stipends for articles submitted,” says Dhlomo. The issue with this is that there is no security for freelancers, so employers can choose when to hire freelancers and when not to, says Johnstone. “They also pay no sick leave, annual leave, maternity

leave, pensions, bonuses or medical aid contributions – better for employers, but precarious for freelancers,” she adds. Moore says she knows “editors who get put on a freelance basis, and they get paid per shift with no freelance security whatsoever”.

Emmet mentions that some interns and young journalists are often willing to “work for a byline”, which means working without financial compensation in exchange for receiving recognition and their name on the story. She adds that some experienced journalists are also willing to write for free, just to gain exposure.

ON THE GRID

With the freelance industry’s considerable growth, the local media industry seems to be transferring more and more into using the gig economy, with journalists being hired online per article they write, says Chuma. “That is exactly where things are going. Hence the need for freelance organisations such as SAFREA to support freelancers and to build some collective bargaining power,” says Skinner.

According to Moore, websites that contract work on an article-by-article basis are becoming more popular. However, these platforms run the risk of damaging the ethics of the industry, since their content isn’t being monitored in newsrooms and because the journalists on these platforms aren’t necessarily formally trained. “I suspect that these are content mills,” she says. “I get asked a lot by young people [...] if they should get an agent or if they should join [online contracting platforms], and I say, ‘Why don’t you first learn to write?’” she says.

Smit says that she found online freelance-contracting platforms useful to start establishing her business, but later found word-of-mouth recommendations to be much more useful. “I highly recommend that freelancers, especially in digital marketing and social media management, start by advertising to acquaintances and local businesses. Word-of-mouth is a powerful tool,” she adds.

WHERE TO NOW?

“I think the importance of organisations such as SAFREA will grow. Also, it will be good for SAFREA to build stronger relationships with organisations such as SANEF and the AIP to pool resources and support,” says Skinner.

“I think the future of [media] work in general is going to be in freelancing, because I don’t think this pandemic is going to go away,” says Moore. “People have gotten used to the idea of working from home. I think companies have gotten used to outsourcing because they lose the responsibility of the 13th cheque.” There is now also a need for journalists to expand their skills and change their approach to be multi-disciplined, in order to ensure that they are able to perform a wider variety of work, according to Emmet.

In terms of community news, the survival of freelancers depends on the survival of the community publications that support them, says Dhlomo. “Hopefully the situation will go back to normal and our businesses will continue and thrive,” she adds. **SMF**

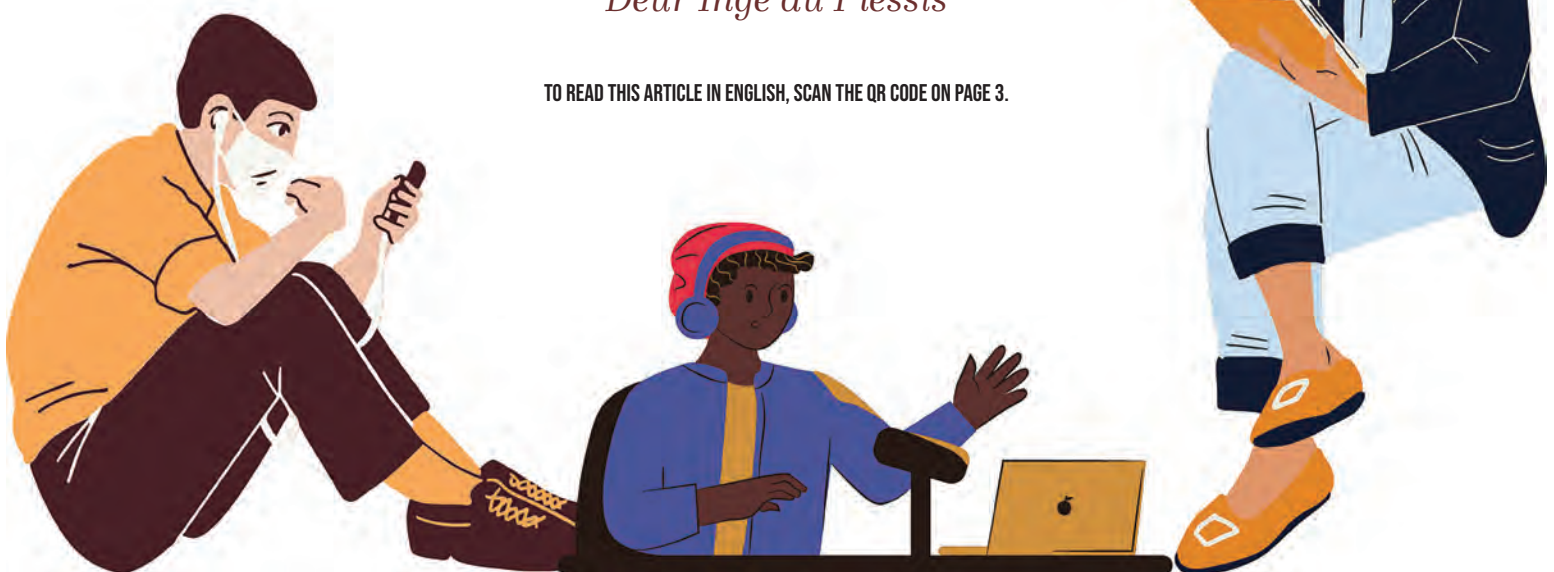


Nuus vir 'n aanlyn generasie

In die afgelope dekade het die vervaardiging en verbruik van nuus in die Suid-Afrikaanse medialandskap aansienlik verander. Plaaslik is koerante soos *Rapport* nou ook aanlyn beskikbaar op *Netwerk24*, terwyl aanlyn publikasies soos *Daily Maverick* se werk nou in 'n gedrukte weekblad, *DM168*, verwerk word. Nuus bereik baie meer oë en ore as ooit tevore, maar dit moet nou ook meeding met die oorgloed van inligting wat op digitale platforms vir nuusverbruikers beskikbaar is.

Deur Inge du Plessis

TO READ THIS ARTICLE IN ENGLISH, SCAN THE QR CODE ON PAGE 3.





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Toe Julian Jansen 13 jaar gelede as joernalis by *Rapport* aangesluit het, het hy ná 'n onderhoud na die nuuskantoor teruggekeer met enkele dinge: Notas van wat die nuusmaker hom vertel het, en 'n foto of twee deur die fotograaf wat saam met hom uitgegaan het.

Vandag lyk hierdie proses anders: “Die pakket wat jy na die kantoor toe bring, is nie meer net jy wat gaan sit en die storie skryf nie,” vertel Jansen. “Jy bring nou vir hulle 'n klankgreep en die fotograaf neem baie keer 'n kort video wat dan gesny en aangepas word vir ons sosiale media-platforms.” *Rapport* gebruik die visuele en klankelemente saam met die storie wat vervaardig word, volgens Jansen.

“Wat vir my baie moeilik was, was om inkoop van 'n redaksie te kry om die digitale leefwyse te integreer binne 'n koerantprodukt, en om vaardighede uit te brei,” vertel Inge Kühne, adjunkredakteur van *Rapport*. Sommige joernaliste het beter aangepas by die byvoeging van digitale elemente, waar dit vir ander “vreemd en bedreigend” was, sê sy.

“Die wêreld van mediaproduksie (nuusmedia en andersins) verander voortdurend en wat ons gehore soek, verander namate hul verbruiksgewoontes verander,” sê Sarah Koopman, die bemakingsbestuurder van *Daily Maverick*, per e-pos aan SMF.

“Omdat mense met die groot en skielike veranderinge wat die land [gedurende die grendelstaat] beleef het, nie hul huise kon verlaat nie, was daar baie angste en onbeantwoorde vrae. Die byvoeging van visuele en klankelemente by die aanbieding van ons werk, het ons toegelaat om die gehoor op 'n ander en nuwe manier te betrek,” sê Koopman.

Belangstelling in addisionele vorms van media, soos podsendinge, is besig om te groei in Suid-Afrika, volgens Catherine Rice, die aanbieder en vervaardiger van sommige van die News24-podsendinge, soos *The Story* en *The Inge Lotz Story: A miscarriage of justice*.

Die vierde seisoen van *The Story* is vanjaar tussen 1 Junie en 1 September meer as 125 000 keer geluister, volgens Sharlene Rood, die multimedia-redakteur van News24.

NUWE MEDIUMS VIR OU (EN NUWE) MEDIA

Sosiale media stel publikasies in staat om meer mense te wys wat hulle in die komende koerant kan verwag, sonder dat lesers hul huise verlaat of per toeval een van die koerant se plakkate raaksien, volgens Kühne. *Rapport* is op Facebook, Instagram en Twitter aktief.

“Digitaal is baie verleidelik. Dis baie lekker om te sê: ‘Hier is iets nuuts – kom ons doen dit óók!’” vertel sy.

“En daarom het ons nou 'n tipe dissipline in ons proses ingebou om te vra: ‘Wat doen ons en hoeveel mannekrag verg dit?’” verduidelik Kühne. Dit is belangrik om die opbrengs op belegging van die tyd wat op digitale aspekte bestee word, te assesser in terme van die reikwydte, sigbaarheid en bemakings wat dit vir *Rapport* se inhoud bied, sê sy. “Ons primêre produk is die inhoud van ons stories wat in *Rapport* en op *Netwerk24* verskyn.”

Netwerk24 se digitale pakket bied 35 koerante en 10 tydskrifte in elektroniese formaat teen R99 per maand aan, volgens die platform se webtuiste. In November 2020 het News24 berig dat *Netwerk24* met 71 500 digitale intekenaars, Suid-Afrika se grootste digitale nuus-intekendiens is.

Daily Maverick – wat hulself as 'n “digitale inboorling” beskryf, omdat die ontstaan en ontwikkeling van hul organisasie hoofsaaklik

digitaal plaasvind – het gedurende 2020 ook 'n weeklikse koerant, *DM168*, begin druk. “Alhoewel dit nie 'n aanlyn element is nie, is dit 'n nuwe medium en 'n manier van verslaggewing waarmee ons na drukjoernalistiek uitgebrei het,” sê Koopman.

Buiten hul sosiale media-teenwoordigheid, het beide *Rapport* en *Daily Maverick* verrykende inhoud by hul gewone artikels begin insluit. Bykomende interaksie met lesers is ook gevestig deur, byvoorbeeld, regstreekse onderhoude met joernaliste op aanlyn platforms, volgens Kühne en Koopman. Publikasies soos *Rapport*, *Daily Maverick* en News24 sluit ook nou podsendinge by hul nuusdienste in.

Volgens Rice is die vervaardiging van podsendinge 'n multimedia-projek wat die verbruiker toelaat om die karakters deur teks, video en foto's te “sien”. “Die fokus is dalk op die podsending, maar die projek sluit soveel addisionele multimedia-elemente in,” sê Rice.

Podsendinge stel joernaliste in staat om meer agtergrondinligting oor hul storie te gee, volgens Rice. Afhangend van die storie wat vertel word, neem 'n podsending “nie te lank om te vervaardig en te redigeer nie” en die insluiting daarvan op 'n nuuswebtuiste “kan baie voordelig wees”, sê sy.

“Tans is daar uitstekende podsendinge oral beskikbaar, maar News24 is nog altyd daarop ingestel om die jongste nuus te deel, so [in-diepte podsendinge] is 'n nuwe veld wat ons betree,” sê Rice. “Ons werk baie hard daaraan sodat toegang tot die podsendinge iets sal wees wat mense na News24 lok.”

News24 – die land se grootste aanlyn nuusplatform wat verlede jaar gemiddeld 1,3 miljoen daaglikse besoekers gehad het – het in Augustus 2020 'n intekenmodel bekendgestel, teen R75 per maand. In die eerste twee maande nádat die model geloods is, het hulle 20 000 digitale intekenaars gehad, volgens hul webtuiste. In April 2021 het hulle 31 000 betalende digitale intekenaars gehad, volgens die Wêreldvereniging vir Koerante en Nuusuitgewers (WAN-IFRA).

Die nuus- en inligtingsomgewing het wel verander, volgens Iske Conradie, wat tans besig is met 'n meestersgraad in ekososiale ontwerp aan die Universiteit van Bozen-Bolzano in Italië. Conradie het voorheen joernalistiek studeer en in die plaaslike mediabedryf gewerk. “Voorheen het gedrukte nuuspublikasies met ander koerante meegeding, maar aanlyn kompeteer hulle met beroendes en kat- en hondvideo's,” sê Conradie.

Conradie meen verbruikers vind dit dan soms moeilik om die nuus bo die vermaak te kies.

Musawenkosi Ndlovu, mede-professor in mediastudies aan die Universiteit van Kaapstad, beaam die kompetisie tussen vermaak en nuus. “Jongmense het toegang tot veelvuldige platforms en verskeie toestelle, en as hulle nie relevante nuus sien nie, verbruik hulle iets anders,” sê Ndlovu. Daar is 'n groter verskeidenheid van inhoudsaanbiedings en dit verander verbruiksgewoontes, volgens hom.

'N AFNAME IN NUUSVERBRUIKERS

“Daar was 'n geleidelike afname in nuusverbruik oor die hele land sedert 1994,” verduidelik Ndlovu. “Daar was 'n afname in volwasse, jong volwasse en jeug-nuusverbruikers, maar veral die jeug.”

Die lesers van *Rapport* se koerant en aanlyn publikasie is deel van 'n ouer generasie van nuusverbruikers wat baie ingelig en lojaal is, volgens Kühne.

“Wat die geskiedenis vir ons gewys het, is dat mense, namate hulle ouer word, meer media gebruik en meer geneig is om daarvoor te betaal,” sê sy. Volgens die Suid-Afrikaanse Oudit-buro van Sirkulasie (ABC) se



koerantsirkulasiesyfers, het *Rapport* in die tweede kwartaal van 2021 'n totale sirkulasiesyfer van 76 187 gehad, waarvan 75 957 betaald was. Dit is 'n 6,8% afname teenoor die eerste kwartaal.

Conradie sê ook dat mense – insluitend sy, as 31-jarige met 'n agtergrond in die media – nie meer joernaliste en artikels as 'n hoofbron van inligting gebruik nie, maar eerder as 'n sekondêre bron om meer inligting te kry oor iets wat op sosiale media of deur iemand bekend gedeel is.

Kühne vertel dat sy die nuusgewoontes van generasie Z – mense wat tussen 1995 en 2015 gebore is – oor die afgelope tydperk waarneem.

“Elke keer wat [*Rapport*] onderhoude met studente voer, vra ons hulle watter media gebruik hulle en dan sê hulle: ‘Ek teken eintlik op niks in nie’. Hulle betaal nie vir media nie en hulle vind hulle media op ander plekke,” sê Kühne.

“Nuusverbruikers van môre is in hierdie stadium waarskynlik besig om na YouTubers te kyk en te luister wat Kanye West van die wêreld dink. Dit is 'n baie moeilike mark vir ons wat in die tradisionele media werk – druk en digitaal – om te bereik,” sê Kühne. 'n TikTok-sangeres “wat nie eers sing nie”, kan deesdae die mark van 16- tot 20-jariges in Suid-Afrika meer suksesvol bereik as enige tradisionele media, meen sy.

INTERAKTIEWE NUUSVERBRUIKERS

“Die jongmense sal onmiddellik vir jou sê: ‘Ek stel nie belang in nuus nie.’ Maar as jy vir hulle vra: ‘Wat weet jy van Black Lives Matter?’, of ‘Wat weet jy van Afghanistan?’, of ‘Wat weet jy van die optogte in KwaZulu-Natal?’, dan weet hulle baie. Hulle besef nie altyd dat hulle nuus gebruik nie,” sê Kühne.

Sosiale media-verbruikers wêreldwyd stel al hoe meer belang in sosiale geregtigheidskwessies, soos die aanlyn #BlackLivesMatter-veldtog, berig RESET, 'n organisasie sonder winsoogmerk wat fokus op volhoubare digitale ontwikkeling. Minstens 60 lande het aan anti-rassistiese betogings deelgeneem gedurende die tydperk van die #BlackLivesMatter-veldtog in 2020, volgens RESET.

Tieners, asook ander sosiale media-verbruikers, se belangstelling in sosiale geregtigheidskwessies weerspieël tot 'n mate joernalistieke etiek, volgens Conradie. “Daar is 'n gemeenskap van informele joernaliste en ons kan eintlik by hulle aanklank vind, want hulle ervaar ook die druk om aandag te trek en te behou, maar om terselfdertyd eg te bly en die waarheid te deel,” sê sy.

Die nuwe generasie is nie net nuusgebruikers nie, maar ook nuusdeelnemers, volgens Kühne. “Dit gaan interessant wees om te sien hoe die nuus, nuusproduksie en joernalistiek gaan ontwikkel om by mense aan te pas. Ons is in baie onbekende vaarwater wat interaktiwiteit aanbetref,” sê Kühne. “[Die jonger generasie] is meer betrokke en meer aktief as wat die vorige geslagte op daardie ouderdom was.”

JOERNALISTIEK IN DIE KUBERWÊRELD

“Ons lesers is aan die beweeg en wat hulle in hulle hand het, is hulle selfoon. Dis amper soos 'n asmapompie wat hulle het en hulle is geduring daarop. So, ons moet ons lesers volg,” sê Jansen.

Jansen het tans amper 74 000 volgelinge op sy Facebook-blad.

Volgens hom is verifikasie baie belangrik vir enigiemand wat inligting op Facebook deel.

“Almal wil joernaliste wees. Mense is deesdae vinniger as joernaliste op misdaadtonele en hulle neem foto's van die gesigte van die slagoffers. Ek kry soms video's van slagoffers wat in hulle eie bloed lê,” sê Jansen. “Dit word ongesensureerd die wêreld ingestuur. Sosiale media is koerante sonder redakteurs en sonder 'n proses van verifikasie.”

Jansen sê egter dat hy sy Facebook-blad ook gebruik om sowel sy eie artikels as interessante artikels van sy kollegas en ander nuuspublikasies te deel. Sodoende bied hy 'n interessante pakket vir sy volgelinge aan. “Wanneer jy jou eie storie doen, moet jy die bemagtiging van jou eie storie doen. Ons kan nie net op *Netwerk24* staatmaak om die storie te dra nie,” sê Jansen. “Wanneer ons 'n storie skryf, moet daardie storie digitaal meer oë, ore en vingers kry.”

Verifikasie en integriteit aanlyn skep 'n verhouding van vertroue tussen leser en joernalis, volgens Jansen. Sommige van die artikels wat hy deel, is egter nie beskikbaar vir al sy Facebook-vogelinge nie, omdat slegs *Netwerk24*-intekenaars toegang daartoe het.

“Soms sal mense in die kommentaar-afdeling kla oor die intekenmodel. My lojale volgelinge *educate* hulle dan sommer. Joernaliste moet ook kos op die tafel sit en die intekenprys [van *Netwerk24*] is werklik min vir die hoeveelheid publikasies waartoe dit vir jou toegang gee,” meen Jansen. **SMF**



Grafika: Inge du Plessis

SMF

The new face of *sports journalism*

The emotions and reactions of the fans in the stands are crucial in shaping the way that sports stories are reported on, according to Xola Ntshinga, South African sports anchor. But since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, stadiums have been empty. While the absence of cheers was one of a series of hurdles that reporters had to overcome, the pandemic brought about unique opportunities to find solutions to some of the problems sports journalists face.

By Tina Ddamulira

Photo: Tina Ddamulira



Sports reporting entails more than just relying on the score or the result of a match – it is about the narrative, says Sibusiso Mjikeliso, deputy editor of *Sport24*. Mjikeliso feels that in order to tell the story, journalists rely on “sporting intuition”, which he defines as a “keen sense for the game and gathering information from [...] everyone we can to make sense of the sporting occasion and why some teams or individuals win and others don’t”.

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and the accompanying restrictions have resulted in limited in-person interviews, the inability to access matches and practices, and extended working hours, according to Mjikeliso. “The workday has transitioned from being a 9-ish to 5-ish operation to a 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. time span. Sometimes even beyond,” Mjikeliso tells *SMF* in email correspondence.

WORKING FROM HOME

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the DStv Premiership (formerly known as the Premier Soccer League or PSL) denies journalists access to any of the football games, according to Edoardo Martinuzzi, the digital content editor for *Soccer Laduma* and *KickOff* – an online football news platform. Freelance journalists are denied a chance to earn an income as a result of the DStv Premiership’s actions, which affects photographers the most, says Carl Fourie, a freelance photographer.

This is because reporters can view the match on television (TV) and still write a review, whereas photographers need to be at the venue in order to do their job, he explains.

The journalists that cover football have been attending virtual press conferences in order to get content about player updates and behind the scenes news, according to Lorenz Köhler, a former journalist for *KickOff* and the print publication, *KickOff Magazine*. “The pro is that you can sit in Cape Town and attend a virtual press conference in another province,” says Köhler.

However, most journalists from different publications are given the same information from media managers, whereas they could previously physically attend live matches or access players at the training grounds, according to Köhler. “This means that we have to get creative with the content that we get,” he says.

Martinuzzi has also found that while the readers on *KickOff*’s digital platforms are still consuming hard news, the softer news element, such as lifestyle news, has captured the audience’s attention too. “We have focused on great storytelling, thereby fulfilling the reader’s needs,” he says.

The pandemic presented Amy Samuels, a former TV reporter for e.tv News and Sport, with the opportunity to interview athletes from overseas via video call – an opportunity she might not have had under

normal field reporting circumstances. “All of a sudden, all the athletes were doing virtual calls and that was the way they were speaking to the media,” she says. Doing interviews via virtual calls also meant that journalists did not have to drive out to sources and be on the road “and then come back to import all that footage”, says Samuels.

THE MISSING CROWD

As lockdown restrictions have been gradually lifted, journalists have been welcomed back to certain sporting events, says Martinuzzi. For instance, sports journalists were allowed to cover the British and Irish Lions rugby tour to South Africa that took place from 24 July to 7 August 2021, in person, says Mjikeliso. The journalists were present in the stands in their allocated zones, but had no contact with players and coaching personnel, he adds. Entry to the fixtures were only allowed after a negative Covid-19 test, according to JJ Harmse, the media manager for the Springbok Sevens.

Furthermore, no physical after-match press conferences were held – only virtual ones – according to Harmse, who assisted with media and communications during the British and Irish Lions tour. “That impacted the mood of the event,” he tells *SMF* via email correspondence. “Normally one would have a couple of questions to a coach/player. With the virtual [conferences], it was limited.”



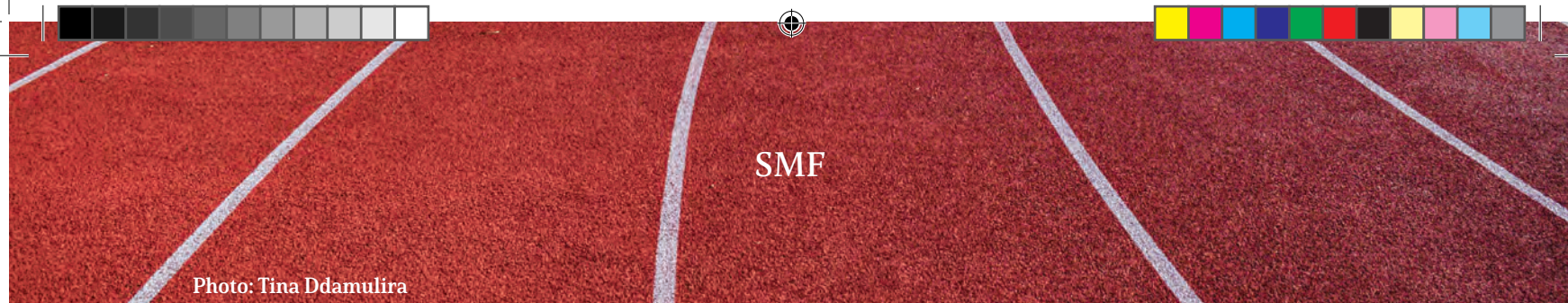


Photo: Tina Ddamulira

While journalists were granted access to sporting events, these events took place in mostly empty stadiums. This made reporting difficult for the TV reporters, according to Xola Ntshinga, a sports anchor for Newzroom Afrika and Jacaranda FM. Broadcast sports coverage hinges on the reactions of the supporters, on their anger or emotion in relation to the events, says Ntshinga.

For TV reporters, the sense of a massive sporting event is lost when there is nobody in the stands, he adds. This sense was especially lost at the Women's Twenty20 International series in March 2021, where no spectators were in attendance to witness the South African national cricket team beat India in all the three matches, says Ntshinga. "This was a massive achievement for them, but nobody was there [besides the journalists] to actually witness such a celebration," he says.

CHANGE IN CONTENT

Ntshinga says that sports bulletins and reporting has changed significantly since the start of the pandemic, as he now uses more emotive language. "The only people who can carry the emotions are reporters," he says.

At the beginning of the pandemic, for a period of two weeks, the sports bulletins consisted of the events that were being called off rather than what was going ahead, says Tholakele Mnganga, an *Eyewitness News (EWN)* sports reporter. But Mnganga believes that this change in the bulletin format is not as big of an issue as one might think. "As we dealt with the reality of the situation, we realised it was a great time to do creative content and tackle issues we would not normally address during a busy calendar," says Mnganga. Now, when she does interviews with athletes, she no longer just asks about their "field issues", but also touches "on mental health and the continued impact of the pandemic on their way of life", she adds.

ADVERTISING AND RETRENCHMENTS

As major events were pulled off schedule, the advertising revenue for media linked to these events essentially followed suit, according to Clinton van der Berg, senior manager of communication for SuperSport. Nevertheless, "SuperSport has been incredibly successful, surpassing budget and all expectations for the big

[three sporting events]: UEFA [Champions League], British and Irish Lions [tour] and the Olympics", he says.

For *KickOff Magazine*, the dip in advertising revenue when there were no games being played did not have a significant impact on the print publication, according to Zola Doda, the print editor of *KickOff Magazine*. "We were not getting a lot of money from advertising anyway," he says. The print publication was also fortunate enough not to have retrenched any employees, since *KickOff Magazine* has always had a small team. "It's myself, the sub-editor and three journalists," says Doda.

LOGISTICAL CHANGES

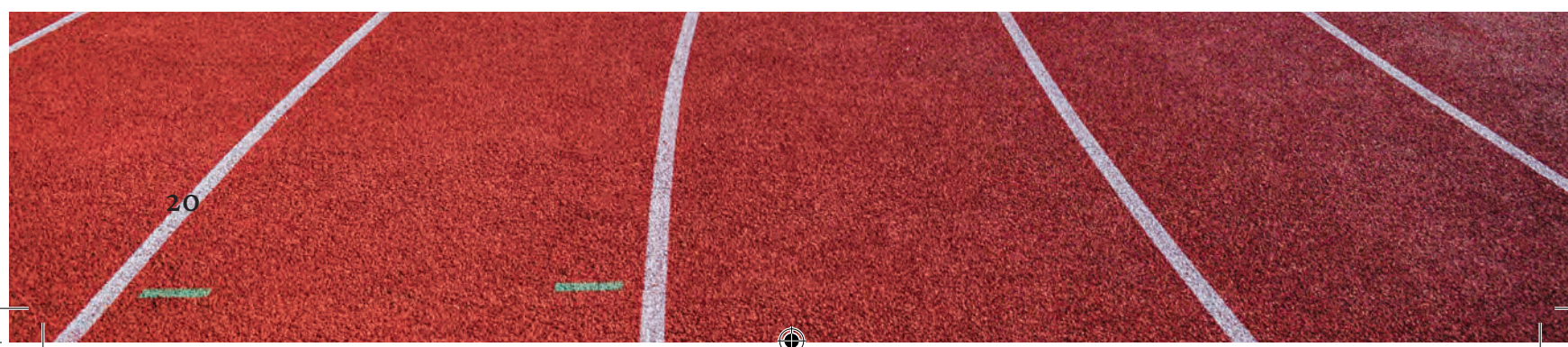
Samuels found it difficult to report for TV during the pandemic because the majority of the work she did involved doing in-person interviews. "You have to be understanding to the athlete if they don't want to meet up with you in person," she says.

Given that Samuels filmed her own interviews, there was no need for a cameraperson. She believes that this made athletes feel at ease and that they were "less susceptible to getting the [Covid-19] virus". Samuels found it interesting to see how comfortable the athletes were being filmed with a cell phone, versus how their personas changed in front of a bigger camera.

Broadcasters had to rely on a lot of archival visuals, which included "a lot of images, which isn't necessarily the best for TV", Samuels mentions. The images were either sourced from the athletes themselves or from their social media accounts, she says. Athletes were also asked to get their coach or family members to record their training, according to Samuels. "I think that's where I took my hat off to a lot of athletes."

Cindy Poluta, a sports anchor for *947 Breakfast Club*, has found that broadcasting sports on the radio has been challenging to do from home. "Especially when you've got live sports on the go and you have to pre-record your bulletins for the anchor to add their news bulletins, [...] the scores are not always up to date," says Poluta.

However, Ntshinga appreciates that the show can still continue remotely, should something go wrong at the station. "And even post [Covid-19], I think we feel free to make use of the advances in technology that allow us to do that," he says. **SMF**



Funding models: Bespoke or broke?

New business models are being explored to ensure the journalism industry survives amid shrinking newsrooms. Targeting niche audiences, implementing paywalls and using subscription models are a few of the methods that have been adopted by publications globally. However, the key to sustainability may lie in creating a bespoke funding model that caters to audiences while providing them with a unique experience.

By Kimberley Schoeman

South Africa's media environment is a dynamic and changing space. Readers are seeking stimulating news stories to engage with across multiple digital and print platforms. However, rising printing costs – coupled with the expectation for editorial content to be innovative, freely available, and versatile for all platforms – threaten traditional media business models. This is according to Chris Roper, deputy chief executive officer (CEO) of Code for Africa, and former editor-in-chief of *Mail & Guardian*.

"South Africans are starting to better trust their media. However, there is a challenge for the media to prove to readers that paying for quality journalism is worth it," says Roper.

In other countries, such as the Netherlands, some local news organisations receive direct government funding. This may be key to the long-term survival of local journalism, according to Reg Rumney, former media researcher at Rhodes University's school of journalism and media studies. In South Africa, this kind of financial support is currently extremely tricky, due to the country's history of government involvement in the media during apartheid, says Rumney.

JOURNALISM WITHIN A CONTENT ECONOMY

Audience behaviour has shifted from reading long-form news pieces to preferring short-form content on social media, according to Ryan Hancocks, director of the South African Reserve Bank Centre for Economics Journalism. This has changed the kind of content audiences engage with, as well as how they engage with it.

"People are producing narrative content and storytelling in various shapes and forms," explains Hancocks. "[T]raditional media has not caught up with us [social media] very well, which is why we see the daily paper just doesn't really exist anymore. Everything has gone off to a niche publication."

Shifts in where audiences are choosing to consume content have also disrupted the traditional journalistic model, Hancocks explains. In order to reach their audiences, journalists strive to lead online conversations via their social media accounts. Publications also rely on their own platforms for reader engagement, according to Hancocks.

"On Twitter especially, journalists have tended to lead headline-focused conversations, but now it's challenging to draw attention to their publications and content," explains Hancocks.

Publications are turning to alternative forms of content with new types of distribution channels to tell stories, according to Hancocks. The challenge with this approach is finding the right balance of content, platform choice and audience knowledge, according to Styli Charalambous, CEO of *Daily Maverick*.

"You want to be putting the most relevant content and journalism in front of people. [W]hether that's a climate change article or a membership marketing message, you really want to be pushing it to the right people to give [your publication] the greatest chance of success," explains Charalambous.

MARKET-DRIVEN JOURNALISM

Today's audiences have a different mandate for the content they want media publications to produce; they have an appetite for enriching and engaging narratives, according to Hancocks.

"Build audiences and then build content that audiences really want to follow," explains Hancocks. "[I]t's important to understand





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what your audience wants to consume, and where your niches [are], and then developing that,” says Hancocks.

Media publications may look to “behavioural economics” to understand the dynamics between the audience and the creator, explains Hancocks. This allows publications to develop and maintain audiences, meet commercial imperatives, and see when stories are being read most, he adds. (See story on page 29.)

“Online, you’re constantly having first-time unique visitors coming in. You need to understand the audience’s needs and not necessarily what they want,” says Hancocks. However, “publications have proven to be struggling with relying solely on audience-generated revenue streams”, according to Hancocks.

News sites like *Daily Maverick* use digital tools to target user behaviour and prompt marketing messaging that best aligns with the user’s preferences, says Charalambous. “Marketing automation is something we use already. We’ve been using the tool called Piano, which is one of the well-known industry tools, and we use that to target newsletter sign-ups to people,” he explains. Charalambous adds that using these tools “collects information from different sources and then allows us to get a much more holistic view of our readers”.

Although the practice of market-driven journalism can boost a publication’s revenue, it can be even more instrumental in maintaining an audience’s wants and needs, according to Hancocks. This is a type of behavioural economics, as it leads to loyalty, he says.

Prioritising your audience’s expectations above profit may seem “counterproductive”, but Hancocks believes that this will pay off in the long-term. “[A]s soon as you start working for the advertisers, you lose your entire audience and then you lose your advertisers anyway, because there’s no loyalty [like] true loyalty [which] only comes from that long term audience development and maintenance,” says Hancocks.

BRAND IDENTITY AND POSITIVE NARRATIVES

The brand identity of a media publication is how the public perceives the publication, based on readers’ expectations. This is according to Sarah-Jane Lowes, senior experience planner for Ogilvy Social.Lab.

“[Your brand identity is] your audience’s gut feeling towards your company,” explains Lowes. It is not a logo, product, or promise, but rather your reputation, she adds.

Charalambous explains that everything that *Daily Maverick* produces is based on the following question: “What is journalism for?”

“Only once you know the answer to that question, we have a somewhat clearer or agreed upon definition of [identity],” says Charalambous. Then one can start to build the vision and a mission on top of that, and choose important themes that one wants to cover as an organisation, he adds.

THREE REVENUE STREAMS OF *DAILY MAVERICK*



PHILANTHROPY

Venture capital



COMMERCIAL EFFORT

E-commerce and publishing wings



READER REVENUE

Subscriptions and paywalls

Graphics: Kimberley Schoeman



Photo: Bank Phrom/Unsplash

“South Africans are starting to better trust their media. However, there is a challenge for the media to prove to readers that paying for quality journalism is worth it.

In South Africa, journalism is considered a service that helps people navigate their world, says Charalambous. This allows publications to understand how they make decisions based on their audience's expectations. “If you buy into the fact that [journalism] is a public service, and that service is designed to help people navigate their world, it is entirely focused on what the audience needs...and only they can decide whether you've done a good job,” says Charalambous.

Hancocks believes that bias in news reporting can be permissible if it contributes to a positive content narrative that leads to community engagement.

“Narratives are influencing us and how we engage with things and it has blurred the line [...] and we don't need to have this definitive version of what truth actually is now,” says Hancocks.

However, engagement can also be negative. Sites like *News24* require users to be subscribers in order to comment on articles, due to a history of harmful comments from the general public, says Hancocks. “There was a fraught time in South Africa in terms of the online presence of publications, and *Media24* is a good example of one of the most septic comment sections known to mankind. It's like the seventh layer of hell,” explains Hancocks.

BESPOKE FUNDING MODELS

Major disruptions in funding models for journalism have affected every type and size of outlet globally, according to Roper. There is no longer a cookie-cutter-like approach. Advertising currently contributes a very small percentage of revenue for publications, says Roper.

As a digital-first publication, *Daily Maverick* has had to strategise to find their own place in the media landscape, says Charalambous. In order to do this, they have tapped into multiple revenue streams. According to Charalambous, there are three different revenue categories: philanthropy, commercial efforts, and reader revenue. “Each one has a plan or type of revenue stream that we pursue and people responsible for driving [them],” says Charalambous. “They're all congruent, in that they'll benefit from more readers and more engaged readers, and how we funnel those people along a user journey of financial membership,” he adds.

One can pick a revenue strategy based on all resources available, says Charalambous. “[W]e can no longer rely on this highly profitable, high-volume advertising industry where we control the channel, which is now gone,” says Charalambous. “[I]t's asking us to be entrepreneurs, product-minded, audience-centric, and builders and innovators.”

For community newspapers like the *Fourways Review*, a potential revenue stream is monetising the paper's thirty-year-deep archive, according to Khomotso Makgabutlane, reporter for the *Fourways Review*.

“Some community papers have been talking about creating a subscription library model for researchers, and access to our archives,” says Makgabutlane. “It would provide some content for marketing and advertisers because we can license the content and they pay us to use it.”

The challenge is the lack of technical knowledge needed to sort through old articles, images and audio clips, explains Makgabutlane. Due to changes in general discourse around certain topics, some content would need to be recontextualised, she says.

Subscription models have been widely adopted, as monthly media subscriptions have become common within the landscape. These systems work well to track audience behaviour, and build a highly valuable audience, says Lowes. “The weakness of subscription models, is that consumers are gathering content from a variety of different sources, depending on the content. If the publication is not a source the consumer regularly uses, paying a subscription model is not practical,” says Lowes.

Lowes says that the job at hand is to move readers through a “funnel”, from awareness, to consideration, to purchase of print or a subscription. “But this is a long process that starts with the quality of publications,” she adds.

“You have to first offer a good enough product that they are willing to engage with more than once and that they are willing to pay for,” she says. [SMF](#)



SMF

VOOR TAAL EN TYDING: TAALDIVERSITEIT AS JOERNALISTIEKE STRUIKELBLOK

Elf ampstale en 'n twaalfde dalk op pad: In Suid-Afrika – 'n land met 'n relatief onlangse geskiedenis van sensuur en kulturele verdeling – kan taaldiversiteit unieke uitdagings bied vir die gehalte van joernaliste se werk, sowel as die publiek se toegang tot nuus.

Deur Anri Matthee

TO READ THIS ARTICLE IN ENGLISH, SCAN THE QR CODE ON PAGE 3.

Die status wat Engels in die plaaslike media geniet, weerspieël geensins die werklikheid van ongeveer 59 miljoen Suid-Afrikaners se daaglikse lewens nie. Die taal se rol as *lingua franca* het veroorsaak dat die plaaslike medialandskap grootliks deur Engelse publikasies oorheers word, alhoewel slegs 8,1% van die bevolking by die huis Engels praat, volgens Statistiek Suid-Afrika se algemene huishoudelike peiling vir 2018.

Publikasies in Suid-Afrika se drie grootste huistale – Zoeloe, Xhosa en Afrikaans – behaal verskillende mates van sukses in die plaaslike mark. Maar in terme van lesersmark hou hulle nie naastenby kers vas by hul Engelse eweknieë nie, volgens die nuutste data van die Suid-Afrikaanse Oudit-buro van Sirkulasie (ABC).

Die uitdagings wat nie-Engelstalige publikasies bedreig, is egter niks nuuts nie. Publikasies in inheemse Afrikatale verdwyn dikwels kort nadat hulle verskyn, volgens 'n 2013-navorsingsartikel deur prof. Abiodun Salawu, 'n dosent in joernalistiek, kommunikasie en mediastudies aan die Noordwes-Universiteit (NWU). Hy is ook die direkteur van Inheemsetaalmedia in Afrika (ILMA), 'n navorsingsentiteit van die NWU. Salawu verduidelik in sy artikel dat feitlik geen van die 19 Afrikataal-koerante wat in 1930 in Suid-Afrika geregistreer was, vandag nog bestaan nie.

“Afrikatale oral in Afrika – nie net in Suid-Afrika nie – word deur ernstige uitdagings van aanvaarding in die gesig gestaar waar

die eienaars van die taal nie bereid is, of selfs daartoe in staat is, om die taal te gebruik nie,” sê Salawu aan SMF. Die grootste struikelblokke wat die meeste inheemse Afrikatale moet oorkom, is die gebrek aan intellektualisering en die persepsie dat dié tale nie gespesialiseerde inligting kan oordra nie, volgens Salawu.

Dié aannames is egter nie waar nie, meen prof. Russell Kaschula, 'n dosent in Afrikataal-studies aan Rhodes Universiteit (RU). Kaschula is ook die voorsitter van die Nasionale Navorsingstigting (NNS) se Suid-Afrikaanse Navorsingsleerstoel in die intellektualisering van inheemse Afrikatale, veeltaligheid en onderwys. “Daar is niks wat in Engels gesê kan word wat nie in 'n Afrikataal gesê kan word nie,” verduidelik hy per e-pos aan SMF.

DIE WAARDE VAN MOEDERTAALNUUS

Die gebruik van huistale in die media – spesifiek inheemse Afrikatale – is meer as blote simboliese gebare. “'n Mens verstaan die wêreld die beste in 'n taal wat jy die beste praat,” sê Kaschula. “Dit is gewoonlik jou moedertaal.”

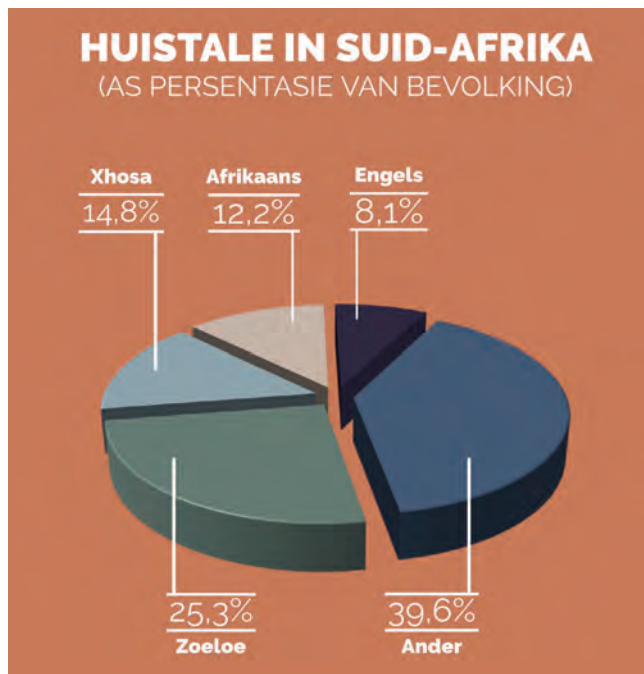
Boonop is baie mense in landelike gebiede nie Engels magtig nie, verduidelik Salawu. Wanneer nuus dus in Engels gekommunikeer word, word 'n “oorgrote meerderheid” Suid-Afrikaners van toegang tot dié inligting ontnem. “Die gebruik van Afrikatale in ons media is 'n manier om mense te bemagtig sodat hulle goed

Oorkantste bladsy: Die skep van nuwe terminologie en kreatiewe vertalings, soos hierdie voorbeelde, is een van die maniere waarop taaldiversiteit in nuuskantore hydra tot die voortbestaan van tale, volgens Inge Kühne, adjunkredakteur van *Rapport*.
Bronne: Sithandiwe Velaphi, Inge Kühne, Slindile Khanyile & Bawinile Ngcobo. Foto en Grafika: Anri Matthee

[illegible]



SMF



Bron: Statistiek Suid-Afrika Algemene Huishoudelike Peiling 2018. Grafika: Anri Matthee



Bronne: Inge Kühne, Anneliese Burgess, Dixon Pillay & Sithandiwe Velaphi. Grafika: Anri Matthee

ingelig kan wees en kan deelneem aan die demokratiese proses,” sê Salawu. Volgens Sithandiwe Velaphi, die nuusredakteur van *Isolezwe lesiXhosa*, speel die landskap waarin dié Oos-Kaapse koerant gepubliseer word ’n belangrike rol.

“Ongelukkig, wanneer dit by die Oos-Kaap kom, veral met Xhosa, is daar baie mense wat ongeletterd is,” sê Velaphi.

Die historiese ontwikkeling van die Xhosa-medialandskap word gekenmerk deur kortstondige publikasieleeftyd – ’n probleem wat algemeen op die vasteland kop uitsteek, sê Salawu. Volgens sy navorsingsartikel was die eerste inheemse Afrikataal-koerant in Suid-Afrika ’n Xhosa-koerant van 1837, *Umshumayeli Wendaba*. Byna twee eeue later – in 2015 – het *Isolezwe lesiXhosa* die eerste dagblad in Xhosa geword. Nou word dié publikasie weens finansiële uitdagings slegs weekliks uitgegee. Ondanks hierdie traë ontwikkeling, merk Velaphi dat daar nou “baie verbetering” in Xhosa-sprekers se belangstelling in moedertaalnuus is.

In sommige gevalle, soos met die gewildste Zoeloe-publikasie, *Isolezwe*, stem die hoeveelheid verbruikers en die grootte van die taalgemeenskap nie altyd ooreen nie. Volgens Statistiek Suid-Afrika se 2011-sensus, is daar 11,5 miljoen Zoeloe-huistaalsprekers in Suid-Afrika. *Isolezwe* se beraamde leserstal is tans 706 000. Dít dui aan dat daar ruimte vir nuwe streekstaalpublikasies in ander tale is, volgens Slindile Khanyile, voormalige redakteur van *Isolezwe*.

“As jy na ons land se demografie kyk, dink ek ons kort nog baie meer,” sê sy. “Ons is nog nie naby markversadiging nie.”

Die bestaan van moedertaalpublikasies is ’n “absolute geskenk aan die taal”, meen Inge Kühne, adjunkredakteur van die Afrikaanse Sondagkoerant, *Rapport*.

“Koerante lewer massiewe bydraes tot die ontwikkeling van die taal – tot die ontwikkeling van nuwe woordeskat,” sê sy. “Jy praat met mense oor dinge wat vir hulle belangrik is.”

BEPERKTE HULPBRONNE

Wanneer dit kom by nuusproduksie en die beskikbaarheid van hulpbronne, blyk dit dat die geskiedenis ’n beduidende rol speel in hoe Suid-Afrikaanse nuuskantore vandag lyk. Die Afrikaanse taalgemeenskap het, byvoorbeeld, ’n histories-gevestigde kultuur van nuusverbruik.

“Afrikaans het gekom waar hy is met ’n onregverdigde voordeel as ’n gevolg van wat in die verlede gebeur het,” verduidelik Kühne. “Die groter tragedie is dat daardie selfde onregverdigde voordeel nie vir ander publikasies en vir ander taalgroepe gegee is nie.”

’n Hulpbrontekort beteken, byvoorbeeld, vir *Isolezwe lesiXhosa* onvoldoende taal- en skryfhulpmiddels, soos rekenaarspeltoetsers, sê Velaphi.

Kleiner nispublikasies ervaar dat bronne dikwels onwillig is om kommentaar te verskaf, omdat hulle nie vertrou is met die publikasie nie, meen Anneliese Burgess, mede-redakteur van *Vrye Weekblad* – ’n Afrikaanse publikasie wat sy as “polities links-leunend” beskryf.

“Mense weet nie wie jy is nie en mense heg nie noodwendig ’n waarde aan daai gehoor nie,” sê Burgess.



DIE REGTE SPAN

Die Zoeloe-mediakultuur is tans die sterkste van die inheemse Afrikatale, volgens Salawu. Die oudste Zoeloe-koerant, *Ilanga*, bestaan sedert 1903 en is vandag steeds die taal se naasgrootste publikasie, volgens Salawu se navorsingsartikel. Dié koerant verskyn tans twee keer per week met 'n sirkulasiesyfer van 43 757.

“Zoeloe is natuurlik die grootste taal in Suid-Afrika,” verduidelik hy, “maar buiten dit, is daar die regte ingesteldheid teenoor taal binne die Zoeloe-gemeenskap.” Salawu meen dat daar trots rondom die gebruik van Zoeloe is wat voordelig is vir die kultuur van publikasie in dié taal.

Khanyile meen dat hierdie sterk geskiedenis die bedryf ondersteun omdat daar baie Zoeloe-joernaliste is wat in hul moedertaal wil skryf. 'n Gebrek aan opgeleide personeel kan egter 'n struikelblok vir kleiner nuuskantore word, volgens Salawu, omdat taalvaardighede “hand aan hand” moet gaan met joernalistieke vaardighede.

Hierdie uitdaging geld ook vir Afrikaanse nuuskantore. “Daar is ongelukkig baie mense wat dink hulle kan skryf omdat hulle [Afrikaans] kan praat. Maar omdat hulle geen ervaring van Afrikaanse skryfwerk het nie, is hulle werk nie bruikbaar nie,” sê Kühne.

Vir *Vrye Weekblad* – wat 33 914 geregistreerde aanlyn lesers het – is dit ook uitdagend om skrywers te behou, omdat senior joernaliste dikwels Engelse publikasies verkies vanweë die groter leserskap, volgens Burgess. Sy meen dat dit vir Afrikaanse publikasies ál moeiliker sal word om bekwame “interessante jong stemme te kry”.

TAAL EN TOEGANKLIKHEID

Aangesien Suid-Afrika so 'n diverse bevolking het, word 'n groot groep lesers dadelik uitgeskakel deur nie-Engelstalige publikasies bloot omdat hulle nie die taal magtig is nie. Dít, volgens Salawu, lei tot 'n versperring van kommunikasie tussen taalgemeenskappe. Iemand buite die Zoeloe-taalgemeenskap sal, byvoorbeeld, geen nuus oor die Zoeloe-gemeenskap wat slegs in Zoeloe beskikbaar is, kan lees nie.

“Die enigste inligting wat jy oor die Zoeloe-gemeenskap kan hê, sal die inligting wees wat in Engels gepubliseer is,” verduidelik Salawu. “Daarom kan jy nie sê dat jy veel weet oor wat in daardie taalgemeenskap aangaan nie.”

Een manier om hierdie uitdaging te oorkom, is met vennootskappe tussen veeltalige nuusplatforms, soos dié tussen *Rapport* en die groter Media24-groep. Oorspronklike kopie wat eerste in *Rapport* verskyn, word op *Netwerk24* gelaai en verskyn ook in Engels op *News24* en in *City Press*. Die reikwydte van *Rapport* word dus vergroot wanneer die artikels vertaal, aanlyn gedeel of mondelings deur lesers oorgedra word, verduidelik Kühne.

“Wanneer 'n storie regtig groot of belangrik genoeg is, sal dit nie binne die Afrikaanse borrel bly nie,” sê sy.

Taalversperrings kan egter ook binne 'n taalgemeenskap uitdagend wees. Bawinile Ngcobo, nuusredakteur van *Isolezwe*,



PROF. ABIODUN SALAWU,

'n dosent in joernalistiek, kommunikasie en mediastudies aan die Noordwes-Universiteit en die direkteur van die navorsingsentiteit Inheemsetaalmedia in Afrika.



SLINDILE KHANYILE,

voormalige redakteur van *Isolezwe* en redakteur en uitgewer van *Umbele*, 'n aanlyn Zoeloetalige besigheidspublikasie.



BAWINILE NGCOBO,

nuusredakteur van *Isolezwe*.



ANNELIESE BURGESS,

mede-redakteur van *Vrye Weekblad*.



INGE KÜHNE,

adjunkredakteur van *Rapport*.



SITHANDIWE VELAPHI,

nuusredakteur van *Isolezwe lesiXhosa*.



PROF. RUSSELL KASCHULA,

'n dosent in Afrikataalstudies by Rhodes Universiteit en die voorsitter van die Nasionale Navorsingstigting se Suid-Afrikaanse Navorsingsleerstool in die intellektualisering van inheemse Afrikatale, veeltaligheid en onderwys.

Foto's: Verskaf



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Dit hang nou af van die eienaars van die taal om lewe in hul tale in te blaas.

verduidelik dat dit belangrik is vir joernaliste om in 'n gepaste register te skryf. “Ons probeer skryf in 'n taal wat op straat deur mense gepraat word, want ons wil hê mense moet die inligting kry in die taal wat hulle verstaan,” sê sy.

Kort ná die publikasie se ontstaan, het *I'solezwe lesiXhosa* se redaksie onder kritiek van hul lesers deurgeloop oor die styl en taalgebruik in die koerant, sê Velaphi. Vir hom was die opskerp van hul publikasie se taalgebruik deel van 'n groter verantwoordelikheid teenoor die taalgemeenskap.

“Ons moet 'n manier hê om te verseker dat ons Xhosa bewaar,” sê hy. Wanneer lede van die taalgemeenskap begin om die koerant se begrippe in hul alledaagse taalgebruik in te sluit, “weet [hulle] by *I'solezwe* dat [hulle] die terme ontwikkel het”.

Kühne en Burgess beklemtoon albei die belangrikheid van vertaling vanuit en na Engels as 'n noodsaaklike vaardigheid vir Afrikaanse joernaliste in die nuuskantoor. Vir beide Velaphi en Ngcobo is direkte vertalings dikwels nie voldoende nie; 'n fokus op die konteks van die oorspronklike aanhaling, of 'n omskrywing van betekenis, bepaal hoe begrippe in Xhosa of Zoeloe uitgedruk word. Dis veral belangrik met die vertaling van aanhalings, omdat geen betekenis verlore mag gaan nie, sê Velaphi.

VELE TALE UIT EEN MOND

Ten spyte van die unieke uitdagings wat joernalistiek in elke taal meebring, stem al die kenners saam: Die beste manier om nie-Engelstalige media te ontwikkel is om aan te hou om in jou taal te skryf.

“Dit hang nou af van die eienaars van die taal om lewe in hul tale in te blaas,” sê Salawu. “As ons Afrikatale meer gereeld in die media gebruik, sal dit die voortbestaan van Afrikatale verseker.”

Só kan nuuskantore verseker dat hulle “tot mediadiversiteit bydra” en dat die taal nie “met nuwe voorwaardes en nuwe tegnologie agtergelaat word nie”, meen Velaphi. Diverse en nispublikasies dra ook by tot die ontwikkeling van 'n meer veelsydige taal. “Elke stem wat anders is, help om die taal te bewaar,” volgens Burgess.

Veeltaligheid is wel 'n uitdaging in die nuuskantoor, maar dit het “ewe veel voordele as nadele”, omdat dit ook nuwe vaardighede en perspektiewe bydra, volgens Kühne. Salawu reken dis 'n positiewe verskynsel dat “die meeste Suid-Afrikaners reeds meer as een taal kan praat”. Volgens die Regeringskommunikasie- en Inligtingstelsel (GCIS) se *Amptelike gids vir Suid-Afrika 2018/19*, kan die meeste Suid-Afrikaners “ten minste twee of meer” van die ampstale praat.

“Al waarvoor ons kan hoop, is dat hierdie neiging sal voortduur: dat mense sal aanhou om daarin belang te stel om tale buiten hul huistaal te praat,” sê Salawu.

Kaschula glo dat veeltaligheid vir Suid-Afrikaners beter toegang tot mekaar se leefwêreld sal verskaf en sosiale kohesie, respek en begrip tussen gemeenskappe sal kweek.

“'n Veeltalige burger is net 'n beter en meer ingeligte burger,” verduidelik hy. “Daar is niemand in hierdie land wat nie ten minste een Afrikataal behoort te kan praat nie, afhangende van waar hulle woon.” **SMF**



Grafika: Anri Matthee/ PicMonkey



OM DIE LESER TE LEES

Ná jare van krimpende leserskap, inkomste en vertroue, glo baie rolspelers in die mediabedryf dat 'n goeie verhouding met lesers die beste manier is om hul lojaliteit terug te wen.

Deur Candice Jantjies

TO READ THIS ARTICLE IN ENGLISH, SCAN THE QR CODE ON PAGE 3.

As gemeenskapskoerant het *Die Son (Son)* se redaksie 'n baie hegte verhouding met hul lesers.

“Lesers beskou ons joernaliste as maatskaplike werkers, *counsellors*, wetstoepassers en familie,” sê Neil Scott, redakteur van *Son* – die grootste daaglikse Afrikaanstalige dagblad in die land, volgens hul webtuiste. “Daar is byvoorbeeld gevalle waar lesers *Son* bel vóór hulle die polisie of ambulansdienste vanaf 'n misdaadtoneel kontak.”

Om daardie goeie verhouding te handhaaf en lojale lesers te behou, is redaksielede bewus van hul lesersmark, volgens Scott. Joernaliste prioriteer stories uit die gemeenskappe wat deur *Son* gedek word, en 'n groot getal van hul stories kom van wenke uit dié gemeenskappe. “Mense wil hê ons moet hulle probleme openbaar. Mense soek oplossings en 'n stem om hulle probleme uit te lig,” sê hy.

Die publikasie spring egter nie die uitdagings in die bedryf vry nie. “Net soos ander gedrukte media regoor die wêreld, staar ons ook die probleem van dalende sirkulasie in die gesig,” sê Scott.

Wêreldwyd is die joernalistiek in 'n eksistensiële krisis gedompel: Die bedryf het jare van agteruitgang in leserskap, inkomste en publieke vertroue beleef. En daar is geen ooglopende einde daaraan in sig nie.

Dit is volgens Jacob Nelson, 'n professor aan die Universiteit van Arizona se Walter Cronkite Skool van Joernalistiek en Massakommunikasie, en 'n studiegenoot aan die Universiteit Columbia se Tow-sentrum vir Digitale Joernalistiek. Nelson ondersoek die verhouding tussen joernalistiek en die publiek.

“Dis moeilik om die agteruitgang op 'n spesifieke jaar vas te stel, maar ek sal sê dit het erger geword [sedert die middel-2000's],” sê Nelson.

DEURDRENK MET INLIGTING

Die koms van die internet en digitale media het grootliks bygedra tot die uitdagings waarmee die bedryf tans worstel, meen Nelson. “Ek dink die internet speel 'n groot rol,” sê hy.

Die probleem met die internet is tweeledig, volgens Nelson. Aan die een kant het dit die winsgewendheid van advertensiemodelle uitgedaag. Dit bring 'n hulbrontekort mee wat publikasies beperk in die omvang van hul verslaggewing, en kan uiteindelik die gehalte daarvan beïnvloed. Maar eintlik het die internet wêreldwyd net 'n meer versadigde medialandskap meegebring, waar daar baie meer bronne is waaruit mense inligting aanlyn kan “drink”, meen hy. “En dit laat mense voel dat hulle self die waarheid kan vind,” sê Nelson.

In Suid-Afrika het die totale sirkulasie van dagblaie oor die tydperk van die vierde kwartaal van 2005 tot die tweede kwartaal van 2021 met 98,57% gedaal. Dit is volgens data van die Suid-Afrikaanse Oudit-buro van Sirkulasie.

DIE ROL VAN DIE INTERNET

Baie rolspelers in die Suid-Afrikaanse mediabedryf deel Nelson se mening dat die internet 'n groot rol speel in die inkrimping van onder meer leserskap, inkomste en publieke vertroue. Die impak van die groeiende digitale media en 'n swak ekonomie is maar twee van vele faktore wat lei tot die afname in sirkulasie en inkomste, meen Scott.

Die “skuif na die digitale medium” is een van talle redes waarom die joernalistiek in 'n “tydperk van ontwrigting” verkeer, meen Gert Coetzee, die redakteur van *Volksblad* – 'n daaglikse Afrikaanstalige publikasie wat sedert 2020 slegs as 'n PDF-koerant op *Netwerk24* verskyn.

“Gegewe die realiteite, dink ek *Netwerk24/Volksblad* vaar uitstekend, maar dan is ek bewus van die uitdagings en realiteite en beleef dit nie afstandelik vanuit 'n geriefsone nie. Vertroude en ingeligte, realitiese lesers sien dit wel ook so in, is my ervaring hier,” sê Coetzee per e-pos aan *SMF*.

PLAASLIK INGESTEL

Nuuspublikasies wat groot gehore bereik, het dikwels uitstekende hulpbronne om die tipe verslaggewing te doen wat hul lesers se belangstelling sal prikkel, meen Nelson. Dit stel hulle in staat om 'n impak met hul verslaggewing te maak – veral

wat wagbond-verslaggewing betref. Baie gemeenskapspublikasies beskik nie oor voldoende hulpbronne om diepliggende ondersoekende verslaggewing te doen nie, verduidelik hy.

“Ek dink die probleem wat ons tans met wagbond-joernalistiek het, het minder met die grootte van nuusorganisasies se gehore te doen, en meer met die gebrek aan publikasies wat op plaaslike nuus ingestel is,” sê Nelson.

Son dek die hele Wes-Kaap, maar weens beperkte hulpbronne kan hulle nie alle gemeenskappe in hul lesersmark bereik nie, volgens Scott. “Daarom het ons 'n groot netwerk van vryskutjoernaliste wat daaglik stories uit hul gemeenskappe bydra,” verduidelik hy oor hoe hulle inhoudsgapings oorbrug.

IN VERTROUDE GEANKER

Vertroue is die “anker, hoeksteen en kapstok” van standvastige joernalistiek, meen Coetzee. En dit is “baie moeilik” om 'n leser terug te wen as hulle eers vertroue in 'n publikasie verloor het, volgens Scott. “Daarom fokus ons op gebiede waar ons lesersmark sterk is, en is ons doel om lojale lesers te behou,” sê Scott.

Baie nuuskantore glo dat 'n beter verhouding met hul lesers die beste manier is om inkomste en die publiek se vertroue, te herstel, volgens Nelson. Die probleem is egter dat niemand werklik weet hoe om dit te doen nie. In die eerste plek is dit nie so eenvoudig soos om bloot vir lesers te gee wat hulle wil hê, in plaas van dit wat hulle benodig nie, meen hy. Daar is 'n ander manier om daarna te kyk, meen hy.

“Dit is om die gehoor te gee wat hulle *quote-unquote* benodig, maar om die gehoor nou en dan te betrek, sodat jy as joernalis eintlik 'n beter idee kan hê van wat daardie behoeftes is.”

DIE DOEL EN DIE MIDDELE

Verskillende nuuskantore het verskillende strategieë om hul lesers beter te verstaan en te bereik. Dit maak saak, want die toekoms van die joernalistiek – asook die rol van die gehoor daarin – sal grootliks afhang van watter van hierdie strategieë slaag, meen Nelson.



“

JY MOET DIE STORIE VERANDER WAT MENSE HULSELF OOR
JOERNALISTE VERTEL VOORDAT JY DIE MANIER WAAROO
HULLE OOR 'N ORGANISASIE VOEL, SAL VERANDER.

Party steun op digitale statistieke om te bepaal waarvan hulle lesers hou en nie hou nie. Hulle gebruik dan daardie inligting om aan lesers meer van die eersgenoemde te gee. By *Rapport*, 'n Afrikaanse weekblad, monitor die redaksie, byvoorbeeld, die hoeveelheid aanlyn lesers wat hulle per storie genereer om te bepaal watter stories die meeste lesers lok. Dit is volgens Julian Jansen, 'n verslaggewer by dié publikasie.

“Dit is 'n manier hoe ons ook ons advertensie-inkomste kry. Want hoe meer [lesers] en hoe meer advertensies gekoppel is aan daardie spesifieke berigte, gaan vir ons ook [finansieel] baat,” verduidelik hy.

Ander gemeenskapspublikasies tree weer direk in verbinding met hul lesers om plaaslike kwessies te bespreek en hulpbronne en kennis te deel. Sodoende word beter plaaslike verslaggewing bevorder, sê Nelson. *Son*-lesers kan, byvoorbeeld, direk met die publikasie in verbinding tree via hul SMS-lyn, WhatsApp en Facebook. “Vir ons is dit belangrik om eerstehands kontak met lesers te hê,” sê Scott.

Die toenemende pogings wat nuuskantore aanwend om hul lesers beter te verstaan en te meet, is 'n aanduiding dat baie in die bedryf streef na 'n groot gehoor ten koste van hul verantwoordelikheid om 'n publieke diens te lewer, meen Nelson. Publikasies loop egter die gevaar om sekere aannames van hul gehoor te maak met die fokus op hul lesers se gedrag, sê hy.

Baie nuuslesers oor verskillende ouderdomsgroepe heen voel dat die



Neil Scott is die redakteur van *Die Son*.
Foto: Son Koerant/Twitter



Prof. Jacob Nelson van die Universiteit van Arizona ondersoek die verhouding tussen joernalistiek en die publiek.
Foto: Verskaf/Charlie Leight



Gert Coetzee is die redakteur van *Volksblad*. **Foto: Gert Coetzee/Twitter**



Julian Jansen is 'n verslaggewer by *Rapport*. **Foto: Inge du Plessis**

nuus waarmee hulle omgaan nie aan hul behoeftes as nuusverbruikers voldoen nie, en dat hulle gewilde nuus gevoed word. Peter Plaatjies, 'n ywerige nuusleser, meen dat sensasie altyd die oorhand kry in die nuus waarmee hy omgaan. Hy wend dus 'n bewustelike poging aan om nuus uit te soek wat nie viraal oor die internet versprei is nie.

DIE EEN IS SOOS DIE ANDER

Terwyl nuuskantore se aannames van hul lesers nie noodwendig sal saamhang met hul lesers se voorkeure nie, maak lesers ook die aanname dat die bedryf as geheel nie vertrou kan word nie, volgens Nelson.

“Die wantroue [...] is nie net gefokus op een spesifieke organisasie nie, maar dit is deel van hierdie groter storie wat mense vir hulself oor die joernalistiek vertel. Dit is dat die joernalistiek fundamenteel onbetroubaar is, want dit is óf daarop uit om jou ideologieë te verander sodat jy in pas is met die politiek van nuusuitgewers, óf dis daarop uit om sensasionele nuus te produseer om meer geld uit jou te melk,” verduidelik hy.

Terwyl daar nie 'n ooglopende oplossing vir die bedryf se leerskap-tameletjie is nie, moet elke nuuskantoor 'n poging aanwend om die kollektiewe narratief rondom die geloofwaardigheid van die bedryf te herstel, meen Nelson.

“Jy moet die storie verander wat mense hulself oor joernaliste vertel voordat jy die manier waarom hulle oor 'n organisasie voel, sal verander,” verduidelik hy. “En ek dink nie enigiemand weet hoe om dit te doen nie.” **SMF**



SMF

on politics &

Some see the media as a space in which public opinion is reflected. However, journalists are not just information providers. They can also be mediators between public opinion and politicians' actions. In a country with a political landscape as vibrant as South Africa's, political journalists employ techniques such as their "bullshit detectors" to navigate political agendas and avoid being used by those in power.

By Kirsty Bucholz

power



While the relationship between journalist and politician differs from one instance to the next, there is always a degree of interdependence. They both need each other for certain functions, explains William Bird, the director of Media Monitoring Africa, a non-profit organisation that promotes ethical and fair journalism.

Politicians need political journalists to assist them in getting their messages out. As for the journalists, they need politicians in order to access information for their stories, says Bird. But what happens when a politician colours information with a particular agenda?

INDEPENDENCE

"Sometimes people approach you and they say, 'There's an exclusive story here' or 'Why is nobody looking at this?'" explains Carien du Plessis, a freelance political reporter for *Daily Maverick*, *City Press* and *News24*.

Du Plessis remembers how people would approach her while she was working as a reporter in the Western Cape. "I have a story for you", "I'll make a star out of you", they said. And they come with all these promises. The best is to use your bullshit detector. So, "Why is this guy giving this story to me, and what should I do with it?" says Du Plessis.

Politicians are known to do interviews because they want to push their narratives or agendas, explains James de Villiers, an in-depth and profile writer at *News24*. Ultimately, politicians want to be in the media, because they want to attract voters, he says.

"There is a great expression: The media don't tell us what to think, but they do tell us what to think about," says Bird. Politicians seek to shift the narrative in their favour, and away from information that they do not want to make public knowledge, he explains.

Jan Gerber, a photographer and parliamentary reporter for *News24*, shares the same sceptical approach to political

reporting. "In terms of agendas, you've got to realise that everybody's got one – even you as a journalist," says Gerber. In general, a journalist's agenda would be to inform the public and hold politicians accountable. While interacting with sources, Gerber keeps two questions in the back of his mind: "Why is this person giving me this info?" and "What does he want to achieve by getting it published?"

For example, if a source is able to leak something from an African National Congress (ANC) National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting that will be in their best interest, they will do it, according to De Villiers. "Whenever a story has 'insiders said' [in it], you as a reader have to take a step back and realise that sources speak because they want to push an agenda that will benefit themselves," he adds.

BULLSHIT DETECTORS ON

It is important to know what a politician's motives are: when they are politicking, when they are telling the truth, and when they think they are telling the truth, according to Du Plessis. "I do use my bullshit detector – what I know of the world and the story – to figure out if a politician is telling the truth or not," says Du Plessis. "You kind of have to know when people are lying to you."

There is another phrase that aligns with "bullshit detector", says Stephen Grootes – a host at SAfm, presenter on *Newzroom Afrika* and journalist for *Daily Maverick* – namely, "Why is the lying liar lying to me?"

Grootes explains that, as a journalist, he has his bullshit detector on all the time, especially now that social media and disinformation are so prevalent.

When talking to a source, the first thing to know is what you are talking about, and who you are talking to, according to Grootes. Politicians often use the media to foreground stories. "They will know that a story is coming, and they will try and put information out



Photo: Michael Yuan/Unsplash



that will soften the blow or prepare the narrative," he says. "It's not wrong to be a part of that process, but you must be aware of what's happening."

While remaining critical, journalists should also exercise caution, since personal prejudices should not get in the way of hearing what a source has to say, according to Du Plessis. "Something might sound bullshit because of your worldview, but to them, it's the truth," she adds.

Understanding people's motives and knowing how to set the rules of engagement as a journalist comes with experience, according to Hajra Omarjee, the political editor at *Business Day*. "Experience is how one grows a bullshit detector," she says.

MEDIA AND POLITICS

The manner in which journalists report on politics creates a dialogue that politicians can interact with. "It is a two-way street," says Amanda Gouws, a professor of political science at Stellenbosch University.

"Investigative journalists are very important in uncovering corruption, maladministration and maleficence. That is why politicians sometimes fear the media

and often criticise journalists, but journalists can also help to create conditions conducive for politicians to work in," says Gouws.

While media houses in Britain and America have clear agendas that they push, "we're lucky in South Africa in that we have big media houses that aren't politically aligned, [...] which I think is healthy. The one exception would obviously be *IOL*, an independent [news outlet]," says De Villiers.

Sekunjalo-owned Independent Media, the company that owns *IOL*, withdrew from the Press Council of South Africa in 2016, opting instead for an internal ombud. Independent Media's articles seem to be influenced by the executive chairperson, Dr Iqbal Survé, according to De Villiers.

Industry veteran Ferial Haffajee wrote an article for *fin24* in November 2019 titled "Iqbal Survé and how not to lead". In the article, she makes reference to *Paper Tiger* by Alide Dasnois and Chris Whitfield, both of whom were editors and news executives at Independent Media. "[Survé] turned his titles and platforms into two things only: weapons to fight his many battles in disinformation campaigns [...] and as his personal vanities," writes Haffajee.

"We know that the Independent Media body has been used to push the narratives and debates of Survé," confirms De Villiers, "or those he is aligned with." The South African Press Code is an avenue to keep people accountable, "which is well adhered to in most cases", he adds.

Survé has also caused controversy in the past through his political alignment with the ANC. In 2019, he made an election donation of R1 million, saying that he has never hidden the fact that he supports the ANC, according to an article by Jenni Evans titled "Iqbal Survé gives Western Cape ANC 11th-hour financial boost, but wants 'no favours'", published on *News24* in May 2019.

Some newspapers – such as *City Press*, owned by Media24 – have faced backlash from political parties.

In 2012, the late Jackson Mthembu, who was the ANC's national spokesperson at the time, encouraged people to boycott *City Press* and burn their newspapers after they published an image of "The Spear". The painting depicts former president Jacob Zuma with his penis exposed, according to De Villiers.

Photo: Michael Fousert/Unsplash





Graphic: VectorStock

However, *City Press* is still here today, says De Villiers. "There might be immense political pressure. Obviously politicians want to influence as best they can, but they're mostly unsuccessful."

More recently, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) have been known to criticise journalists, and have them kicked out of press conferences. This makes the job of a journalist more difficult, says Du Plessis.

Playing the devil's advocate, Gerber wonders how influential journalists really are. "I think sometimes we overestimate our influence. I think parties will carry on doing whatever they're doing anyways," says Gerber. He finds this concerning, as being a watchdog is an important role that journalists fulfil.

However, Bird argues that while the media largely helps to represent the power dynamics of government, they are also able to shift and change these dynamics. "We are influenced by what politicians say when we report on them, but this is not apartheid...I can report on whatever I want to report on," says De Villiers.

Sometimes the media do put things on the political agenda, causing politicians to address certain things in parliament, according to Gerber. If some form of corruption is exposed, it might end up having real-life repercussions. "Digital Vibes is a good example. After *Daily Maverick* broke the story, it became a big thing," he says.

Former Health Minister Zweli Mkhize was suspended and later resigned after *Daily Maverick's* *Scorpio* division released Pieter-Louis Myburgh's series of articles implicating Mkhize in the theft of R150 million in Covid-19 funds from the department of health. "That's a clear example of the media influencing the political agenda," explains Du Plessis.

THE IDEAL

Maintaining distance while interacting with political sources is important for journalists. "I think as soon as you start becoming friends with the person, then it becomes a grey area to report on something," says De Villiers. "As soon as that distance becomes blurry, then I think things become complicated."

"Too close a relationship, and the integrity of the journalist can be shattered, as they may be seen to be in the pocket of the politician, and that relationship may impact their stories," says Bird.

The best solution to this problem is for journalists to maintain relationships with politicians that are polite, but never too close, according to Bird. "Don't shy away from difficult or awkward topics," he says. "Politicians tend not to like that, and most are masters at persuading people."

Gerber explains that it is normal to build relationships with politicians in the course of your career, but it is important to "remember

that you're there to serve your readers, and not the politicians".

Journalists need to question themselves constantly as well, says Gerber. He suggests that they ask questions such as: "Why am I doing this story?" or "What do I hope to achieve?" and "Am I starting to conflate the public interest with [the politician's] interest?" It also helps to have a political editor off whom you can bounce ideas, according to Gerber. It is important for a journalist to have a good team around them.

Gerber thought about professional boundaries often last year when he covered the Democratic Alliance's (DA) internal election. "Because I work in parliament, I know [DA leader] John Steenhuisen pretty well, and people around him. So you have to think, 'Okay, am I getting too close here?'" says Gerber.

Ultimately, journalists should strive to be ethical and professional, and ensure that they represent the public's interests – not their own, or those of politicians. "Anything other than that, and they will likely be deeply compromised," says Bird.

Omarjee says that the carrot rather than the stick approach has worked best for her. By being fair, and ensuring a person is heard, it allows them to swallow criticism better. "But the rules of engagement must always be clear," she adds. "I am a journalist, bottom line." **SMF**

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NO

Graphic: Marianne Francis Stewart

Government and political spokespeople need a more professional attitude regarding political reporting in the media, argues Qaanitah Hunter, political editor of *News24*. She differentiates between spokespeople and politicians, but argues that both should be held accountable for not addressing the media.

Political journalists often struggle to get comments from politicians or spokespeople when it revolves around “the internal issues” of a political party, says Carien du Plessis, a freelance political reporter.

According to Hunter, this kind of non-compliance by sources proves to be a challenge in producing quality political journalism. “As the industry, we need to call this out,” says Hunter.

SOCIETY’S WATCHDOG

The importance of political reporting has heightened since 2009, when former South African president Jacob Zuma was subject to severe media scrutiny during the advent of his presidency. This is according to Glenda Daniels in her book *Power and Loss in South African Journalism: News in the Age of Social Media*.

Zuma stated in 2013 that the media claimed to be society’s watchdog, despite the fact that they are not the individuals who were elected, reports *Mail & Guardian*. “We [politicians] were elected and we can claim that we represent the people,” *Mail & Guardian* quoted Zuma.

Several corruption and state capture charges have been reported by political journalists, which forced Zuma to see himself through the gaze of the media, writes Daniels. “He did not like what the mirror was showing, so he deliberately did not understand the media,” she writes in her book. These occurrences were



COMMENT

Source non-compliance is a major obstacle to overcome in political reporting, says Qaanitah Hunter, political editor of *News24*. A ubiquitous tactic that many political parties employ to silence a story is to ignore political journalists' inquiries, but this should never discourage journalists' endeavours. It is a journalist's duty to create public awareness, Hunter elaborates. Eventhough source non-compliance manifests in various ways, there are possible solutions to circumvent this challenge, she says.

By Jana Scheepers

reported on, but in doing so, political reporters were condemned by loyal party supporters for doing their jobs, Daniels writes. These are some of the slings and arrows political journalists are confronted with, according to Daniels's book.

'IT IS THE INTERNAL ISSUES'

"It was difficult to get a hold of [suspended African National Congress (ANC) secretary-general] Ace Magashule when he had his troubles within the ANC," says Du Plessis. This kind of situation can negatively impact political reporting, because not conveying all the

sides of a case can weaken a story, she elaborates. "I think [receiving comment] makes it easier to complete a story, and I think the more one understands, the more rounded your story is."

Sources consulted for this article are all in agreement: Political parties withhold information to protect themselves from public criticism.

Political sources withhold information because they "are afraid they will be accused of wrongdoing," says Amanda Gouws, a politics professor at Stellenbosch University.

Daniels explains that spokespeople's

communication skills are often inefficient, which also hampers correspondence. Individuals or organisations "who have things, like corruption, to hide" are also unwilling to correspond, says Daniels in email correspondence to *SMF*.

When government transparency is lacking, it creates further opportunities for corruption and maladministration to flourish, says Hunter, who urges political journalists to never give up trying to reach out to contacts. "Politicians only want us to report on formal communication. The presidency is the main culprit in this administration," elaborates Hunter.



Qaanitah Hunter, political editor of News24. Photo: Supplied/Qaanitah Hunter

“They refuse to comment on simple things. It is a problem across all arms of the state, including the executive, judiciary and parliament,” she says.

Political parties think that ignoring political journalists will silence the story, but this “is not and should not be the case”, Hunter says. “The danger [...] is that it sows the seeds of mistrust among readers.” However, she explains that this should not stop reporters from pursuing an important story, as it is the duty of journalists to create public awareness.

The political parties most likely to refuse comment include the ANC and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), says Du Plessis. However, when it revolves around specific issues that politicians believe should be kept private, any party will shy away from political journalists, she explains.

SOURCE NON-COMPLIANCE

“I am busy doing a story on the Political Parties Funding Act, about the fact that political parties have to say who funded them. I have been trying for the past week to get [ANC treasurer-general] Paul Mashatile to talk to me about how the ANC copes with the fact that they cannot pay the staff,” Du Plessis tells *SMF*, on 14 September. This is an example of where

comment from a politician is needed to provide more substance to a story, says Du Plessis. At the time of writing, she was still “living in hope” for Mashatile to respond to her queries in order to publish a holistic story.

On 16 September Du Plessis’s article was published by *Financial Mail*, but without comment from Mashatile. He still has not given a reply to this day, says Du Plessis. Source non-compliance regarding political matters seems to be a problem only in a few countries, explains Gouws. “In North America and Europe, there is a relationship of trust between politicians and journalists. Politicians cultivate a relationship of trust with one specific journalist,” she says. “Here [in South Africa], all journalists seem to be mistrusted.”

Gouws explains that the mistrust of journalists often stems from a lack of verification of facts. “Often journalists get information from social media, when they cannot get it somewhere else,” Gouws tells *SMF*. This information on social media is more often than not misinformation which journalists do not verify, she says.

As a result, public trust in the media diminishes, Gouws observes. “Good political reporting is premised on good sources. It is the tool of the craft,” explains

Hunter. “Without good sources, you are lost. Reluctant sources often make us not have sight of the inner workings of different areas.”

The Covid-19 pandemic has also put a spanner in the works for journalists, says Hunter. She explains that journalists often prefer to approach sources face-to-face, since it is easier to build relationships in person than to try and do it virtually. “General reluctance has also been exacerbated,” she adds. “This is also due to the fact that political activity has halted for much of the pandemic, and the government has been on a slowdown. So it has been hard to get simple answers from spokespeople during this time.”

Persistently pushing for an answer, or openly criticising these individuals, are possible options of mastering the problem, says Gouws and Daniels. Raising matters with political principals can also mitigate source non-compliance, Hunter explains. The EFF, however, disregards journalists, opting instead to respond via Twitter, she claims.

“My message to journalists is, as long as we have done all we could to get comment, and they don’t play ball, we can state that they were not available to comment,” she says.

"NEWSMAKERS AND SOURCES BELIEVE THAT IF THEY IGNORE JOURNALISTS, STORIES WILL GO AWAY. THIS IS NOT AND SHOULD NOT BE THE CASE. THE DANGER IS THAT IT SOWS THE SEEDS OF AMONG READERS."

QAANITAH HUNTER

ACCOUNTABILITY

"In an ideal world, everyone responds to questions," says Hunter. "If those who are paid to communicate to the media do their jobs, it will make our lives very easy." However, this is not always the case, according to Micah Reddy, journalist at *amaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism*.

"Often when [political parties] are unhelpful, I would go to someone higher up in the department and say that these people are supposed to act accountable, and ask: 'Where is the accountability?' And often that gets some results," explains Reddy.

The lack of government accountability is specifically time consuming, says Reddy. This is due to delayed responses from spokespeople which results in back-and-forth questioning for clarity, Reddy tells *SMF*. "Most of the time we eventually get a response, but oftentimes it is not enough," he continues..

"There is a lack of accountability in government, and I do think that should form part of a broader push for government accountability."

In relation to politicians, there has to be greater importance for public scrutiny,









says Hunter. "Take the president [Cyril Ramaphosa], for example: He rarely does interviews with the media and his interactions with journalists are often with a handful of editors through [the South African National Editors' Forum] once a quarter," she says.

Hunter also argues that a platform to express the dismay of journalists dealing with "repeat offender" spokespeople, who refuse to answer questions, should be established. "It will make it easier to do our job if we can complain to someone more than higher-ups about spokespeople and politicians not coming back," says Reddy. "It will make journalism easier."

The EFF, however, told *SMF* that they do respond to journalists' queries when they "feel it is necessary". This is according to Vuyani Pambo, EFF spokesperson.

The spokesperson for the Democratic Alliance, Siviwe Gwarube, says that it is important that party spokespeople "who are going to be representative of their political parties, are available and responsive to journalists".

The ANC did not reply for comment by the time of publication. *SMF*

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The *barriers to* COMMUNITY NEWS *reportage*

Among many other challenges, a lack of funding and resources limit journalists' reportage on the rural and poorer communities in South Africa. "If you read the average, mainstream newspaper, you're gonna find very little reporting out of those really poor communities, unless there's trouble there," says Raymond Joseph, a freelance journalist at Southern Tip Media.

By Caitlin Maledo

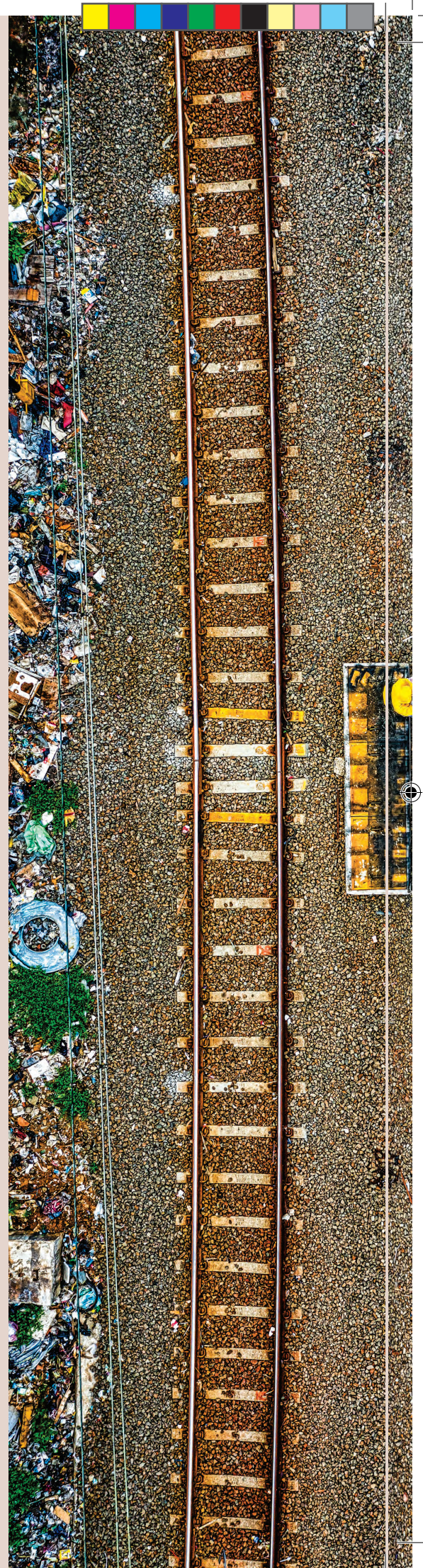




Photo: Tom Fisk/Pexels

Diversity in the newsroom is of absolute importance, according to Dr Kate Skinner, director of the Association of Independent Publishers (AIP). Journalists from varied backgrounds can offer insights into topics that others may not fully comprehend, which is why all newsrooms should be “very, very cognisant” of having a “diversity of journalists who reflect those different views”, says Skinner.

The worldviews of journalists may also be limited to what they are exposed to. As mainstream media conglomerates are often based in urban economic hubs, some journalists’ worldviews may be limited to stories that impact this space, according to Raymond Joseph, freelance journalist at Southern Tip Media.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, newsrooms have become smaller and journalists are tasked with more responsibilities than before. This has made it difficult for journalists to cover a wide range of topics, which, in turn, had a ripple effect on the diversity that may have previously existed in the newsroom, says Joseph. This is particularly apparent in the lack of mainstream media coverage of “underrepresented” impoverished and rural communities, Skinner adds.

THERE ARE OTHER STORIES

On 8 February, a sand embankment next to the N2 near the Borchers Quarry off-ramp collapsed on four children from Nyanga while they were playing in the area. The incident occurred in the afternoon. Velani Ludidi, a multimedia journalist at *Weekend Argus*, tweeted about the incident just before 18:00 the same evening. However, the story was only covered in major news publications the following day.

Ludidi told *SMF* that the incident was only reported on a day later because of a lack of access to the community and information.

“When that happened, a community leader said, ‘Look, this is what happened in our community – here are the pictures, here are the parents crying,’” said Ludidi. Journalists like Ludidi, and those who mostly work for community publications covering specific communities, are able to establish good relationships with the residents of these communities. Journalists working for bigger media companies may not have this connection.

For Ludidi, this kind of connection to the stories he writes is also informed by his own identity and beliefs. “I always say that I am black before I’m a journalist,” explains Ludidi. “I have to put the human factor in first before I chase the story.”

Currently, mainstream newsrooms are covering some news from rural and poorer communities, but more can be done, according to Reggy Moalusi, executive director of the South African National Editors’ Forum (SANEF). Journalists’ pursuit of important community stories is hampered by a lack of resources, as well as the concentration of media in specific areas of the country, he says. If one were to analyse various communities across Gauteng, “whether urban or [...] peri-urban”, the media may not equally or adequately cover each community, according to Moalusi. Even though Gauteng townships, for example, are covered in the media, “there are still other stories out there that are [...] not covered – stories that should have really made the news bulletin, but they are not there”, he adds.

Moalusi’s statement is corroborated by Joseph, who adds that during apartheid, journalists were often based in the areas they wrote about, making the community accessible when it came to news coverage. “[Journalists] knew the communities, they knew the people and they were there to see the stories,” says Joseph.

Mainstream media companies, and particularly their head offices, are established in urban economic hubs. As a result, journalists moved into the cities, according to Joseph. Their stories reflected this shift, with less attention being paid to the rural and poorer communities, he says.

“Generally, [journalists] have all become middle class. A lot of journalists have moved into the [Cape Town] City Bowl,” says Joseph, explaining how journalists lose touch with smaller communities when they move away. “The eyes on the ground, in those communities, are not what they used to be.”

However, Moalusi notes that community news coverage is actually increasing, despite limited resources and the challenges brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. “If you look at the past decade or so, we have seen quite an increase, with more and more newsrooms really getting into reporting about community issues,” says Moalusi. “Not only newsrooms, as in community media, [but] also so-called mainstream newsrooms.”

Nonetheless, this coverage does not encompass the diversity of all community stories available to journalists, according to Skinner. “It would be true to say that a lot of the mainstream media doesn’t necessarily cover all the different communities in South Africa,” says Skinner. The communities that are less likely to be covered by mainstream media include “more impoverished communities, rural areas [and] informal settlements”, she adds.



SMF

THE CULTURE OF THE NEWSROOM

On 14 July, shots were fired at the Cape Town station deck taxi rank amid ongoing taxi violence in the city, according to an article by Qama Qukula for CapeTalk radio station. Ludidi was interviewed by Refilwe Moloto on CapeTalk that same day regarding the taxi violence, which he had been reporting on.

Ludidi told *SMF* that he “was on that story since day one, since the first shot was fired”.

“You would find that the other news organisations only started picking up taxi violence when there were announcements that the transport minister, Fikile Mbalula, [was] coming to Cape Town to negotiate with the taxi bosses,” claims Ludidi. He uses this as an example of journalists’ reliance on government institutions to tell stories that affect local communities.

“So now that there’s a national person who’s coming, all of a sudden, we are interested. That tells you [about] the culture of the newsroom – ‘what are we interested in?’” questions Ludidi.

On 16 July, Ludidi wrote about another shooting that claimed the lives of three people and injured three others, as a result of taxi violence. This article was published moments before the transport minister met with taxi bosses to discuss the ongoing taxi violence.

with many human-interest stories, beyond those of murders and service delivery protests, he adds. Some of these stories include an “old lady who’s using her pension to run an aftercare” or a group of old women getting together to feed others during the pandemic, according to Joseph.

“You really don’t see those stories, because the journalists are not there,” says Joseph.

NAVIGATING COMMUNITY MEDIA

“[T]here is a whole sector of community media – which includes community radio and then, of course, community-printed publications – that do cover [...] certain communities,” said Skinner. These include publications such as *Vukani*, which covers multiple Cape Town townships, or the *Limpopo Mirror*, which covers community stories in Limpopo.

Community radio stations have more traction than newspapers, as broadcast media receives more support from the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA), says Skinner. “If you look at the kind of funding that the MDDA puts into community radio versus community print...It’s substantially more into community radio,” Skinner adds. The MDDA is funded



Photo: Caitlin Maledo

Ludidi observed that after the transport minister left the meeting, news reports on the topic lessened. However, there were still “skeletons” on the topic that could be reported on. “It’s not that media houses lack resources. It’s a lack of an appetite for them to cover such stories,” says Ludidi.

There currently seems to be a reliance on official sources, such as government representatives and spokespeople, to tell stories in mainstream media, according to Joseph.

“What happens is you get the voice of authority. You’ll get the police talking. You might get a counsellor talking, but what you’re not getting are the voices of the ordinary people living in those areas,” says Joseph.

Joseph says that while newsrooms tend to focus more on stories such as service delivery protests and murder cases, the communities in which these incidents occur have other stories to tell as well. “[Journalists are] reporting the bad news because that’s what surfaces,” says Joseph. Poorer communities are rich

by the South African government, with the assistance of major broadcasting and print publications, in order to aid “developing community and small commercial media” in the country, according to the MDDA website.

Based on the MDDA 2020/2021 board approvals list, 22 community broadcast projects across seven provinces, and 10 “community and small commercial media print and digital publications” across five provinces, were approved for funding on 28 March 2020. Nationwide, there are 124 broadcast project beneficiaries of an MDDA grant and 86 community and small commercial print project beneficiaries. This was according to MDDA’s list of beneficiaries, available on the agency’s website.

However, the MDDA has made advancements in diversifying locally produced media in South Africa, says Peter Lategan, managing director of Impact Unlimited Media & Communication – a communication services company – in email correspondence with *SMF*. Having been a recipient of a grant from the MDDA



10 years ago, he emphasises that his print publication, *Impact News*, has been a “success story for the MDDA”.

Impact News is an independent community newspaper based in Atlantis, which covers the town, and surrounding areas such as Mamre, Philadelphia, Duynfontein, Witsand, Darling and Pella, according to the publication’s website.

As the print industry has declined over the past five to ten years, the MDDA has provided more funding to radio, as the agency is able to generate more capital through the broadcast industry, according to Lategan. Despite not receiving as much support from the MDDA, print publications also lack funding and resources. Skinner suggests that struggling community newspapers could function better when operating under bigger “mother” media companies that “can kind of resource them”.

Community newspapers such as *Vukani*, which falls under the Cape Community Papers branch of Independent Media, have been in print since 2000 and managed to continue reporting throughout the pandemic. This can be seen on *Vukani*’s digital platform.

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES AND NEWS

Lategan feels that amalgamating publications is a practice that should be “banned and taken to task in the strongest possible terms”.

Dunisane Ntsanwisi, SANEF’s community committee convener.

“You can’t expect people from the rural areas to go in and buy *Mail & Guardian*,” says Ntsanwisi. A standard 600g loaf of brown bread is roughly R5, according to the Shoprite website. The newspaper currently costs R49.90.

It is not only the cost of a publication, but also the language in which it is written, that can make it inaccessible to poorer communities, according to Ntsanwisi. Community newspapers are incredibly important, especially those written in the mother tongue of a community, he says, adding that there should be a push to make newspapers more accessible by ensuring they use the languages of the communities in which they are based.

In order for a country to develop, citizens need to receive the right information, in a way that each citizen can understand, according to Ntsanwisi. (Refer to page 24 to read more on the challenges of language diversity in journalism.)

Lategan told *SMF* that he is currently working on new and sustainable ways of making community news more accessible. These methods are also intended to ensure that community news better serves communities. The model has the potential to be implemented on a national level at some stage, he adds.

“The successful model, applied by *Impact News*, resulted in the establishment of this multi-pronged facility,” says Lategan, in reference to the project he is working on.

“You really don’t see those stories, because the journalists are not there.”

Independent community publications should be preserved “for empowerment, business opportunities, and job creation” and “for the strengthening of our democracy and the many facets of building a better local society”, according to Lategan.

On 7 July 2020, Media24 released a statement announcing the consolidation of some newspapers into a single newspaper. Among those, *NoordKaap* and the *Kalahari Bulletin* became collectively known as the *NoordKaap Bulletin* and similarly, *Kroon Nuus* and *Vrystaat Nuus* became the *Vrystaat Kroonnuus*, according to the statement. Additionally, the *Theewaterskloof Gazette* was incorporated into *Hermanus Times*.

“[SANEF is] concerned that the continuing closure of media houses will have a detrimental effect on our democracy,” according to a SANEF statement from 7 July 2020, issued in response to Media24’s changes. “[I]t limits the number of sources of information for the public, leads to regression in media diversity and multiplicity of voices.”

Additionally, while some community-based stories can be found in mainstream media publications, the publications may not be financially accessible to the affected communities, according to

“We are currently seeking funding and partners to help set this up in the community we serve.” He is not able to divulge details of the model at this time, as it will be implemented in 2022.

COMMUNITY NEWS COMING HOME

Solutions to some of these challenges may take years to implement in newsrooms. In the mean time, journalists reporting on rural and poorer communities should make use of translation services, and join community-based Facebook or WhatsApp groups in the areas, according to Joseph.

“Don’t only focus on building contacts with authority,” he says. “Community leaders [and] ordinary people understand the dynamics of the area that you are in.”

Newsrooms need to facilitate an understanding between a person from Constantia and a person from Khayelitsha; journalists need to tell the stories that will build these bridges, according to Joseph.

“[It’s] harder work to find those less-obvious stories,” says Joseph. “It’s never been easier to be a journalist, and it’s also never been harder.” **SMF**



Decoding the

News feeds on social media platforms are often run by algorithms or automated systems that have been developed as a means of managing the influx of information available online. There is, however, still much uncertainty about how these systems operate, the impact they have on society and how they threaten journalism as we know it.

By Sibulela Bolarinwa



algorithm



Our daily experiences on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Google happen under the watchful eye of a variety of algorithms. The manner in which these algorithms operate is a well-kept secret of the media organisations that develop them, explains Nicolas Kayser-Bril, a data journalist at AlgorithmWatch.

AlgorithmWatch is a non-profit research and advocacy organisation based in Berlin, Germany. The organisation is committed to watching, unpacking and analysing automated decision-making systems, this is according to the AlgorithmWatch website.

Kayser-Bril tells *SMF* that, as it currently stands, the secretive nature of algorithms makes it difficult to investigate not only Facebook, Instagram and Google, but other social media platforms as well. “What we do know is that the platforms have no incentives to control the content that users share,” says Kayser-Bril. They do, however, “have an incentive to ensure that users spend as much time as possible on the app”. This is because the main goal of these platforms is to make a profit, and users logging off a platform results in reduced profits for the company, says Iske Conradie, a qualified journalist who is completing her masters in eco-social design at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano in Italy.

BUT FIRST, WHAT IS AN ALGORITHM?

Algorithms are the sets of software processes on social networking platforms that analyse viewers’ preferences, according to Arthur Goldstuck, chief executive officer (CEO) of World Wide Worx, a South African-based technology research organisation. The information on a viewer’s individual preferences is then used by the algorithms to determine which content should be prioritised for that specific viewer, explains Goldstuck.

“We can’t do without algorithm filtering at this point, because the content amount is just too big,” says Conradie. We do, however, need to consider what the main objectives of algorithms are, she adds. Specifically on Instagram, the algorithm objectives are always subjective, argues Conradie. They are designed to prioritise “whatever hooks you in three seconds”, she says. Content that is divisive and has the potential to produce a lot of engagement has, for example, been favoured by the algorithms behind Facebook and YouTube, according to Kayser-Bril.

Instagram states that its algorithms select your preferences

based on your in-app activity, according to Kayser-Bril. However, a recent experiment that he conducted suggests differently. In the experiment, Kayser-Bril created a new Instagram account and liked only images of roses. “Instagram created 148 topics that I was supposed to be interested in, even though the only thing it knew about me, in this case, was that I liked roses,” says Kayser-Bril. From this, it is evident that the platform is most likely relying on other data as well, he says.

LIVING IN AN ECHO CHAMBER

From the onset, the aim of algorithms “was to make it easier for people to find the things that they are looking for, or the topics that they are interested in”, says Brigitta Lategan, owner of the Instagram-based social media agency, Beehive Media. The agency focuses on social media management and brand development, according to the Beehive Media Instagram page.

“When we pause, when we scroll a bit longer, when we click into different things”, algorithms are able to identify the content that we want to see, but not necessarily the content that we need to see, says Conradie.

Algorithms on social media platforms currently play a crucial role in generating user traffic on these platforms, but also create echo chambers, says Goldstuck. Echo chambers narrow down the diversity of content that users are exposed to, he adds.

“When you make your typical visit to Facebook, [...] you are clicking through pieces of content, [...] and a single visit therefore can give their system quite an in-depth profile of what your interests are,” explains Goldstuck. Viewership is maximised through algorithms which recommend content that is in line with your previous selections. This is an attempt to ensure that you stay on the platform, he says.

Academics have been debating the issue of echo chambers for more than a decade, says Kayser-Bril. Some academics are of the opinion that they are “very dangerous, and others say that they don’t even exist”, he adds.

Social media has become “a loud echo chamber of polarised political views, divisive rhetoric, binary oppositions, many falsities, rumour, disinformation and propaganda”, says Glenda Daniels, associate professor in the media studies department at the University of the Witwatersrand, in her 2020 book, *Power and Loss in South African Journalism: News in the age of social media*.



SMF

Kayser-Bril argues that algorithmic filtering on a platform such as Facebook has the ability to establish echo chambers through the prioritisation of content that influences the behaviour of certain groups of people. However, the platform cannot decide what those people think, he adds.

A contemporary example of an echo chamber can be seen on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, where anti-vaxxers have daily exposure to “seemingly credible information” on why they need to reject vaccines, but are not exposed to other viewpoints, says Conradie.

“If you like right-wing anti-vaxx content, then all you will see is right-wing anti-vaxx content,” says Goldstuck, with reference to the way Twitter and Facebook algorithms operate.

Dr Nick Bradshaw, founder of the AI Media Group, tells *SMF* that “consumers are dictating the what, when and how of consumption – and perhaps more importantly, the ability to filter onto specific topics of interest, meaning that news and journalistic production has to change its step”.

SOCIAL MEDIA VS PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

The rise of online news consumption has meant that competition in the journalism industry no longer exists between newspapers alone. Today, competition also involves viral videos and influencers on social media platforms, which pose a threat to professional journalism, explains Conradie.

Videos are becoming highly popular in the age of content creation over multiple platforms, as different platforms require innovative and creative ways of telling the same story, Daniels tells *SMF*. However, Conradie points out that it is not possible for journalism to compete with viral videos. Rather, journalists should focus on the technological aspects of the profession, such as the intricacies of social media, she says.

In today’s social media landscape, journalists are some of the least visible content creators, according to Conradie. Currently, polarising news stories are getting the most attention, she says.

In light of this, “the role of journalists is to make sure that we have a healthy information environment”, says Conradie. “[Journalists] need to look at the whole system. We can’t just be focusing on hard news and the way we know it, because that isn’t really getting that much visibility,” she says.

There are many factors to take into account when considering how content can be exposed to a bigger audience, according to Lategan. Instagram’s algorithms will sometimes boost the visibility of content based on the number of likes it has received in the first hour, but the algorithm is constantly changing, she adds.

“The main priority of any news medium that is posting its content on social media is to drive traffic back to their own [websites],” says Goldstuck. “Facebook is arguably the worst enemy of journalism, and yet journalists depend very heavily on it to promote their stories,” he says. Some media analysts argue that the only way forward is to demand that Facebook pay for journalism, according to Daniels. “However, this may increase Facebook’s grip on journalism, as the platform [would then own] the public space even more,” she says.

ERROR: AN ETHICAL DILEMMA

In journalistic practice, “there is a fine line between imposing ethical boundaries and censorship”, according to Goldstuck. “You don’t want to tell people what they cannot view,” he says.

Facebook’s algorithms are a form of censorship, as they filter what people can view, says Goldstuck. He adds that part of the ethical issue surrounding the use of algorithms is that people are unaware that they are being subjected to this filtering. “Facebook also knows that there is very little oversight, so they don’t have a

THE ALGORITHM



big incentive to respect any legislation or any contract that they pass with [their] users,” claims Kayser-Bril.

Media companies and their management executives often pursue clicks, search engine optimisation, and efficient algorithms that can replace human journalists, says Daniels. However, in this process, fact-based ethical journalism that prioritises the public interest is lost, she adds.

“You can design an algorithm to focus on offering people objective news, as best as possible, [but] at the end of the day, it’s still a computer. We need humans to really make ethical judgments, because the computer just does what it’s told,” says Conradie.

The principles of ethics that are taught to journalists are too complicated to programme into a computer, explains Conradie. This means that it is inevitable that the systems will struggle to get it right, she adds.

The ultimate goal of the people who design and programme the systems for Instagram, Facebook or YouTube, is to increase the influential power of these companies, and to ensure that the platforms’ algorithms are optimised for profit from advertising revenue, says Kayser-Bril. The goal is also to increase engagement, according to Conradie.

“Profit is bad when it affects such a significant number of people,” says Conradie. In this instance, “one bad piece of content can have billions of views within three days”, she explains.

A better information environment for all cannot be created if “large corporations own the choice of visibility at large, and if regulation is always too slow”, says Conradie.

Regulators should impose ethical boundaries that require social media platforms to put certain checks and balances in place, such as notifying the users of these platforms that the content they are viewing has been restricted, according to Goldstuck. Users should also be provided with the option to opt out of these restrictions,

he adds. A problem with this approach is that it could limit the growth of traffic on these platforms, according to Goldstuck. Moreover, the lack of transparency around algorithms and their complexity means that regulators do not know much about how they work.

CODING FOR CHANGE

“It’s not really that difficult to change an algorithm...it’s a couple of lines of code,” says Conradie.

If individuals are able to organise their news feeds as they deem fit – by choosing to prioritise information that they value highly – it could lead to more people becoming permanent users on these platforms, says Conradie. This, in turn, will benefit the platforms, as they will have more consistent data to profit from, she adds.

Ideally, if people frequent a platform, then traffic will not be reduced by changing the underlying algorithm. However, the concern is that by giving people content that is not based on their existing preferences, they will click on fewer articles, as the articles would not be automatically catered to their specific interests, explains Goldstuck.

There is a need for more transparency around the problems caused by algorithms, according to Conradie. This will allow a unified attempt, across industries, to address these problems and reconfigure the algorithms to improve them, she says.

At the end of the day, algorithms that generate automated news feeds have not always existed, and are therefore not necessary for people to enjoy online social networks, says Kayser-Bril. But given that the current algorithms are likely to remain in place, we have to make conscious efforts to expand our individual information pools. As members of society, we need to reclaim agency over our access to content, as opposed to solely accepting algorithmic filtering as it currently stands, says Goldstuck. **SMF**

IS WATCHING YOU



Graphic: Sibulela Bolarinwa



SMF

THE SOCIAL MEDIA DILEMMA



In the digital age, social media can be a complex beast. Journalists and news publications are often wary of these platforms, says Kayla Alexander, head of audience development at *Netwerk24*. With increased access to online platforms comes more responsibility to spread accurate information. With phenomena such as citizen journalism becoming more widespread in the digital age, it has become increasingly important for news publications to sift through the noise of misinformation and avoid the digital dilemma.

By Nicola Spingies

Even before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the journalism industry was moving towards a more digital sphere, says Chris Roper, veteran South African journalist and deputy Chief Executive Officer of Code for Africa (CfA). Roper believes that the defining characteristic of the journalism industry is how much it changes as technologies change.

For the current generation of journalists, the use of social media means “an accessibility unlike anything else”, says Zoë Human, a digital and social media manager at *Afternoon Express*. “If you don’t reach out on social media, you are missing a golden opportunity to expand your readership and representation,” confirms Carl Thomas, a journalist at *Netwerk24*.

Through social media, journalists have the ability to find a wider range of stories and interact with sources anywhere in the world, explains Human. Additionally, social media grants a voice to groups of people that might not always feature in mainstream publications, adds Thomas.

However, as news publications and the general public gain increased access to online platforms, they also have an increased responsibility to spread factual information, as “unreliable sources can easily allow untruths to prevail”, says Kayla Alexander, head of audience development at *Netwerk24*. Therefore it is important for news publications to work through the noise and find the facts, she explains.

SOCIAL MEDIA JOURNALISM

“Social media presents some opportunities for journalists and news media in general, [but] there are real dangers and threats,” says Lister Namumba-Rikhotso, a programme manager in monitoring research and analysis at Media Monitoring Africa (MMA). These threats – such as misrepresenting information or spreading false news – become especially

problematic when journalists pick stories straight from social media platforms and publish them as is, she explains. Social media alone should not be allowed to set the agenda of what is reported on, because it allows more instances of misinformation and disinformation to surface, says Namumba-Rikhotso.

For news publications to remain relevant and seen on social media, they might resort to writing about popular trends seen across particular platforms, according to Judith Sandison, an editor at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and the KwaZulu-Natal convenor for the South African National Editors’ Forum (SANEF). “[Social media trends] become newsworthy because it has a growing following and is used by advertisers,” says Sandison.

At MMA, Namumba-Rikhotso says they saw a “concerning” trend among news outlets during the July 2021 unrest, when South Africa saw several days of riots, looting, and protests. During the unrest, MMA found that journalists would take images and videos off of social media and publish them without, for example, taking care to shield the identities of children involved in the looting, says Namumba-Rikhotso. News publications therefore play a vital role in using their social media responsibly to disseminate “accurate, reliable information”, says Alexander.

CITIZEN JOURNALISM

During news events like the July unrest, citizen journalism can definitely play a positive role in telling untold stories and alerting the media to problems or burning issues, says Sandison.

Sandison explains citizen journalism as the effort of citizens to “actively collect and share information about important events or issues that directly affect their lives”. It usually happens during times of crisis, such as riots, when accurate

and fresh news is of crucial importance to either survival or the protection of property, or both, she says. “At such times, some citizens also can’t easily access news from their usual sources,” says Sandison, on why citizens and the media often rely on social media for news.

Citizen journalism itself is not necessarily problematic, as in South Africa it is often connected to reliable news sources, says Prof Ylva Rodny-Gumede, former journalist and the current head of the division for internationalisation at the University of Johannesburg. “Citizen journalism is a valuable thing, [but] it is problematic if someone is running a blog or something that is improperly fact-checked,” says Rodny-Gumede.

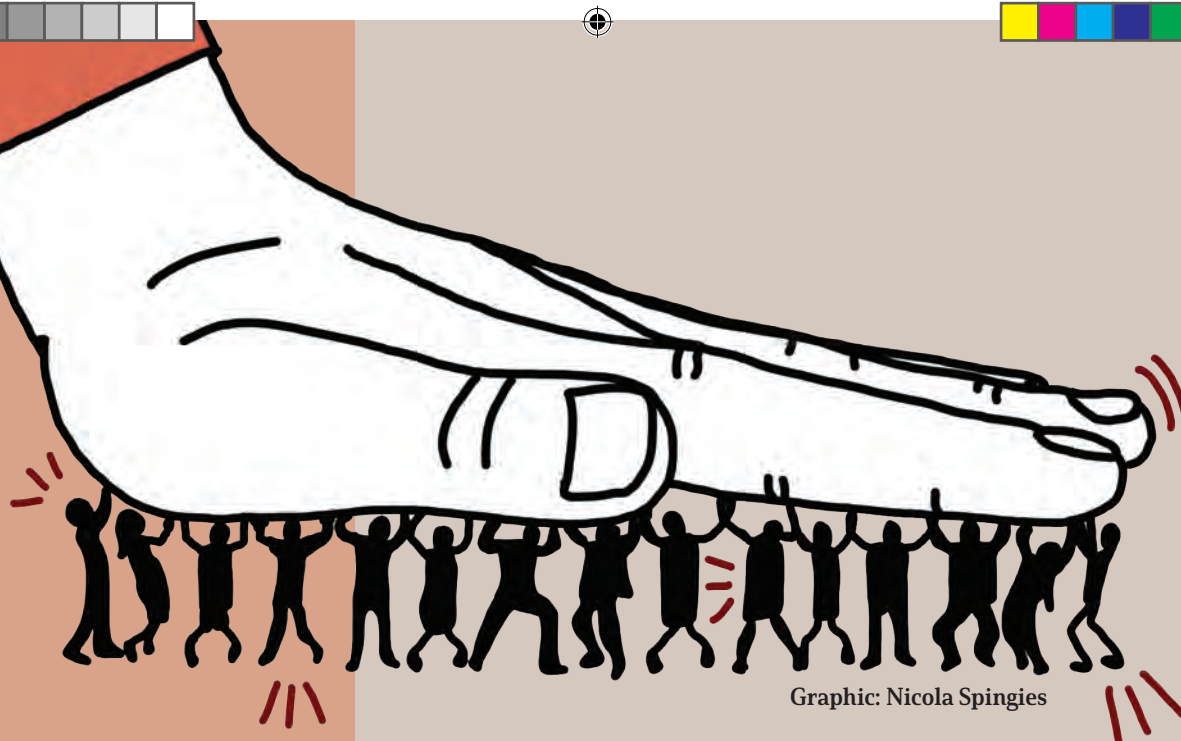
Additionally, Rodny-Gumede says that the media should be careful what it labels as journalism. Journalism should have some kind of guarantee of factual correctness and conformity to certain standards, such as the South African Press Code, Rodny-Gumede says. “If we start calling everything journalism, I think we’ll be in trouble, because it makes [the practice] obsolete,” she continues.

COSTLY CONSEQUENCES

When information from citizens is deliberately misrepresented by people posting on social media, it is often because those people like the attention, says Thomas. “It is our job as journalists to verify that what is being said is accurate,” he says. For Thomas, this means speaking to official bodies such as the police, provincial departments, or non-profit organizations.

“Checking facts using more than one source, and ensuring the right of reply, are essentials of ethical journalism,” says Sandison.

Namumba-Rikhotso agrees. “We still cannot overlook the fact that media coverage still has to [be] ethical and done with the utmost care, especially



Graphic: Nicola Spingies

when it involves vulnerable groups such as children,” she explains. Unethical reporting trends contribute greatly to the reduction of public trust in the media, while also putting the lives of those involved at risk, says Namumba-Rikhotso.

Sandison tells *SMF* that it remains important for citizens and news publications to be aware of the negative consequences of unethical reporting and spreading false information. These include costly lawsuits as a result of posting or sharing false information, loss of trust and credibility, and – for news publications – a drop in advertising revenue.

The increased variety of social media platforms fighting for user attention may cause more division among audiences, says Alexander. “News publications must therefore establish themselves between these online communities,” she explains. “Just as news publications have posted posters on lampposts or had a ‘read-all-about-it’ salesman in the past – social media serves exactly the same purpose in modern times.”

The use of social media in the journalism industry has had a mostly positive impact, allowing media houses to interrogate massive amounts of evidence more quickly and reach a wider audience, says Roper. However, “it does come with its own pitfalls (like a reliance on machine learning algorithms that aren’t always fit for local contexts),” says Roper in email correspondence with *SMF*. Data-driven journalism relies on analytics that indicate to journalists which kinds of content to create to promote active

reader engagement. Although journalists shouldn’t become too reliant on the data or the need to get clicks, they should still pay attention to what their readers want to read and how to get that content to them, explains Roper.

However, if publications allow trends on social media to dictate the news agenda, there are a lot of issues that will not get the attention of mainstream media. “Issues such as service delivery, climate change, gender and racial inequality, [and] human rights, will hardly ever feature in the news if social media trends are allowed to dictate what gets written about,” says Namumba-Rikhotso. Additionally, the news will only be told through “one lens: the one the journalist writes for you”, according to Human.

Sandison agrees. If newsrooms keep focusing their news diaries on the key issues that affect people’s daily lives, and don’t neglect the things that enrich and empower the communities around them, they can avoid being dictated by the digital dilemma, she says.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA SOLUTION

“Social media is so powerful because people have safety in feeling like they can approach a news station online – more so than if they had to go to the actual newspaper,” says Human.

In terms of countering the misrepresentation of information and news events online, Human suggests that it revolves around being aware of what content citizens and news publications are putting out there, and the influence

it can have. “If it’s a negative one, you need to monitor that and help ease the situation,” she says.

Thomas agrees that it is important for news publications to be aware of the content that they publish and share. “I seldom, if ever, write a story with only one voice, especially if it comes from social media,” he says. “Just because an event is placed on social media, does not mean you have to write about it.”

Because the internet remains largely unregulated, social media users can post virtually anything that they like in the digital sphere, says Sandison. This is often done without a thought for the very negative consequences their posts or “shares” can have in the real world, she explains. Governing bodies, such as the Press Council of South Africa, include digital media in the Press Code, says Rodny-Gumede. Because digital news media and, in turn, their social media, are only regulated “as far as it is connected to established media publications”, sharing and misrepresenting information remains problematic, says Rodny-Gumede.

People would be naive to think that social media doesn’t influence the news to an extent, says Thomas. “It remains up to news publications to go smarter and bigger with stories than simply using surface-level posts that often appear on social media,” he says.

Naturally, there are bad journalists and unethical publishers who are in the business of turning traffic into revenue, says Roper. “But the journalists we care about are turning truths into traffic.” **SMF**



Truth in the time of an information overload

Graphic: Kyra Rensburg

The pandemic has brought on a flood of Covid-19-related information, resulting in uncertainty regarding where to turn to for the truth. The World Health Organisation has described this influx of mass information as an infodemic. The information that comes out of this infodemic, however, is not limited to the truth; lies, misinformation and conspiracy also form part of it.

By Kyra Rensburg



SMF

While the world is occupied with the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, there is another battle going on: the battle against the Covid-19 infodemic. This is according to Dr Chikezie Uzuegbunam, a postdoctoral research fellow at the Institute for Humanities in Africa at the University of Cape Town.

An infodemic is an epidemic of information that occurs during a “disease outbreak”, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). This mass information includes false and misleading information, and has brought about many challenges regarding the reliability of the available information, says Uzuegbunam.

“The infodemic is an avalanche of information, especially through the digital or online spaces and technologies [...] because of too much information available to the populace,” explains Uzuegbunam. “[T]he WHO Director-General came out in the middle of the pandemic last year to say that we are not just fighting a pandemic; we are also fighting an epidemic of misinformation and disinformation,” he says.

This information overload becomes problematic when people are unable to tell what is the truth, according to Uzuegbunam. “Many times people do not have the media literacy to decipher accurate or verified information from false or misleading information,” he says.

Information from the internet

The infodemic is specific to Covid-19 because it is the first time there is a pandemic happening during a time when it is so easy to communicate, says Sergio Cecchini, Infodemic Management Officer for the WHO. According to Cecchini, “people

underestimated just how fast information was spread”.

In 2020, when the majority of the world went into lockdown, people turned to the internet for information, says Uzuegbunam. The expansion of digital spaces, specifically social media, has made it easier to share information, including false information, during the infodemic, according to Rod Dacombe, director of the Centre for British Politics and Government at King's College London.

South Africans believe that television, radio and newspapers are the most trustworthy sources for Covid-19-related news. However, more than 85% of South Africans would rather consult Google and Facebook for Covid-19 news, despite trusting the information on these platforms less. This was according to an online survey on disinfoafrica.org, *South African government's handling of COVID-19: study shows declining trust*, by Herman Wasserman and Dani Madrid-Morales.

“The reality of [...] our everyday life right now is that technology or technological devices are more at our disposal than newspapers. So, people can actually say that they know that news from online spaces is questionable, but what they realise is they still rely on those sources for quick, ready information,” says Uzuegbunam.

Approximately 420 million viewers consulted the top ten health misinformers during the peak of the first wave. This was four times the viewings that accredited health informers, such as the WHO, received, according to the 2020 policy framework of the Forum on Information and Democracy's working group of infodemics. This research was mainly conducted in five countries: the United States, the United Kingdom, France,

Germany, and Italy, says the Forum on Information and Democracy.

Africa Check – a fact-checking organisation that aims to promote accuracy in African media – conducted 485 Covid-19-related fact checks from 2020 to date, says Hlalani Gumpo, the organisation's impact manager.

According to the 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer, the infodemic has contributed to a record low trust in information sources such as search engines, traditional media, brand-owned media and social media, since 2019. All four information sources recorded less than 60% of the global population's trust, with social media dropping to a record low of 35% in 2021. The Edelman Trust Barometer also indicated that 59% of the global population believe journalists and reporters intentionally try to mislead the public by publishing false and exaggerated information. In South Africa, 42% of the population distrusts the media in 2021 – an increase from the 40% reported last year.

Regulating the online world

“It is quite difficult to regulate anything online because it's not bound by borders that normal media typically would have been,” says Anri van der Spuy, senior research associate at Research ICT Africa.

Historically, the internet was left to self-regulate, according to Van der Spuy. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn would claim that they “have no control over what people publish on them, and so they should not be held responsible”, she says. However, there has been an increase in online harm, which has created “a shift to holding platforms more accountable” since they cannot be left “to regulate themselves anymore”, explains Van der Spuy.

Facebook established an independent

DISINFORMATION

Information that is false, with the aim of creating harm.

MISINFORMATION

Information that is false, but not intended to create harm.

Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, “Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation”



oversight board to attempt to regulate the platform, says Van der Spuy. They employed a host of experts, including the former editor of *The Guardian*, who oversee and make decisions about the content.

According to Van der Spuy, however, the problem is that their independence is questionable, since they are being paid by Facebook – the company they are supposed to regulate.

At the end of the day it comes down to education and media literacy, which can be taught by introducing responsible online habits to children from a young age, says Van der Spuy. “If you, as a parent, allow your child to join Twitter and Facebook, I think, to some extent, you have a responsibility to also make sure that they understand what their responsibility is in using those platforms,” according to Van der Spuy.

Uzuegbunam suggests that a way to fight false information is by educating people to be mindful of what they consume on a daily basis, whether it be online or offline, and developing the habits to verify this information. “I believe that information is power and the use of such information is an even greater power,” states Uzuegbunam. Media literacy should also be introduced

into schools as early as possible, since this is “one way that people can be empowered to sift good information from bad information”, explains Uzuegbunam.

“People need to be taught about reliable sources of information. [They] need to understand that social media is not a news source. People need to be taught the importance of reading and research,” according to Refilwe Pico, communications officer at the Seriti Institute, a non-profit development facilitation agency focusing on enhancing socio-economic impact. “Educative communication is key here,” she says.

The role of the media

Uzuegbunam says that the media occupies an advantageous position in society, as it educates people so that they can make rational decisions and improve their lives.

“The media is like the bridge between the people and so many aspects of their everyday life,” says Uzuegbunam. “Journalists have a very important role to play in times like this because people rely on them to give them good and accurate and verified information.” It is therefore journalists’ responsibility to provide factual information to counter the false information, says Uzuegbunam.

To avoid spreading false information, Tebogo Monama, a *News24* journalist, does a lot of research by consulting scientific journals and experts, she explains in written correspondence with *SMF*.

“There are so many people going around calling themselves experts, but who are, in fact, spreading misinformation and fake news. To avoid such people, I usually use experts whose credentials and reputations are easily verifiable,” says Monama.

According to Bevan Lakay, the editor of *Health24*, it is important to relay information from reputable peer-reviewed journals. Articles also go through rigorous fact-checking before they are published, says Lakay. Since 2020, *Health24* has published more than 2 000 Covid-19-related articles.

However, writing on Covid-19 is challenging, as new information is constantly being discovered and views on Covid-19 change as scientists learn more about it, explains Lakay. “From a readership perspective, it’s often seen as ‘scientists got it wrong’. [T]he truth is actually [that] as we learn more and more, what we learn will change. Therefore views will change, and scientists will make recommendations accordingly,” says Lakay. **SMF**

Misleading truths

The infodemic has made it difficult for people to find trustworthy information, according to the Forum on Information and Democracy’s working group on infodemics policy framework 2020. Conspiracy theories can be seen as a subset of misinformation, says Rod Dacombe, director of the Centre for British Politics and Government at King’s College London. But they differ from misinformation because they can potentially be factual. Therefore, he describes conspiracy theories as “a lens [and] a way of interpreting world events”.

“The fact that we have been bombarded with more information and more sources than we ever have before, is hugely important here,” Dacombe tells *SMF*. In South Africa, religion and culture were used as a lens to make sense of the pandemic because of socio-cultural factors, according to Dr Chikezie Uzuegbunam, a postdoctoral research fellow at the Institute for Humanities in Africa, at the University of Cape Town. Some religious leaders in South Africa tried to convince the members of their congregation not

to take the vaccine, claiming that their belief would keep them safe from the virus, but such reasoning borders on conspiracy, explains Uzuegbunam. “People that have already developed a particular bias on an issue are susceptible to fake news, especially if it resonates with their bias,” according to Refilwe Pico, communications officer at the Seriti Institute, a non-profit development facilitation agency focusing on enhancing socio-economic impact.

The challenge in fighting conspiracy theories is that they cannot be proved wrong. Any evidence used to refute a conspiracy theory is rejected by the conspirator because they believe they know the overarching truth of the world, explains Dacombe. This becomes dangerous when conspirators start escalating from simply spreading misinformation, to more extreme action and terrorist behaviour, he says. “We’ve got kind of a perfect storm of availability of information, the decline in confidence of democracy and just a lack of agency that people want to assert that led us to this point,” says Dacombe, “and we’re seeing some negative effects.”

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THE COPY MACHINE:

Finding a way towards quality journalism

The term “churnalism”, popularised by American journalist Nick Davies in 2011, refers to the increasing impact that the public relations (PR) industry has had on the content being published by journalists. More than a decade later, some reporters are still rehashing stories from press agencies.

By Carla Visagie

There is a need to slow down in newsrooms, and prioritise quality over speed. This is the sentiment of Prof Anton Harber, adjunct professor at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), and co-author of several media-related books, including *Troublemakers: The Best of South Africa's Investigative Journalism*.

“[S]ome of our newsrooms have built a culture of obedience, caution and avoiding being critical,” according to Harber. “Journalism is about critical scrutiny, verification, contextualising – taking the information in a press release and making journalism from it, using it just as a source.”

PIRATING PRESS RELEASES

One example of a lack of “critical scrutiny” is when the Press Council of South Africa (PCSA) found *The Herald*, a community newspaper based in Gqeberha, guilty of publishing a press release under its own byline in May 2020. The complaint was raised to *The Herald* because it published and attributed an article to a “motoring reporter”, when the content was actually produced by MotorPress, a corporate communications website that lists Land Rover as one of its clients.

Reproducing a press release is “not journalism at all”, according to Simon Pamphilon, a journalism lecturer at Rhodes University who raised the complaint against *The Herald*.

Pippa Green, the then ombudsman of the PCSA, found that *The Herald* transgressed section 2.4 of the South African Press Code (SAPC), which states that “editorial material shall be kept clearly distinct from advertising and sponsored content”.

In Green’s ruling, which can be found on the PCSA website, she added that the article also “skirts close to the bone” of transgressing section 1.13 of the SAPC, which states that the media should not plagiarise.

The article published in *The Herald* on 30 August 2019 describes Springbok rugby captain Siya Kolisi’s affinity for the Land Rover Discovery vehicle. “The introduction to the article is: ‘As a Land Rover ambassador for the past five years, Siya Kolisi has had access to some of the finest SUVs available, but the Springbok captain’s latest seven-seat Discovery is his firm favourite,’” according to the PCSA website.

The article is “misleading to readers, as [it] has been presented in such a way that it emanates from the editorial stable”, writes Green in her ruling.

“Mr Kolisi, as captain of the Springbok rugby team, is of course a popular public figure, particularly since the team’s victory in the Rugby World Cup [in 2019]. It is a stroke of advertising genius for Land Rover to use him as its brand ambassador, but this does not mean that it is ethical for journalists to use copy produced by a promoter for the vehicle as though it is their own,” says Green.

A publication’s primary duty is to present impartial reportage to the public, since “this makes them trustworthy”, says Green in her ruling. “Reviews of automobiles should be independent.”

“In the article in question, for instance, there was not even mention of the price of a Discovery (a basic model retails from over R1 million, according to Land Rover’s website), a fact that readers may find relevant,” according to Green’s ruling.

While the SAPC does not mention press releases specifically, serious cases of plagiarism could be a Tier 3 breach of the SAPC, according to Fanie Groenewald, public advocate at the PCSA. According to the PCSA website, “allowing commercial, political, personal or other non-professional considerations to influence or slant reporting”, can be categorised as “serious misconduct”.

“In *The Herald*’s case, MotorPress were most probably so pleased that their press release had been published as is, that they would not have been concerned about any plagiarism issues,” says Groenewald.

Journalists at *The Herald* rework press releases or use them as a basis to develop a story further when they feel that a particular press release is of public interest, according to Rochelle de Kock, current editor of *The Herald*. “We do try to keep press releases to a minimum,” says De Kock, “[but] it’s not always possible to send a journalist to cover every story that is sent, due to resource constraints.”

THE PROCESS OF A PRESS RELEASE

While the distinction between marketing and news can sometimes be “fuzzy”, it is easy for journalists and editors to distinguish these types of content, according to Pamphilon.

“ABBA reuniting 40 years after disbanding? That’s big news,” says Pamphilon. “ABBA’s new album available for x amount of dollars at some online store? That’s advertising. But while a news story about ABBA



Graphic: Carla Visagie

DANGER: PR LINGO - "ASTONISHING", "SYNERGY", "WORLD-LEADING", "INITIATIVE"

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reuniting might help promote their new album, that wouldn't be the intention, and I certainly wouldn't have a problem with such an article.”

Ideally, once a press release has been issued, it should be reworked by the media that use it, according to Doug Carew, public relations director at Splash PR, a public relations firm in Cape Town. But when publications use press releases and publish it under a “supplied” byline, it means that the PR team “did [their] job well”, says Carew. Carew tells SMF that PR firms prefer not to be named when their press releases are used in news publications, as they want their content to look like editorial copy, rather than promotional or advertorial copy.

Stephen Forbes, executive director of Meropa Communications – a public, corporate and digital communications agency – says that their organisation aims to write press releases that are ready for publication.

“We've even had journalists adding their bylines to pieces we've written (this is more of a compliment than a problem). More critical news platforms will run newsworthy releases, but also seek comments from competitors, industry bodies, independent or third-party commentators,” says Forbes in email correspondence with SMF.

Rather than sending out press releases, it is best to call journalists to alert them to potential article ideas, says Shirona Patel, head of communications at Witwatersrand University, about her experience in a university marketing environment.

“I have an open, transparent relationship with most journalists,” says Patel. “If there is a story idea, it is best to call the journalist, have a

“Press releases can be used as a point of departure for in-depth articles. We always try to speak to local experts or people having a specific issue with, for example, cancer, diabetes or organ donations, to give it that reflection of how the community feels,” says Swart.

While he does not rely on press releases for news ideas, Breyten Cupido – a journalist at the Stellenbosch-based community newspaper, *Eikestadnuus* – says press releases can serve as a useful tool to know what is going on in the community. This has especially been true while reporting throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, which limited interaction over the past two years, he adds.

“Press releases can inform you of good news articles that might be missed otherwise, [...] and then it gets shared with the community because it was sent in a press release,” says Cupido. While not all press releases are “newsworthy”, they can give “insights on what is going on around you”, according to Cupido. “For a community journalist, it is crucial to remain as close to the heartbeat of the community as possible.”

QUALITY OVER SPEED

It is a big frustration when journalists are “spoon-fed information and still get the story wrong”, according to Forbes. “This may have to do with the juniorisation of newsrooms, the generalist nature of most journalists and the desire to break the story first and worry about getting the facts right later.”

“If you are just doing the same as Twitter, then you are not adding any value. If you are not adding any value, why should anyone bother with you?”

conversation, alert the journalist to the story or paper, introduce the journalist to the academic or researcher, and let them take it from there.”

PRESSING MATTERS THAT JOURNALISTS FACE

Major publications seldomly publish entire press statements, as issued by PR firms, but smaller publications with limited staff sometimes do, according to Groenewald.

One factor behind the integration of press releases into the news by media organisations is that large-scale retrenchments over the past decade have left newsrooms short-staffed, according to Prof Glenda Daniels, an associate professor of media studies at Wits. “Sometimes newsrooms don't have the capacity to send journalists out on stories. Then they use press releases,” says Daniels.

Press releases are “without a doubt” of value to newsrooms, according to Helena Barnard, editor of *NoordKaapBulletin*. “In the current circumstances, where we have only one permanent reporter with a broad area to cover, [press releases] are of immeasurable wealth. [This way] one stays in touch with what happens out there, where it is impossible to always be everywhere,” says Barnard.

Swartland Gazette, a Malmesbury-based publication, uses press releases as a starting point, especially for articles that aim to raise awareness about illnesses, according to Maryke Swart, news editor of *Swartland Gazette*.

At *Eyewitness News* (EWN), journalists are taught from the beginning of their careers that journalism happens when a reporter asks questions about what had been left out of a press release, according to Tara Penny, a senior EWN desk editor.

“[Press releases] are usually written by PR companies or entities with a specific agenda – to control the narrative,” says Penny.

“Our job is to declutter the information and find the nugget that answers the question, ‘Why is this important to our listeners, viewers and readers?’” Newsrooms are “never going to beat Twitter for speed”, but the task of news publications is to verify, explain and contextualise information, according to Harber.

“If I want to know something that is happening now, I go to Twitter. If I want to know whether something is true, whether it is verified, if I want to understand it, if I want to know the context...then I go to a news site,” explains Harber. “If you are just doing the same as Twitter, then you are not adding any value. If you are not adding any value, why should anyone bother with you?”

The heart of good journalism is having an independent view and applying a knowledgeable and critical view to a press release, according to Harber. “Particularly these days, where companies can shed press releases and put them on the internet [and] send them out themselves, you don't need the media to simply reproduce a press release,” says Harber. SMF



**WARNING:
YOUR ARTICLE WAS
COPIED AND PASTED**

FINDING OUT WHERE YOUR NEWS COMES FROM

Media Monitoring Africa – who, on its website, describes itself as a “watchdog, taking on a role to promote ethical and fair journalism” – recently developed the website newstools.co.za as an analytical software tool to “keep media institutions honest, help improve media professionalism and promote quality journalism”.

One of the features includes a “churnalism” detector, which allows one to search if your news source was “churnalised”. Scan the QR code to access the website.



Graphic: Carla Visagie

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: A RACE TO THE INEVITABLE?

The world is rapidly moving towards the development of artificial intelligence (AI) in day-to-day settings. This has left journalists and technology experts asking whether or not the South African journalism industry can adapt to this new technological era, or ultimately fall behind. With the Covid-19 pandemic causing a significant shrinkage in newsrooms, the future of journalism with AI is unknown, but seemingly unavoidable.

By Erin Caitlin Walls

Photo: Marcus Pospisil/Unsplash





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The rapidly developing set of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies across the globe have changed the way industries operate – with journalism being no exception. This is according to Dr Nick Bradshaw, founder of AI Media Group. With regards to the journalism industry, “AI is coming and it is inevitable”, says Bradshaw. “Learn about it, understand its benefits and limitations before you deploy it.”

Following the emergence of the fourth industrial revolution and its mainstream use, businesses have embarked on significant transformation using automation tools and services, says Bradshaw. “Companies must understand the new tools they can use to transition to the new dawn of digital consumption and automation,” he says.

AI as a whole is tricky to define, as researchers in the field differ on its meaning, according to Amanda Strydom, senior programme manager at Code for Africa – Africa’s largest network of civic technology and data journalism labs, according to their website.

The earliest adopters of AI have been financial service providers, banks, manufacturers and retailers. However, Bradshaw explains that AI is a cross-cutting technology theme that impacts all industries. “We are seeing interest in [AI] solving problems in multiple sectors,” Bradshaw says.

will be used, but editing and deeper human review of output will still be needed. Therefore, there will be an impact [in the form of job losses]. To quantify it, as a decrease, is hard to gauge right now,” he says.

Instead of saying that AI will radically take away jobs, Dion Chang, founder of Flux Trends, explains that it will rather reduce it, whilst helping the existing ones. “You have to make a differentiation between skilled and unskilled, routine and non-routine. AI is going to help routine and non-routine things, not really skilled and unskilled things,” he says.

An example to consider is a spreadsheet which accountants use, which can be easily automated, according to Chang. On the other hand, a janitor who cleans a bathroom is non-routine, and is hard to automate, he says.

AI is already employed in many newsrooms today since some online articles are already being written by an algorithm, says Chang. It is a type of machine writing, with company reports specifically, which does not need a lot of personality, but just needs to pull the statistics and string a grammatical sentence together, says Chang.

Online automated content has made newspapers less relevant, according to Maydon. Contingent staff in newsrooms globally has

“THERE IS BIAS IN DATA. IF AI IS GIVEN SPECIFIC DATASETS, JOURNALISM RUNS THE RISK OF ONLY TELLING SOME STORIES, AND MINORITY GROUPS [COULD BE] FURTHER MARGINALISED.”

THE FUTURE OF AI IN JOURNALISM

“Whether we like it or not, AI is going to be intricately part of our day-to-day being, at times intrusively. However, this is where regulation [of AI] becomes important, just as the regulation of how our data is being tracked and used,” says Tashin Singh, the founder and creative director at Picture This Media.

Experts differ on what journalism would look like with AI, as well as whether job losses would occur. “In terms of complex journalism, such as investigative journalism, humans will still play the majority role, but that is likely to erode over time,” says Thomas Maydon – head of credits and analytics at Principa, a data analytics company based in Cape Town – via email correspondence with SMF.

On the other hand, Ben Dickson, a software engineer and founder and editor of *TechTalks*, an online platform that examines trends in technology, states that the writing of compelling articles will still remain the work of humans. He claims that the AI technology of today is nowhere near matching the creativity and thought process of humans.

“I don’t see AI replacing journalists any time soon, as the intricacies of nuance, opinion and analysis is best left to journalists themselves,” claims Singh, corroborating Dickson’s statement.

Gathering information and reporting, however, are areas where automation will be seen, claims Bradshaw. “Collaborative robots

reduced significantly due to this. In time, more and more articles will be written by AI, with copywriting and printing also involving AI, says Maydon. “Right now, the traditional media and news model, without AI, is being rapidly transformed. The traditional ‘gather, report, publish, paper’ model is being replaced by new, niche formats and media platforms,” he says.

Even with AI in the newsrooms, investigative journalists – who would need to check facts and manage investigations – would still be needed, according to Chang. However, “soft stories” on, for example, pet care, can be written by AI, he says. “Lifestyle kind of writing absolutely could be written by AI. I do not see why not,” explains Chang.

With the amount of articles journalists are expected to get out, and the quick turnover times of these articles, “many basic grammar errors occur in day-to-day news articles – the kind that AI can easily eradicate”, according to Singh. With tools such as Grammarly, “where it’s going to just reconstruct a sentence for you and just make it shorter, then absolutely, that is going to happen”, says Chang. “If it is not already happening quite a lot, it will happen very, very soon,” he says.

OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME

As with any transformative and revolutionary technologies, there are fundamental challenges inherent in the development of AI, such

"I DON'T SEE AI REPLACING JOURNALISTS ANY TIME SOON, AS THE INTRICACIES OF NUANCE, OPINION AND ANALYSIS IS BEST LEFT TO JOURNALISTS THEMSELVES."

as ethical considerations. The "softer issues" with AI are perhaps even more important – such as bias, ethical use, transparency, explainability and fairness, according to Bradshaw.

"We are now starting to see the inherent bias of AI, specifically in recruitment," says Chang, who says that AI itself cannot have biases, but can only be given biases through whoever programmed a specific AI mechanism. An example of this is current facial recognition AI, which Chang describes as being "very, very flawed". "[T]here are a lot of examples around how people of colour's faces are not read as well as [white] skins," says Chang.

The use of AI, specifically in the South African context, requires considered intent, explains Strydom. While AI can perceive the world using data, it does not want anything – it gives what the user wants, says Strydom. "There is bias in data. If AI is given specific datasets, journalism runs the risk of only telling some stories, and minority groups [could be] further marginalised," she says.

Another obstacle for consideration is the issue of plagiarism within AI and journalism, says Chang. "Depending on the algorithm, [AI] could then pick a sentence from someone else's article that sounds the same, then that could be plagiarism in a weird way. There's this dangerous level of those kinds of things happening," he says.

From a consumer perspective, AI could cause a further decrease in the range of stories a reader is served, says Strydom. "We see this with the spread of misinformation and disinformation – the more someone clicks through to bad sites, the more their newsfeed starts displaying similar stories," she says regarding information consumed from social media sites.

The emergence of echo chambers – many due to AI in the media – has been a problem, says Maydon. The term "echo chamber" refers to how individuals and groups can select what information they would like to see online, and how what they have clicked on before will determine what their feed will contain, he says. This often leads to social polarisation, extremism and confirmation bias, says Maydon. An example of an echo chamber could be the

polarisation of voters between Donald Trump and Joe Biden, prior to and during the 2020 national elections in the United States of America, says Chang. "Those polarising bubbles are a huge problem," he says. "I think it can be very, very difficult to extract yourself from the algorithmic bubbles that just put you in there, which can lead to bias."

However, the need for journalism to metamorphose in terms of technological trends is important. Maydon claims that journalism needs to evolve in delivering relevant stories. "It's sad to watch many journalism houses fail to keep up with current technology and watch their customer base drop significantly," says Maydon.

Humans are naturally drawn to bad news or shock stories, claims Bradshaw. "Toxic news travels faster than the truth, so AI may prove to be an ally in helping to combat this," he says. However, over the next five years, we will see AI within fake news becoming more mainstream, either overtly or covertly. "It is perhaps the latter category we should all be concerned about," says Bradshaw.

AUGMENTED VS ARTIFICIAL

There is a definitive difference between augmented intelligence and AI. "Augmented intelligence – also referred to as intelligence augmentation (IA) – is a complement, not a replacement, to human intelligence. It's about helping humans become faster and smarter," says Dickson. Some prefer the term "intelligence amplification" over "augmented intelligence", as intelligence amplification refers to the effective use of information technology in augmenting human intelligence. This would involve the speed, scope and reach of how news stories are picked up globally, says Bradshaw. "These examples are a logical progression to assist human journalists, and to perhaps also verify fake news," he continues.

Due to the high unemployment rate in South Africa, the idea of machines replacing jobs is highly emotive and is often met with apprehension, explains Maydon. "IA is less emotive. It improves efficiency and may decrease the need for large staff contingents," he says. One example is the *Washington Post* using automation to



give football score summaries, says Strydom. “These stories have a standard format and the wording rarely changes, so it is simple to use a trained tool to do this,” she says.

IA could help push customers to pay for content that is behind a paywall, and play an important role in assisting journalists to conduct research that historically would have been done manually, says Maydon. “IA is the way forward,” he claims.

ADAPTION EQUALS PRODUCTIVITY

Advances in natural language processing will have an important role in helping human writers search and distill copious amounts of written content that is being produced, explains Dickson. “There are already great AI-powered tools for summarising long texts,” he says. The Panama Papers – which resulted in the leak of 11.5 million encrypted, confidential documents from the Panama-based law firm, Mossack Fonseca, in 2016 – exposed 214 000 tax havens, according to Investopedia. As a result of this, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) conducted a year-long investigation of these documents.

This serves as an example of the benefits that journalism could reap with the use of AI, says Strydom. “[Through] machine learning to identify, map and link entities, it allowed more than 100 journalists during the [Panama Papers] investigation to work beyond only the borders of their own reporting and see a larger, international picture of the companies being researched,” she says.

While no tool could have completed the project without humans, AI tools sped up the process that could have taken years of resources to be done by hand, says Strydom.

“I see AI as a time saver and rejigging of resources available. Already journalists can use voice to text transcription – often with relative success,” she explains. “That’s hours of a day a journalist can instead spend on work of value.”

Currently, mainstream media relies on a 24-hour news reporting cycle that repeats the same stories all day, or focuses on reprinted press releases. This cycle will not change, but will rather “die”, explains Bradshaw. The news publications presenting users with the content they want, will survive. AI won’t determine this, but it may help in creating what people want and consume, he says.

“When used as a tool, [AI] can be incredibly useful to journalists – from gathering data for statistics and the output of graphics to aid articles, fact checking, or spell checking,” says Singh.

However, if AI is a tool, someone needs to operate it, says Singh. There is still a need for someone to interpret the data that has been collected, make sense of the graphic produced, and someone who will write the story, he says.

THE CURRENT STATE OF AI IN JOURNALISM

AI is already prevalent in journalism, says Strydom. “Algorithms offer content to readers, automation can pre-suggest headlines [and] machine learning can link entities or find themes in big data projects,” she says.

Articles are already starting to be written by “bots”, says Maydon. He claims that this is set to increase as AI becomes more advanced. “You’ve already got a lot of bots that are churning out social media things. There is an automation of generic stuff on social media. And that’s all possible. It’s already here with us,” says Chang.

Bots, specifically on social media, contribute to the spread of fake news or fake statistics, according to Chang. “I see the role of journalism, but specifically investigative journalism, as becoming more and more important, because we see breaking news on social media. And it could be fake, and it could not be fake,” he says.

“I think [AI] is going to help in terms of doing good and bad, because it can do really boring corporate stuff, really bad fake news,” according to Chang. However, when it comes to journalism, there will always be a need for experienced journalists to do analysis, he says.

AI’s capability to generate text is exaggerated, according to Dickson. However, technologies like Generative Pre-trained Transformer 3 (GPT-3) – an autoregressive language model that uses deep learning to produce human-like text – have proven to be proficient, says Dickson. “Will they be able to generate new thoughts and opinions? No. There are already enough experiments that show GPT-3 doesn’t have a fundamental understanding of how the world works,” he says.

So, while we work towards AI, traditional news and “human-derived” journalism still have a place in modern society, says Bradshaw. “Slow journalism”, a movement that has emerged to offer deeper and paid-for content in a more integrated fashion, is a news subculture born out of the current frustration of journalism from the mainstream press, he says.

“Change, as they say, is inevitable, and AI is just another tool that journalists will have to learn to utilise to aid in producing high quality journalism,” says Singh. **SMF**



Photo: Erin Caitlin Walls



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we, THE WOMEN

Photo: Maryam Adams

In South Africa, a country where gender-based violence is prevalent, being a female journalist comes with its own challenges. For women in the media industry, some threats are overt, while others are subtle, but violent. From online harassment to physical intimidation, it is often female journalists who bear the brunt of the hostility toward the media industry.

By Maryam Adams

TRIGGER WARNING: THIS ARTICLE MAKES BRIEF MENTION OF SEXUAL ASSAULT AND RACIST REMARKS.



“The threats are always linked to my gender...it is an experience that is completely linked to my womanhood, and does not even exist outside my womanhood,” says Pontsho Pilane, director of Mathaba Media, a media consulting agency.

Being a journalist in South Africa comes with a lot of difficulties, according to Sandisiwe Shoba, a young journalist who has been with *Daily Maverick* for just under three years. “We’ve got race issues, we’ve got misogyny. [I]t’s all intertwined,”

your surroundings when you go out on assignment, according to Shoba. “You’re always aware and looking over your shoulder to see whether or not you are safe. You can’t go into certain areas or do certain assignments on your own. You need to be accompanied by a male photographer,” says Shoba.

“I do feel that my male colleagues just have a lot more freedom to move through the world and cover stories than I do,” says Davis. After covering the aftermath of the looting that took place in KwaZulu-Natal

“They called us names and threatened to rape us merely for being there or for requesting interviews about their strike action. Many of us were intimidated and scared, but we stuck it out,” according to Nicolaides. “While it was challenging, I felt there was a need to tell the story of Marikana,” she says.

The cover of Nicolaides’s book, *Reporting from the Frontline*, features an image depicting female journalists deliberately positioned behind their male colleagues when miners were speaking or

“WOMEN JOURNALISTS ARE BOTH THE PRIMARY TARGETS OF ONLINE VIOLENCE AND THE FIRST RESPONDERS TO IT.”

says Shoba. “These are the same issues that feed into our gender-based violence (GBV) problems in the country.”

Many of the difficulties she faced in the past as a female journalist were not overt, Shoba tells *SMF*. Rather, there were more subtle discriminations at play, even within the newsroom itself.

Although Rebecca Davis, a journalist at *Daily Maverick* and the author of *Best Whites And Other Anxious Delusions*, has not directly felt any gender inequality within her workplace, she acknowledges that many other female journalists are faced with these struggles in the industry.

“There’s a glass ceiling for [women] in management – mediocre men are still consistently promoted above them,” adds Davis. Female journalists are often sidelined by male journalists, according to Davis. “You really have to be assertive and learn to stand in your space and take it. Otherwise, you will get overlooked,” she says.

‘YOU NEED TO BE ACCOMPANIED BY A MALE’

Living in a society where GBV is so prevalent, you are constantly aware of

earlier this year, Davis reflects on how she would not have been able to go into such spaces if she was not with her male colleagues. “I think that is something that men often don’t even think about,” she observes. “It is a lot easier for them just to go out and cover stories without worrying about what’s going to happen to them.”

Katy Katopodis, a journalist and the news director of Newzroom Afrika, tells *SMF*’s Tamsin Metelerkamp that although the issue has always existed, the threat of rape has been increasingly weaponised against female reporters, especially following the Marikana Massacre.

“It was the first time, as far as I can recollect, that female journalists spoke out directly about [the weaponisation of rape threats]. It was written about, it was spoken about, and it was the first time we were fully made aware of something like this,” says Katopodis.

Gia Nicolaides, a journalist who covered the Marikana Massacre, tells *SMF* that although she had been intimidated while reporting before, it did not compare to the way that female journalists were threatened during the Marikana Massacre.

addressing issues with their unions, she explains. “Our male colleagues were very aware of what was going on and always stayed nearby,” she says. “However, I still felt intimidated on several occasions while covering the story.”

‘HE HAD THE AUDACITY TO PINCH MY CHEEKS’

As a journalist, it is important to build strong relationships with your sources. However, Shoba says that doing this can sometimes be tricky to do when sources cross the line.

Early in her career, while interviewing a prominent South African creative, Shoba gave him her cell phone number for further correspondence. However, he crossed professional boundaries, she says.

“I was harassed and called and messaged, and when I wouldn’t respond, threatened. It was a horrible experience for me,” explains Shoba. “Because this is somebody that I looked up to, I was excited. He was an icon and I got to interview him, and then it turned into this nightmare of harassment.”

Being harassed by sources is something that Pilane has also experienced firsthand.



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Graphic: Maryam Adams

"I'll have to block [sources] on WhatsApp, because they get overly familiar," she says.

Another incident in which a source crossed a line with Shoba was during an interview with a member of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). "There was an incident where I was trying to interview [a senior leader] from the EFF, and he had the audacity to pinch my cheeks," says Shoba.

Politicians employ different tactics in an attempt to intimidate journalists. "In public forums, they will name you and maim you, in an attempt to embarrass you, frighten you and silence you," Mahlatse Mahlase, the group editor-in-chief of *Eyewitness News*, tells *SMF's* Wessel Krige.

There was a time when there was tension between the EFF and *Daily Maverick*, and the political party would constantly follow and respond to articles published by the platform, according to Shoba. "Anything that we wrote [about the EFF], the trolls came out online and attacked," she says. "I remember reading the [Twitter] comments where people were calling me 'a slave of white monopoly capital', 'the white man's bitch', saying 'look at her bowing down to her masters'," says Shoba. "It's that idea of 'you've sold out', 'you're betraying your people'."

Nobesuthu Hejana, Pauli van Wyk, Ayesha Ismail and the late Karima Brown are a few female journalists who have reportedly also experienced some form of harassment by members of the EFF in the past, either physically or online. "We see a reluctance to criticise the EFF, because [journalists] know that they're going to get absolutely taken apart on social media, and that's really worrying for media freedom," says Davis.

'DISRESPECTFUL, ENTITLED, AND VIOLENT'

Beyond the threat to physical safety, a more recent phenomenon is the rise of online violence against women. As a result of Covid-19, a large portion of the population moved online, says Pilane.

"Women journalists are both the primary targets of online violence and the first responders to it," according to a research discussion paper, *The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists*, released by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

For Davis, online attacks occur non-stop, and the harassment is angled towards "everything to do with [her] personal identity", including her sexual

orientation, race, gender and feminism. She further explains that these attacks are almost always gendered. "If I use the word 'fuck' in an article, you can guarantee there will be comments about how unladylike this behavior is, and how it cheapens my work," says Davis, "which is absolute fucking bollocks."

Online violence against women is not an isolated occurrence. "The way in which men address me online is incredibly disrespectful, entitled, and violent," says Pilane.

Attacks that take place on social media often have negative effects on mental health, and sometimes it would be easier for women journalists to leave the space completely, but social media is an essential tool for a journalist, explains Davis.

"Leaving Twitter really has helped to save my mental health," says Davis. "But the reality is that as an up-and-coming person in the media, and as an up-and-coming person of colour in the media in particular, these spaces are indispensable in terms of growing your constituency and getting your voice heard."

Davis says that her ability to leave Twitter was a mark of privilege, as she had already established her career. "My partner, who is a woman of colour, feels that she cannot leave Twitter, because she gets job opportunities through there, because it is one of the unmediated platforms where she can have her say without, say, a white male editor saying 'You can't say that'."

Pilane questions why female journalists, and specifically those of colour, still bear the brunt of the slings and arrows of the industry. "What is it about black women doing their jobs as journalists that just triggers this other side of social media?" questions Pilane.

"What the fuck are we putting up with? It's so insane that every day you have to go onto a social network and just get attacked by random people for doing your job," says Davis. "Nobody should have to live like that."

SMF reached out to the EFF for comment, but they had not responded by the time of print. **SMF**



NEW FACES of broadcasting STILL FACING OLD PROBLEMS

The media industry in South Africa has steadily become more inclusive and representative of its people since 1994. This is visibly and audibly noticeable in broadcast journalism, where television screens and radios are filled with the colours and voices of the rainbow nation. However, the women in front of the cameras and microphones bear the weight of the often stagnant environment in which broadcasters sometimes operate.

By Keanan Hemmonsbey

TRIGGER WARNING: THIS ARTICLE MENTIONS SEXUAL ASSAULT, SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND PHYSICAL ASSAULT, BUT NO EXPLICIT DETAILS ARE MENTIONED.

“I was covering quite a volatile protest in Hangberg a few years ago. [M]y male colleagues were standing not too far away,” recalls Monique Mortlock, who was working as a correspondent for *Eyewitness News (EWN)* at that time. “[A man] then told me [...] he’s going to rape me if I don’t put [my] phone away now.”

This incident took place quite early in Mortlock’s journalistic career, and it changed the way she navigates potentially volatile spaces, like protests. “[I]t reminded me that just me being a woman can be used as a weapon against me by men,” she says.

Four years later, Mortlock – who now works as a television broadcaster for eNews Channel Africa (eNCA) – explains that the incident has stuck with her in her everyday life.

“That’s just always at the back of my mind and I hate that it is there. I don’t let it interfere



Monique Mortlock. Photo: Supplied/
Monique Mortlock



Tara Lee. Photo: Supplied/Tara Lee

with my job, but it’s just in the back of my mind that ‘you are a woman [and] there are so many terrible things that can happen to you that may not necessarily happen to your male colleagues in this setting,’” says Mortlock.

Female journalists are faced with many challenges that their male counterparts simply cannot relate to. Women of colour experience additional challenges – especially in broadcast journalism – that many of their colleagues do not understand, according to Tara Lee, a sports anchor at Heart FM. “As a woman of colour, you have to be better than your male counterparts,” she says.

Yet, women deal with these situations in a professional manner, says Motshidisi Mohono, a broadcaster at SuperSport. “When you’re a broadcaster, it’s not about you. It’s about the viewer. My training over the years has taught me that everything goes wrong in live television,” explains Mohono. “I’ve learned there’s always the benefit of hindsight, but in the moment, you don’t think of 10 scenarios. You do what instinctually comes to you – [...] to be brewing inside, but completely calm,” she adds.

INCLUSIVITY IS KEY

“Representation matters. It’s never easy, being the only woman or the only POC [person of colour] in the room, or sphere of influence,” says Sherlin Barends, KFM broadcast journalist and media personality. White, male-dominated media spaces are beginning to change, “albeit not as fast as we would like”, according to Barends.

Mohono agrees, saying that the production studio has changed drastically since her arrival at SuperSport in 2011. “When I started, I would probably be the only lady in production,” says Mohono.

Radio stations face a similar problem with regards to inclusivity, according to Lee. “You just have to look at the line-up of the radio stations across the country and you see it does need to change,” says Lee. “How many women in Cape Town are hosting day-time, prime-time slots on commercial radio stations at the biggest stations in the Western Cape? It’s very few,” she says.

The reason that so few women host their own shows is that the radio industry believes that audiences do not want to hear women’s voices, according to Lee. She recalls being told that “people don’t want to hear women talking

about sport” and that “women are there to supplement the men”.

It is important to ensure that newsrooms do not become echo chambers, says Mortlock. In order to prevent this, she suggests ensuring that a wide range of voices are present in newsrooms. “I’m always keen for having as many female voices in [the newsroom] as you can get without completely alienating men, but I think it really just improves your product when you have people who are from different backgrounds,” she says.

The importance of an inclusive newsroom can encompass critical aspects of news production, such as the narratives that shape stories, but also some subtler aspects, according to Mohono. Having Phindile Tshabalala – a SuperSport colleague – look out for her, makes a difference, according to Mohono. “Phindi is like, ‘eh, Mots love, please can you powder your nose’, and I burst out laughing because if she wasn’t here, none of the guys would have picked it up because ‘Mots looks great, let’s move on,’” says Mohono. “It sounds like such a silly [thing], but it makes such a difference when you feel like someone is looking out for you that knows you intricately like that...or sees themselves in you so intricately.”

BREAKING THE MOULD

Trying to fit into an environment where nobody looks like you can be difficult, according to Mohono. When Mohono joined SuperSport in 2011 – after having worked as a newsreader for YFM radio station in Johannesburg – she expected to face some pushback against her presence due to the nature of the environment around rugby in South Africa.

“There’s always apprehension in a space that’s white male-dominated – white Afrikaans male-dominated – so I expected the pushback,” she says. “Everyone around the sport was taken aback by this black woman, this black girl from Katlehong, who dared to be seen on the sideline of the rugby pitch.”

Mohono notes that she did not experience any prejudicial behaviour in-house at SuperSport. Instead, it occurred when she would leave the SuperSport studios. “I think it was more a thing of either the fans watching, or the people I interacted with at the stadiums – be it stadium managers, event managers, that kind of thing,” says Mohono.



Sourced: Tom Mossholder/Pexels

The turning point for Mohono was realising that what makes her different does not make her worse at her job. "I had to really get stuck into honing my craft in a way that does not call for me to be like everybody else, especially the gents. I had to rise to their level as myself, and not try to be them," she says.

Mohono explains that it is just a question of finding self-confidence and self-belief, and not looking for approval elsewhere, because by looking elsewhere, you start to mimic what you see.

"There's a way in which I do the job that I do, that only I can do," she says. "I spent a long time trying to be one of the boys, and I realised [...] I will never be one of the boys. I will never be an ex-rugby player. I will never be an ex-rugby coach. But as a broadcaster and as Motshidisi, there's something that I bring to the table that cannot be found anywhere else."

TRANSFORMING NEWS

In order to create change in the types of stories that are seen in the news, newsrooms need to be transformed, according to Kim Abrahams, journalist at *YOU* magazine. "Our company [Media24] has a disclaimer with every application where they tell the applicant that previously disadvantaged individuals get preference, but I also don't think it should stop there," says Abrahams.

Barends, however, warns against companies or brands using people of colour to "enhance" the image of their brand. This is often done when companies or businesses have public relations disasters with regards to racism, and they need a prominent person of colour to save face, according to Barends.

"We've seen many brands getting it incredibly wrong recently. I was approached to do some damage control for one of these brands, using my personal social media platforms. I declined respectfully," says Barends. Instead, companies and brands should invest in diversity, she says. "It's the right thing to do."

A mindset change is necessary in the workplace, according to Lee. She notes that women are often deemed desperate for a job, which could lead to women being subjected to sexual harassment. People in managerial positions often believe that because they give women opportunities in the broadcasting industry, they deserve favours in return,

according to Lee. She describes these situations as a promise of "stick with me and I'll make you famous".

NO 'RIGHT WAY' TO RECOVER

Mortlock and Mohono counter the different forms of prejudice that they experience in the workplace – be it racism or misogyny – in their own ways. But both of them believe that speaking to friends and family is the first step towards recuperation.

"I'm a very outspoken person and in situations where you're so shocked by something happening, I just remove myself from that toxic or violent situation that's happening," says Mortlock.

On 6 February 2021, the leader of an anti-mask lockdown protest physically assaulted Mortlock, who was reporting on the protest in Fish Hoek. She says she stood up for herself by opening a case against the perpetrator.

"His supporters were trying to bully me into dropping the case, and to not take it further. They tried to make me feel sorry for him, but I just kept on at it because I knew if I don't do this, he won't learn his lesson and he'll just do it again to someone else," says Mortlock.

As Mohono works primarily from a studio, most of the attacks she has experienced came from social media. "I usually don't address it because I feel like we live in a space where people think that their opinion matters – and to go back and forth with a troll on social media [...] is just a waste of my time and my energy," she says.

LOOKING AHEAD

Diversifying representation on television and radio is important, since it makes it possible for young children to aspire to something tangible and visible, according to Mortlock.

"I would like to think that I can also be an inspiration," says Mortlock, who often does journalism workshops and talks at schools for young children. "[T]he kids are like, 'Yoh, Auntie. Auntie klink an soes my. Auntie praat dan soe met 'n rrrrr.' Then I'm like, 'Hoe moet ek an praat?' (Translation: "[T]he kids are like, 'Yoh, Auntie. Auntie sounds like me. Auntie talks with a rrrrr.' Then I'm like, 'How else should I talk?'")

When young children see someone who resembles them represented in broadcast media, they believe that they can also

accomplish such things, according to Mortlock. "It's kids who realise, 'I speak exactly like you. I look like you. We both grew up in an area where there's poverty all around you, gang shootings happening – maybe I can also do it,'" she says.

For Mohono, visibility is the most important factor in making people aware of the possibilities of working in the broadcasting industry.

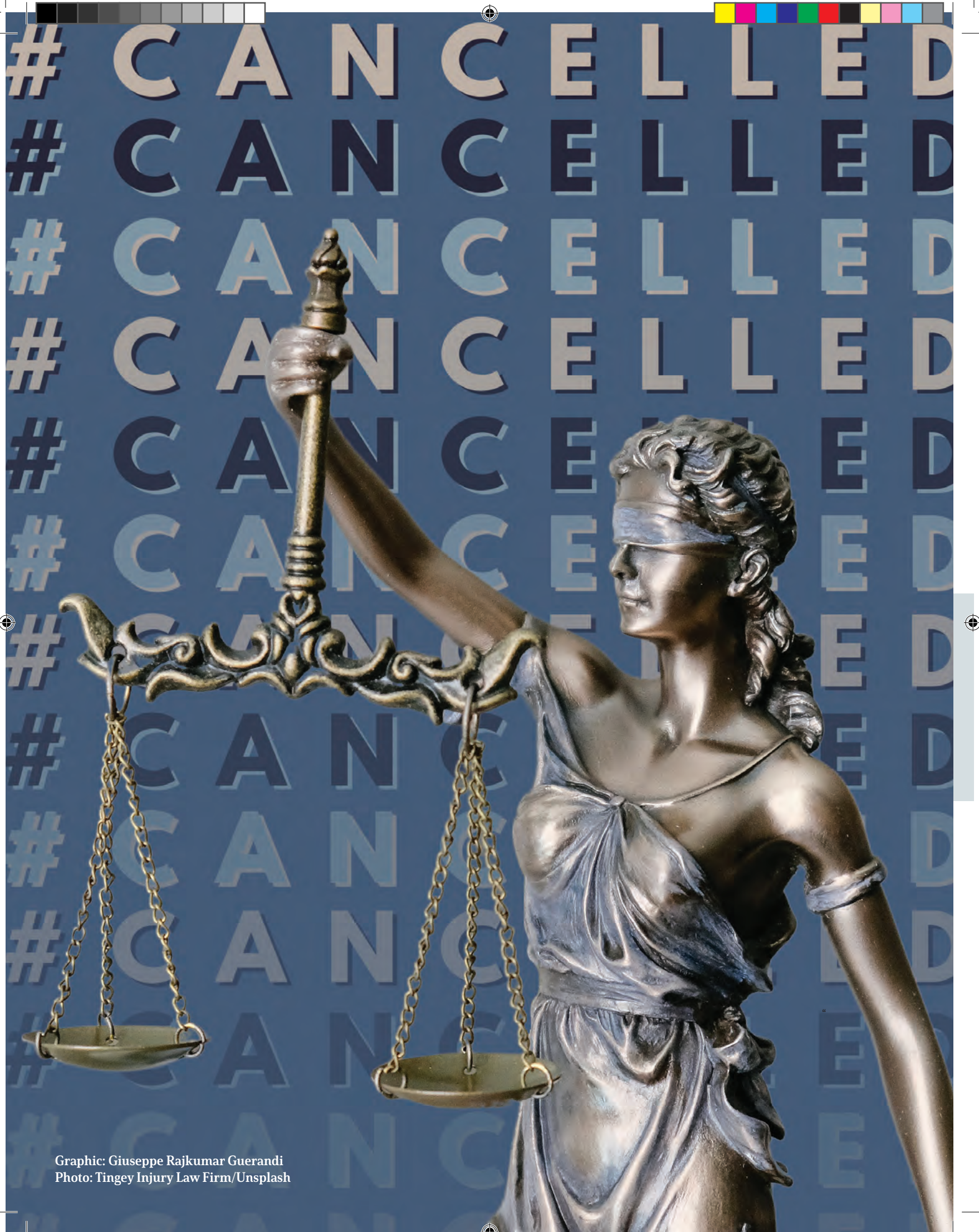
"That's why exposure is so important. Let's not limit what our kids see, because what they see is Motshidisi and her panel, and I want them to see more than that. I want them to see just how big that team is, and how much work and how much manpower it takes to put one game on air. Because that expands the mind," says Mohono. "There's a lot, lot more of us [than before], but there can be a lot, lot more of us, you know?" **SMF**



Sherlin Barends. Photo: Sibulela Bolarinwa



Motshidisi Mohono. Supplied/
Motshidisi Mohono



Graphic: Giuseppe Rajkumar Guerandi
Photo: Tingey Injury Law Firm/Unsplash



CANCEL CULTURE: Justice in the age of the social?

If there are spectres haunting the media industry today, you would be hard-pressed to find one that has reared its head as swiftly and pervasively as cancel culture. This elephant in the newsroom has come to dominate the collective imagination of modern social justice. But what were the founding intentions of cancel culture? And if there is merit to its aims, have we strayed off the path of justice into morally ambiguous territory?

By Giuseppe Rajkumar Guerandi

TRIGGER WARNING: THIS ARTICLE MAKES BRIEF MENTION OF DEATH BY SUICIDE, HOWEVER NO SPECIFIC ACTS ARE DISCUSSED.

For Waldimar Pelser, editor-in-chief of *Rapport*, cancel culture is law-making in nature. “It is a way to exert influence over the public conversation and delineation of taboos,” says Pelser. “It’s to establish what is socially acceptable and to construct penalties for those who transgress.”

Cancel culture is a form of digital accountability and social media activism, according to an article titled *DRAG THEM: A brief etymology of so-called “cancel culture”* by

Meredith D. Clark, an assistant professor of media studies at the University of Virginia in the United States. “Canceling is an expression of agency, a choice to withdraw one’s attention from someone or something whose values, (in) action, or speech are so offensive, one no longer wishes to grace them with their presence, time, and money,” writes Clark.

Marecia Damons, a multimedia journalist at *GroundUp*, expands on this definition, highlighting the medium of cancellations.

“It mainly refers to a popular trend on social media for people to publicly humiliate, ‘call out’ and withdraw support from a public figure, company or organisation,” explains Damons, in email correspondence with *SMF*.

If cancel culture functions as a form of unwritten legislature, then how is this law enacted? Being cancelled can have a wide range of implications, from being unable to attain financial support to being deplatformed or losing one’s job, according to Lia Snijman, a



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freelance journalist who is relatively new to the industry.

Adam Habib, director of the University of London's School of African and Oriental Studies, provides *SMF* with a recent example of cancel culture based on his own experience. In March of this year, Habib was embroiled in an incident that almost resulted in his own professional cancellation, after he made comments involving racist terminology over a conference call with students.

"It is good and helpful when things such as sexual harassment or bigotry are called out," says Kirthana Pillay, sub-editor for the daily newspaper, *The Witness*. "However, cancel culture can be an extreme method to correct someone's unpopular opinion. I'd rather see people corrected or educated than outright cancelled for a minor issue."

TRACING THE ORIGINS OF A CULTURE

In her article, Clark suggests that cancel culture really penetrated the mainstream in 2013, "during Black Twitter's summer of accountability". She cites the use of hashtags and online petitions in the cancellation of celebrity chef Paula Deen, for workplace bigotry, as an example. She further suggests that this phenomenon has its roots in various queer and black communities, and especially in queer communities of colour, in the form of "reading" and "calling out".

"Not every critique can come wrapped up in niceties and polite speech. Nor should it. Sometimes, the urgency and weight of oppression require us to immediately cry out," writes Clark.

The general mechanisms of cancel culture seem clear. However, the moral contents of it are grey, according to Habib. While Habib acknowledges the legitimacy of the aims of cancel culture, he describes its execution as "inhumane" and "undemocratic". Speaking to the incident he was involved in, Habib says that he understands he lacked a degree of social intelligence in that moment, but still feels he was treated harshly. "I'm only human," he adds.

Habib says that the mainstream media as a whole is experiencing structural issues. "They just cover the incident without the interrogation that is required, I think. And, in a sense, too often are driven by headlines,"

argues Habib. "[I]n a sense, there's a kind of business logic to escalate it to the point that intrigues somebody enough to buy it. They feed, if you like, the culture itself."

According to Habib, the conflict at the heart of cancel culture is a political one between "the far right and what [he sees] as the anarchic left". He adds that he fears the unintended consequences of this conflict. "It alienates what are potential allies, and by alienating what are potential allies for the progressive project, you run the danger of allowing the right wing to manipulate the angst to advance their own agenda. If you want to see an example of that, you just have to come to the United Kingdom," claims Habib.

Pelser agrees that the original intentions of cancellations were likely noble. "Initially, I think the idea [of cancel culture] was that there are injustices that are being overlooked by the establishment," says Pelser. "There are people who are not being heard. So, therefore, we want to confront existing norms."

However, cancel culture has devolved into an unforgiving system – one that does not allow the space for redemption, according to Damons. "Cancel culture used to be a way of calling out people for problematic, distasteful or offensive behaviour, with the intention of having them apologise for it," explains Damons. "It's now become a quick way to call out any type of offensive behaviour and mobilise social media groups

to discredit the person or people associated with problematic incidents."

EFFECTIVE JUSTICE OR WELL-INTENTIONED HARM?

When unpacking the intricacies of cancel culture, it becomes clear that this phenomenon is not a simple case of right or wrong. As Pelser puts it, "Truth is a messy business."

To its credit, there are benefits to what cancel culture strives to do, according to Pelser. "One plus is that it has made all of us who publish, whether it's digitally or in print, realise that the cost of a mistake can be quite high," says Pelser. "So, on the upside, I think that this has occasioned more careful consideration by everybody who publishes about what they publish, and that cannot possibly be a bad thing."

Reframing the conversation around this culture, particularly the utility it may serve, is important for considering its worth as a mechanism for social justice, according to Clark. "Being canceled – a designation, it should be noted, usually reserved for celebrities, brands, and otherwise out-of-reach figures – should be read as a last-ditch appeal for justice," she says.

However, Habib feels that the good intentions of cancel culture have turned malevolent, specifically for the media, journalism and writers.

"[Y]ou will be amazed at how many people say to me, 'This is my position, but I can't say it publicly because I'm utterly terrified of saying it'," observes Habib. "I'm seeing senior scholars saying, 'I am terrified to write' [or] academics say, 'I am terrified of teaching'. Now, I've heard journalists say to me, 'I will write on certain things, but I just will not write on others'."

I'd rather see people corrected or educated than outright cancelled for a minor issue.

Photo: M.T ElGassier/Unsplash



The rate at which the cancel culture machine produces and reproduces the rules of its engagement is an important element of its supposed harm, according to Pelser. “These rules can become established as social norms almost overnight,” says Pelser. “And I think that is what has given cancel culture a unique potency for people who are unsure of what the rules are and fear the consequences if they transgress.”

Speaking to the alleged limitations that cancel culture imposes on the media’s ability to push the envelope, Pelser suggests that “media or publishers or even individuals who slavishly follow that which is regarded as social norms, will simply not be read; it’s not interesting”.

“Cancel culture may make people trust the mainstream media less,” says Pillay. “If a journalist were to be called out for an honest mistake, that mistake could go viral and the reputation of that journalist and publication would be tarnished.”

The limitation of independence and free speech in the media industry is a danger that should not be underestimated, according to Damons. She uses the example of Lindsay Dentlinger, an *eNCA* reporter accused of racist practice, whose “cancellation” led to the network being labelled as racist.

For Habib, the desired outcomes of cancel culture are simply not manifesting in helpful ways. “There’s a huge silencing beginning to happen,” says Habib. “Now, the irony: Some strands of this anarchic Left think that they’ve actually silenced the right wing. And to be honest, they haven’t. The right wing is as obnoxious as they’ve often been.”

Instead, Habib suggests that this silencing is affecting liberals and the political Middle, adding that cancel culture often fails to

hold members of the Right accountable for potentially problematic actions. “[T]he institutional structures of right-wing politics will protect them, because [...] those are not abhorrent ideas in their worldview. But the ones who suddenly find themselves isolated are [...] the liberal and the progressive intelligentsia.”

According to Habib, in the most extreme instances of cancelling, some people lose their livelihoods, or even lose their lives to suicide.

TO LIVE WITH IT OR WITHOUT IT

The media must find a way to commit to its foundational principles without committing undue or discriminatory harm, according to observations by both Damons and Snijman.

Snijman elucidates this dilemma on the level of principle, suggesting that journalists look to their press codes for guidance, and understand the difference between writing about someone versus giving them a platform.

“I think the media industry must balance its duty as the mouthpiece for true and accurate information, along with its duty to not inflict harm on innocent people,” says Snijman, speaking to the ethical dilemmas of reporting on potentially problematic individuals. “There is also the balancing act between not wanting to give awful people a platform and respecting the principle of *audi alteram partem* – let the other side be heard.”

Journalistic accountability mechanisms that already exist, such as the South African National Editors’ Forum (SANEF) and the ombuds of publications, should be used for filing complaints and contributing to the qualitative improvement of the country’s

journalism, suggest Snijman and Pillay.

For Damons, the ethical tenets of the media industry are now its best tools of journalistic navigation in a world influenced by cancel culture. “The best way is for the media to stick to its role of being the watchdog or fourth estate, which is essential to the healthy functioning of a democracy,” she says.

If the future of cancel culture is uncertain, what is clear is that shying away from engaging with it will only heighten its volatility, particularly in the form of backlash from socio-political conservatives, according to Habib.

“The liberal intelligentsia have to find their courage,” argues Habib, specifically in terms of opposing attempts to silence speech, regardless of which corner of the political spectrum they emanate from. “Not because we agree with each other, but because we have the right to be heard within the ethical parameters of a progressive agenda [...], as long as it’s not a hate agenda.”

He furthers his argument from the left-wing perspective, suggesting that cancel culture is at odds with an important liberal goal of combating a rise in radical conservatism. “I come from the Left,” he says. “I want us to adopt a set of strategic engagements that don’t give space for Donald Trump to mobilise.”

Pelser echoes a similar sentiment, saying that cancel culture, as it currently exists, has the potential to further echo-chambers, particularly those of a conservative nature.

“[We need to] slightly up the tolerance for difference in conversation, because otherwise we lose conversation and people withdraw into the underground,” explains Pelser. “Too-strict taboos on what can and cannot be said does not make people better people – it just means that they hang out in evermore homogenous groups.”

Valuing the good faith of people and allowing them the space to be messy in their articulations is essential in tempering this backlash, according to Pelser. He suggests that the culture of cancelling is one of constant retaliation, and will lead to social deteriorations.

“I’m pretty sure that’s not the best way of getting more people in the tent of becoming a better society,” says Pelser. **SMF**





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FLIPPING THE LENS



Behind the lens and out of the spotlight – that is where most photojournalists prefer to be whilst they capture scenes of pain, violence, courage and heroics. “Ultimately, you are there to tell other people’s stories. It’s not about you,” says James Oatway, an independent South African photojournalist. But although it is important for these stories to be told, the impact they have on a photographer can be long lasting.

By James Cameron Heron

TRIGGER WARNING: THIS ARTICLE MAKES MENTION OF MURDER AND DEATH, BUT NO EXPLICIT DETAILS ARE MENTIONED.

Operating in potentially hostile and violent environments – and then having to capture and piece together the events for a disconnected public – can be a taxing experience, according to James Oatway, an independent South African photojournalist. As former chief photographer and picture editor at the *Sunday Times*, the scenes that Oatway has captured throughout his career still stick with him today and affect him on a personal level.

“There are so many [memories] that it’s too hard to single any one memory out,” he says. “Every photograph I take brings back its own memories.”

Witnessing violence and tragedy is difficult to deal with, according to Oatway. This sentiment is shared by Greg Marinovich, renowned South African photojournalist. Marinovich was a member of the Bang-Bang Club – a group of four conflict photographers who operated during South Africa’s transition to democracy.

“I don’t know how one is meant to be prepared for that kind of stuff. I certainly wasn’t. It was very disturbing, and very difficult to deal with psychologically and socially...and politically,” reflects Marinovich.

OPENING THE ARCHIVES

Remembering the first time he witnessed the death of another human whilst in the field, Marinovich describes the complexity of seeing somebody get murdered, and being unable to do anything about it without endangering himself.

“The first time I went to cover violence [...], I witnessed a murder. And that was very complex to deal with. [O]ne would imagine that you would do something to stop the murder of what seemed to be an innocent person, but no, I didn’t, because that would have gotten me killed,” says Marinovich.

The 1991 Pulitzer Prize winner explains that dealing with such sensitive and deep-seated matters so regularly has resulted in a complex digestion of the events. “It’s not like photographing something that’s at a distance, or that’s anonymous. This was very intimate, and very complex, and very difficult to deal with psychologically,” says Marinovich.

“Throughout those years, you’d come across different things that would affect you in different ways. Being at massacres [...] where you watch it happen, or Boipatong, where you come across – in the morning, afterwards – all these



This page and opposite page: Photos taken from *The Dead Zone*, a portfolio of photographs that capture the violent conflicts that engulfed parts of South Africa in the 1990s. Photos: Supplied/Greg Marinovich

people mourning their dead...it's awful. It's awful, [...] babies being killed," he adds.

Years after photographing the Marikana shootings on 16 August 2012, Felix Dlangamandla – *Daily Maverick's* (DM) current photo editor – still sits with what he saw on that day. One moment in particular stays with him. "On the morning of 16 August, I received a call from Mgcineni 'Mambush' Noki (one of the striking miners) asking me to send two journalists to talk to him because negotiations with the police had stalled and they were unable to reach an agreement," writes Dlangamandla in a photo essay for DM. "Less than an hour later, Noki was lying dead in a pool of blood," he continues.

Dlangamandla told SMF that the violence he had witnessed that day only started sinking in on the two-hour drive back home. Alone in his car, he began to feel the "shock" about what had just happened. He still feels it now. "One way or another, it is going to catch up with you. You may become violent or you may become disinterested in doing anything. That affected me, and it still does," says Dlangamandla.

While one does not get used to witnessing scenes like these in which lives

are lost, one does begin to accept them as a high likelihood - once accustomed to the profession, according to Marinovich. "I've certainly become more desensitised to seeing dead people, but I'd say I was more sensitised to the possibility of watching someone die. And the thought is really horrific," he says.

MENTALLY TOUGH

Taking these scenes home and dealing with them by yourself can be a challenging and dangerous process, according to Dlangamandla. From first-hand experience, he implores all photojournalists to seek someone to talk to. "I think it's very crucial that all photojournalists who take [violent and sensitive] photos attend debriefings or consult professionals if they've got the means to do that," says Dlangamandla. "Mentally, it helps you to talk about all the experiences you've encountered."

For Samar Abu Elouf, a Palestinian freelance photojournalist based in Gaza, it is not the internal struggles she finds difficult, but instead, the physical dangers that are a reality in the field. "My belief in my cause and my humanitarian message is what drives me to capture all the

scenes. When I go into the field, I prepare my camera and the equipment I need, and if the place is dangerous, I wear a shield, a helmet, and a protective mask," says Elouf in email correspondence with SMF. "Sometimes I may be worried if the situation is very dangerous, such as war on my relatives and loved ones, but it does not affect my mental health. That I can overcome."

THE SOCIAL SIDE

With the rise of social media, and its ability to make posts go viral across the globe, a few photojournalists have felt the effects of their images being distributed online. When publishing photos that are potentially sensitive and triggering, photojournalists sometimes receive responses from various sources that are tough to handle, according to Kasia Strek, a Polish photojournalist.

"My last five years of work have been concentrating on the issues regarding reproductive rights, and especially access to abortion, which is an extremely controversial issue [...] and this work triggers reactions," she says. Strek has received many unsettling messages as a result of her work.

1 September 2013: A Congolese army unit mobilises on the frontline at Kibumba. M23 rebels retreated to Kibumba after they were routed from their stronghold on Three Antenna Hill. The rebels attempted to consolidate and resist from Kibumba, but were forced to abandon their positions and retreat to Bunagana on the Rwandan border. Photo: Supplied/James Oatway





Oatway has endured similar online attacks that questioned his intentions and actions. “The images of the murder of Emmanuel Sithole during xenophobic violence in 2015 caused a huge response. Many people expressed shock and outrage at the images,” says Oatway. “Some people took to social media to attack me personally. Some blamed the death on me, and others claimed that I was a coward to photograph the attack. Others accused me of making money off of other’s misfortune,” he says.

EASY ACCESS

It is not only social media that contributes to the difficulties of publishing as a photojournalist, but also advancements in

That’s because the technological barrier is no longer there. Am I going to send you to Johannesburg if there’s some big event? Or am I just going to pick up footage from 20 000 bystanders? It’s an easy answer,” says Marinovich.

TO KEEP SHOOTING

Despite the obstacle of online attacks, Strek still finds reasons to pursue her work. She is able to move past all the other factors that aim to stop her from training her lens on “controversial issues”. “I had a conference with students at a high school, and the teacher contacted me lately, saying that there was a girl who came to her looking for help after seeing [my] work and after hearing [me] speak.

In the Palestinian territory of Gaza – a place currently rife with violence – Elouf feels the importance of her presence in the field, and therefore continues to capture what is taking place in Gaza. “Where I find myself – my proximity to people and the place of events – the pleasure of photography [exists] despite the harshness of the work and the harshness of the scene. I believe in the issues of children, women and the oppressed here,” she says.

Within environments which can be painful and violent, Marinovich says that he has experienced moments of positivity that contrasted with those events entirely. Stressful situations can at times be “heroic”, “unexpected” or



21 June 2017: The Red Ants evict residents and destroy an informal settlement near Pomona on the East Rand of Johannesburg. Photo: Supplied/James Oatway

technology. In particular, the improvement of cell phone cameras seems to be slowly lowering the demand for photojournalists, according to Dlangamandla.

“Anybody can be a photojournalist. Times have changed now, and we need to accept that,” says Dlangamandla. “But – and it’s a big but – you still need to speak to the ethics of photojournalism.”

The accessibility of cameras, along with the global reach of social media, means that photojournalists are finding it more and more difficult to find work, according to Marinovich. “Most [photojournalists] just scrape by, if at all.



16 August 2021: Mineworkers scatter from police fire outside Nkaneng informal settlement in Rustenburg, North West. Photo: Sourced/Felix Dlangamandla

[T]his is something which shows exactly why I do the work,” says Strek.

Similarly, Oatway’s images of the Sithole murder in 2015 did not only result in social media scrutiny; positive change was also implemented in response to the violence captured in his photographs, he says.

“There were positive effects. The army was deployed the next day and there were no more reports of violence. Demonstrations took place in South Africa and in other African countries. The story became headline news on BBC and CNN,” says Oatway.



19 January 2011: US Marines fire a mortar at a Taliban compound near the Kajaki Dam, Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Photo: Supplied/James Oatway

“morally inspiring”, he says. The most important function of a photojournalist remains capturing these situations, according to Marinovich.

South Africa’s transition to democracy was a time where it felt important to take photographs, since Marinovich and his colleagues sensed that they were “on a historical precipice”, he says.

“Sometimes you did it because you got caught up in a situation, and you might as well shoot. Because it didn’t make a difference if you shot or not – you were trapped,” he recalls. “So you might as well just shoot, right?” **SMF**



SMF

PIETER-LOUIS MYBURGH:



Foto: Heléne Leonard

Onderzoekende joernalistiek is 'n noodsaaklike bousteen van 'n goeie demokrasie. Een van die voorlopers in hierdie veld in Suid-Afrika, Pieter-Louis Myburgh, meen dat die gebruik van onderzoekende media die enigste manier is vir die publiek om inligting te bekom en ingelig te bly oor die sake wat hulle direk beïnvloed. Dié onverskrokke joernalis gesels oor sy ervaring.



'N BOBAAS SNUFFELHOND

Deur Heléne Leonard

TO READ THIS ARTICLE IN ENGLISH, SCAN THE QR CODE ON PAGE 3.

Een van die min dinge wat Suid-Afrika vir die laaste paar jaar aanmekeer hou, is 'n kritiese pers, volgens Pieter-Louis Myburgh (36), een van Suid-Afrika se top ondersoekende joernaliste. "Ek dink ondersoekende joernalistiek is 'n onlosmaaklike deel van enige demokrasie, en 'n noodsaaklikheid is 'n vrye en kritiese pers wat 'n regering op sy tone hou," sê hy.

Myburgh het reeds vroeg in sy loopbaan nie by alledaagse verslaggewing aanklank gevind nie. Vir hom is dit "kleurloos" en "eenvoudig".

"Dit is eentonig om na 'n perskonferensie toe te gaan en al die aanhalings net te kry," meen Myburgh wat daarna streef om eerder agter die kap van die byl te kom. "Ek wil soek en soek totdat ek die eintlike storie vind," vertel hy.

Dit was gedurende Myburgh se tyd as joernalis by News24 dat hy met ondersoekende werk begin het toe hy 'n magdom e-posse moes deurwerk. Dié e-posse het gelei tot wat nou bekend staan as die #GuptaLeaks – 'n ondersoek na die sterk invloed wat die Gupta-familie, 'n ryk besigheidsfamilie van Indië, op die Suid-Afrikaanse sakesektor en regering gehad het en die vermeende gepaardgaande staatskaping tydens die voormalige president, Jacob Zuma, se presidentskap.

Ondersoekende joernalistiek kan verandering in die land teweegbring, meen Myburgh. En dit is waarom hy die beroep gekies het. "Ek is redelik opgewonde oor die trefkrag van ons joernalistiek – dit is *powerful*," sê Myburgh, wat tans 'n ondersoekende joernalis by *Daily Maverick* is.

Alhoewel die trefkrag in Myburgh se werk opmerklik is, is hy steeds nie tevrede met hoe korrupsie in Suid-Afrika hanteer word nie.

Myburgh se nuutste storie is dié van Digital Vibes: 'n Ondersoek na aantygings dat Zweli Mkhize, voormalige Suid-Afrikaanse gesondheidsminister, Covid-19-fondse misbruik het.

"In Digital Vibes se geval is ek nog nie tevrede met die verandering wat gebring is nie. Hopelik stop dit nie daar nie.

Ja, Mkhize het bedank, maar 'n mens kan dit eerder sien as hy wat uit die kabinet uitgedruk is."

Volgens Myburgh word Mkhize se bedanking as 'n "effektiewe afdanking" beskou, aangesien hy nie in sy posisie sou kon aanbly nie.

"As die Nasionale Vervolgingsgesag hulle werk doen en vir Mkhize vervolg, sal dit goed wees. As dit nie gebeur nie, sal 'n mens vies word," meen Myburgh.

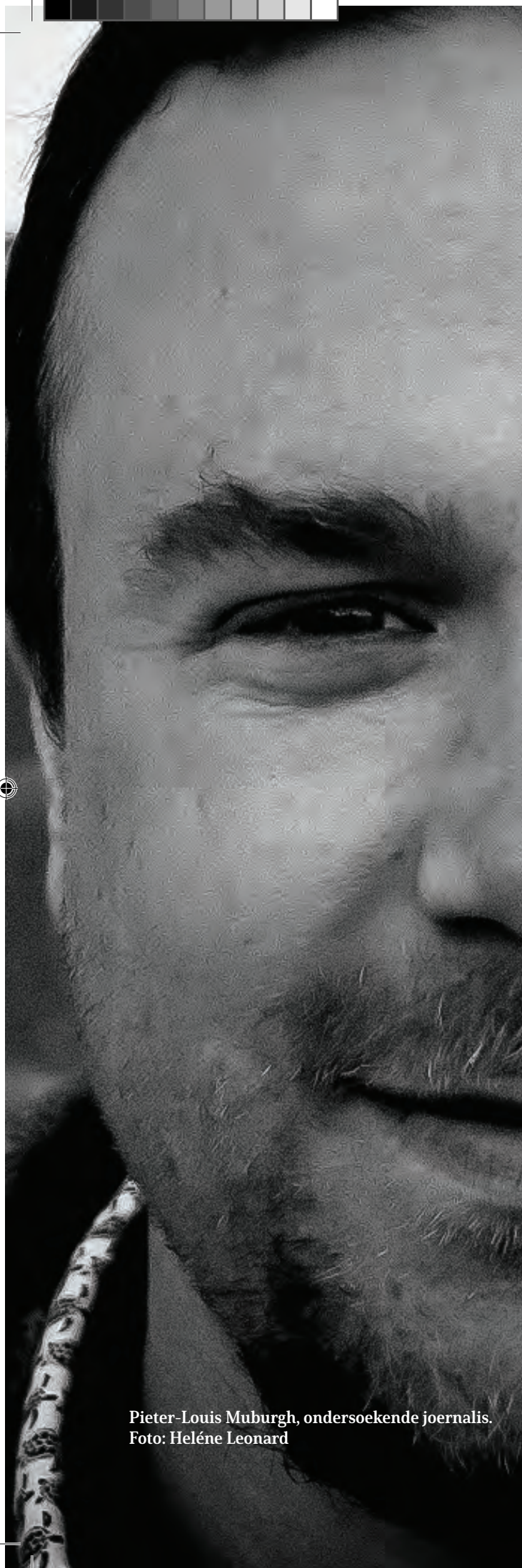
Vir Myburgh is dit frustrerend om te sien dat korrupsie nie genoeg aandag kry nie. Volgens hom is die Nkandla-storie – wat bewys dat Zuma opgraderings van ongeveer R246 miljoen aangebring het by sy Nkandla-woning in KwaZulu-Natal, volgens *Mail & Guardian* – een van die gevalle waarin sulke korrupsie te siene is. Volgens Myburgh kan aanspreeklikheid egter nog lank duur.

'N SPERDATUM IS NIE TER SPRAKE NIE

Ondersoekende joernalistiek is een van daardie goed wat óf reg óf glad nie gedoen moet word nie, volgens Myburgh. As daar konstant 'n ontoegeeflike sperdatum is, word daar skade berokken aan die publiek se persepsie van joernalistiek, sê hy. "As jy 'n onbuigbare sperdatum het, is dit waar foute deurglip," meen Myburgh.

"Om redakteurs te oorreed dat dit die moeite werd is om meer tyd te spandeer op stories, is 'n enorme uitdaging. Ek besef *Daily Maverick* is in 'n luukse posisie waar hulle die joernaliste die tyd gun om 'n goeie, feitelike storie uit te kry," vertel Myburgh.

Met die Prasa-storie – wat Myburgh en Waldimar Pelser, redakteur van *Rapport*, saam aangepak het – was dit eenvoudig: Transnet se treine was te hoog vir die bestaande infrastruktuur. Myburgh het die impak van dié kwessie vroeg raakgesien en moes dit sorvuldig aan *Rapport* se lesers vertel, want dit is moeilik om komplekse situasies aan jou gehoor te verduidelik, sê Pelser.



Pieter-Louis Muburgh, ondersoekende joernalis.
Foto: Heléne Leonard

EIENSKAPPE VAN 'N EERSTELAS JOERNALIS

Tim du Plessis, voormalige redakteur van *Beeld* terwyl Myburgh daar gewerk het, beskryf Myburgh as “rateltaai”.

“Pieter-Louis stuit vir niks nie en hy hou eenvoudig aan en aan totdat hy gekry het wat hy soek,” sê Du Plessis.

Volgens Du Plessis hanteer Myburgh sy feite met forensiese sorgvuldigheid. “Oor die jare heen het hy ’n sesde sintuig vir skelmstreke ontwikkel. Hy ruik skelms uit soos [wat] ’n snuffelhond met dwelms maak en dan vind hy die bewyse,” vertel Du Plessis.

Myburgh het hom gevestig as die land se voorste ondersoekende joernalis, meen Du Plessis. “As redakteur sal ek met Pieter-Louis oorlog toe gaan,” vertel hy.

Pelser meen dat hy as redakteur baie geleer het in die tyd wat Myburgh by *Rapport* gewerk het. “Hy beskik oor die vermoë om heel eerste die groot prentjie te sien, en soms sukkel ons as redakteurs om raak te sien wat hy sien. Maar ’n mens moet hom vertrou, want Pieter-Louis sien goed van kardinale belang vroeg raak,” vertel Pelser.

In ondersoekende joernalistiek gaan snuffel ’n mens iets uit waarvan niemand weet nie. Dit is soos ’n skat wat jy bewaar en dan publiseer jy dit. Hierdie skat het dan ’n enorme impak op die samelewing, meen Myburgh.

“Jy skryf ’n boek oor Ace Magashule en dan word hy vervolg,” sê Myburgh oor sy 2019-boek *Gangster State* wat die beweerde korrupsie deur die voormalige sekretaris-generaal van die African National Congress (ANC) blootgelê het. “Die snuffelwerk is baie bevredigend.”

Die verskyning van *Gangster State* het ’n blywende impak gehad op Suid-Afrika se politieke landskap. “As Magashule aangebly het as sekretaris-generaal, sou hy moontlik Suid-Afrika se volgende president geword het,” meen Pelser.

Myburgh sê hy het probeer om pro-aktief te wees met stories, soos Digital Vibes, deur ’n data-analise te doen oor die Covid-19-uitgawes. Dit is waar hy die foute raakgesien het.

Met elke storie wat hy aanpak, mik Myburgh om die geld wat uitgegee word, te volg en “elke liewe sent om te draai en te kyk waarheen dit gaan”.

GEVARE VAN DIE BEROEP

“Ek begin al hoe meer eerlik wees met myself,” sê Myburgh. “Dit is swaar om met negatiewe stories van die land te werk. En dit gaan nie net oor die ondersoekende werk nie. Dit is meer as dit – om konstant omring te wees met negatiewe nuus. En Suid-Afrika het so baie negatiewe nuus.”

Hy maak ’n punt daarvan om sy kop skoon te kry. In sy vrye tyd geniet hy lees, golf en branderplankry. “Ek lees op die oomblik *Fortunes: The Rise and Rise of Afrikaner Tycoons* deur Ebbe Dommis – ’n boek oor al die *horribly* ryk Suid-Afrikaanse sakemanne,” vertel hy.



Onderzoekende joernalistiek kan 'n uitdagende beroep wees en dit lok baie kritiek uit. Myburgh loop dikwels deur onder Twitter-kritici, maar desondanks bly hy 'n vasberade ondersoekende joernalis wat hom nie van stryk laat bring nie.

"Twitter is nie rêrig nie. Mens moet dit altyd onthou," meen Myburgh. Hy beskou Carl Niehaus as sy grootste Twitter-trol. "Dit is eintlik so *sad*. Sy gunstelingwoord [vir Myburgh] is '*trash journalist*', maar ek vat dit van wie dit kom."

Met die skryf van *Gangster State* het Myburgh besef hoe gevaarlik die werk kan word. "Ace Magashule het geweet dat ek die boek skryf en as ek alleen in die Vrystaat rondgery het, op soek na inligting, het die gedagtes by my opgekom dat hulle weet ek krap rond," vertel hy.

Myburgh het al direkte dreigemente ontvang, maar dit skrik hom nie af nie. "Ek is nie eintlik bang vir dié wat my bel en sê '*I'm going to kill you*' nie, want as iemand jou wil doodmaak, sal hulle dit nie sê nie, maar doen," meen Myburgh.

Myburgh glo dat geen dreigement iemand só moet affekteer dat dit jou verhoed om jou werk te doen nie. " 'n Joernalis se werk is te belangrik," sê hy.

"Ek het vir lank, seker 'n maand, lyfwagte gehad ná *Gangster State* se bekendstelling. Ek het soos Justin Bieber gevoel," vertel hy. Die lyfwagte is aangewys na afloop van *Gangster State* se eerste bekendstelling op 9 April 2019 by Exclusive Books in Sandton City, Johannesburg. Die bekendstelling is weens sekuriteitsredes gestaak nadat 'n groep betogers die bekendstelling ontwrig het. "Die betogers het kaasborde opgemors en mekaar met kaas begin gooi. Dit was chaos," vertel Myburgh.

Daardie aand het Penguin Random House-uitgewers, wat die uitgewers van *Gangster State* is, besluit om lyfwagte vir Myburgh te gee, vertel Surita Joubert, bemarkingshoof by die uitgewershuis. "Verdere bekendstellings vir *Gangster State* is gelukkig geensins ontwrig nie," vertel Joubert.

"Die sekuriteit was interessante karakters. Ek is tot vandag toe nog pelle met van hulle. Party van die mense was Beyoncé se lyfwagte toe sy in Suid-Afrika was, so ek het soos 'n *celebrity* gevoel," vertel Myburgh.

Die lyfwagte het vir ongeveer 'n maand wag gehou buite Myburgh se private woning. "Hulle sou deur die nag voor my huis in 'n groot bakkie sit om 'n *statement* te maak," sê hy.

Myburgh het sy sogenaamde "*darlings*", (die stories wat hy die meeste geniet het om te skryf), maar hy sal altyd sy eerste deurbraak onthou. "Die Prasa-exposés vir *Rapport* was vir my belangrik en is die eerste storie wat my gevestig het as ondersoekende joernalis," vertel hy.

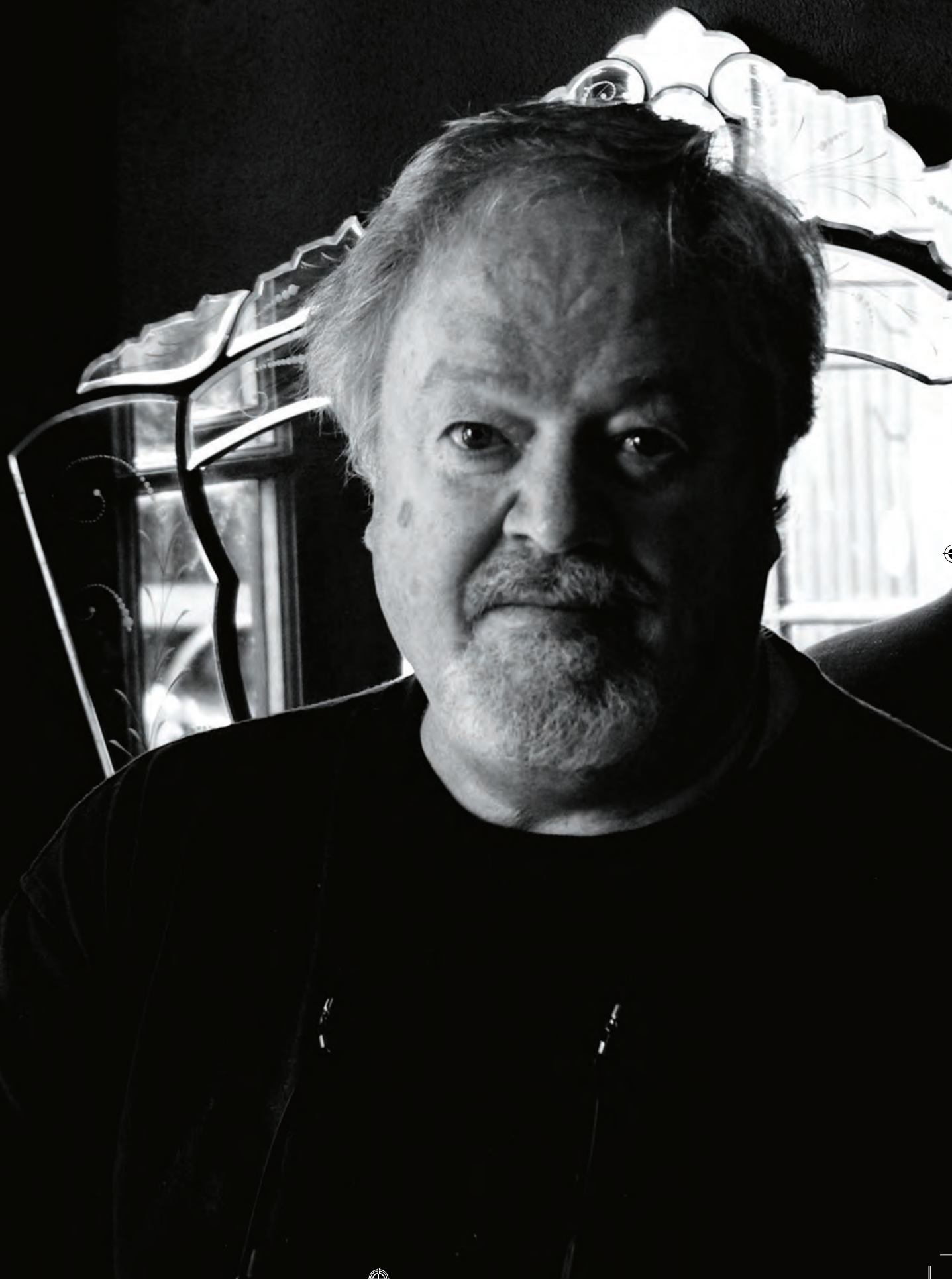
Ná twee boeke en veel meer opwindende ervarings, is daar vir Myburgh geen teken van briek aandraai nie. Met sy planne vir nog baie diepgaande forensiese ondersoeke in die toekoms, bly dié snuffelhond koersvas op die spoor van korrupsie. **SMF**




Ace Magashule, voormalige sekretaris-generaal van die African National Congress (ANC).
Foto: Verskaf/Alon Skuy



SMF





THE SHADOW OF JACQUES PAUW

One of the most significant factors grounding journalism is its ethical standpoint. It is on this foundation that the public's trust in the media is built. But what happens when that trust is broken? Veteran investigative journalist, Jacques Pauw, recently experienced the aftermath of being “cancelled” by the public and the media industry after writing a factually inaccurate column for *Daily Maverick*.

By Lara van Zyl

“

It's always going to be held against me. There's no question about that.



Photo: Erin Caitlin Walls

“The health inspector is coming today.” Jacques Pauw, veteran investigative journalist, is making a cup of coffee in the kitchen of his restaurant, the Tin Roof Taverna in Riebeeck Kasteel. “Don’t buy a restaurant or a guest house. It’s excruciating.”

With his reading glasses hanging around his neck, he sits down at one of the tables. The 61-year-old starts unpacking the intricate story that is his journalistic career. Having worked at publications and companies such as *Rapport*, *Vrye Weekblad* and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), Pauw has had a long and successful career. But after writing a factually inaccurate column for *Daily Maverick* earlier this year, he was disgraced in both the media and online for his unethical actions. “I completely accept that I fucked up,” says Pauw. “It’s always going to be held against me. There’s no question about that.”

THE VETERAN

Pauw first stepped into the world of journalism in 1984, after seeing an advertisement in a newspaper for a trainee journalist position at Perskor. Perskor was an Afrikaans media house that was later taken over by the media company, Caxton. “And I became a journalist,” he says.

From there Pauw moved to *Huisgenoot*, and in 1985 he started working at *Rapport*. This was the same year that PW Botha, the then president of South Africa, declared a state of emergency and “South Africa was basically under a military dictatorship”, Pauw recalls.

At that time, the Afrikaans press – including *Rapport* – supported the National Party, Pauw explains.

While he was working at *Rapport*, he got to know Dirk Coetzee, the commander of the South African police’s death squad at Vlakplaas. “He told me what happened [at Vlakplaas] and how they killed anti-apartheid activists...and they poisoned this lot and they burned that lot,” says Pauw. “I couldn’t do anything with the story because I was working for a National Party publication.”



However, in 1988 Max du Preez started *Vrye Weekblad*, an Afrikaans anti-apartheid newspaper, and took the role of editor-in-chief at the publication. Du Preez tells *SMF* that he was struggling to find people to work for him. Pauw joined Du Preez, along with a few other journalists, so that he could write about Dirk Coetzee and expose the death squad.

“He was our kind of journalist,” says Du Preez of Pauw. “He was fearless – sometimes a bit reckless – and unrelenting. [H]e quickly grew into one of the best investigative journalists South Africa had ever seen.”

Launching an Afrikaans anti-apartheid newspaper at that time seemed an act of madness, says Du Preez.

“We wanted to tell Afrikaans readers what apartheid was really like. In the end, we spent an awful lot of energy on exposing the death squads of the apartheid state – the killings, torture and kidnappings,” he says.

Vrye Weekblad received a lot of backlash from the apartheid government, including many criminal convictions under various pieces of legislation, says Pauw. “Our offices were bombed in July 1989...we were harassed in all kinds of ways.” Was he scared? No. “When you’re young, you’re not scared,” says Pauw. “You’re a cowboy.”

The most difficult thing for Du Preez was the apartheid government’s use of the courts to “make our lives hell”. The government’s strategy was to exhaust the limited financial resources available to the publication, and to intimidate them.

By 1994, *Vrye Weekblad* was forced to close down, after being driven into bankruptcy by legal costs. Pauw joined the SABC, where he made documentaries. He travelled to places like Rwanda, Algeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ethiopia to uncover brutal acts and civil wars that were taking place in these countries. “I just think that, as journalists, we should take those opportunities, if we can,” says Pauw. “I’ve seen the best and the worst that Africa has on offer. The cruelty is sometimes mind-blowing...what people can do to one another.”

TIN ROOF AND THE HAWKS

During his 30-year career as an investigative journalist, Pauw wrote many different books, including *Into the Heart of Darkness: Confessions of Apartheid’s Assassins*, *Dances with Devils: A Journalist’s Search for Truth* and *The President’s Keepers*. In 2014, Pauw decided that it was time to put his pen down and retire from journalism.

He and his wife, Sam Rogers, who is also a journalist, bought a house in Riebeek Kasteel in the Western Cape. They then bought the restaurant and guesthouse in which Pauw now sits – the Tin Roof Taverna.

Two years into his life of retirement, in December 2016, Pauw received a call that persuaded him to return to investigative journalism. “I got a phone call from a man who I used to know when I was still a journalist. He didn’t know I had left the profession. He used to work for the State Security Agency (SSA), and he called me and he said to me, ‘I’ve got documents for you,’” says Pauw.

Pauw met with him and saw confidential SSA reports that revealed corruption involving Arthur Fraser, the former director of the SSA. Pauw then contacted the advocate who drafted the reports, Paul Engelke. Engelke was living in Moscow at the time, and worked as a lecturer in the faculty of law at the Moscow State University, explains Pauw.

He travelled to Russia to meet with Engelke and, upon his return, started writing the now-famous *The President’s Keepers* – the book that exposed the many corrupt actions taking place under Jacob Zuma’s presidency. Upon its release, the book sold 210 000 copies, says Pauw. He explains that the book received a lot of backlash from the government, including criminal charges, and even an attempt to remove the book from all bookstores in South Africa.

After the book was published, the Tin Roof Taverna was raided by the Hawks, a South African priority crime investigative unit, Pauw recalls. “They walked in here with their search warrant, three of them,”

he says. The colonel demanded to see the classified documents that Pauw had used to write the book. Pauw responded: “Do you really think I’m going to keep secret documents here? They’re all on a cloud above you.”

“He didn’t know what I was talking about,” Pauw tells *SMF*.

While the other two Hawks members were searching Pauw’s office in the restaurant, the third member, who was the captain, called Pauw around the corner and asked him to sign his copy of *The President’s Keepers*. “That was just ridiculous,” Pauw chuckles.

AN UNFORTUNATE EVENT

Pauw wrote and published a book, *Rat Roads: One Man’s Incredible Journey*, in 2012. The book follows the life of Kennedy Gihana, a Rwandan soldier who walked thousands of kilometres from Rwanda to South Africa to escape the Rwandan civil war in the early 1990s.

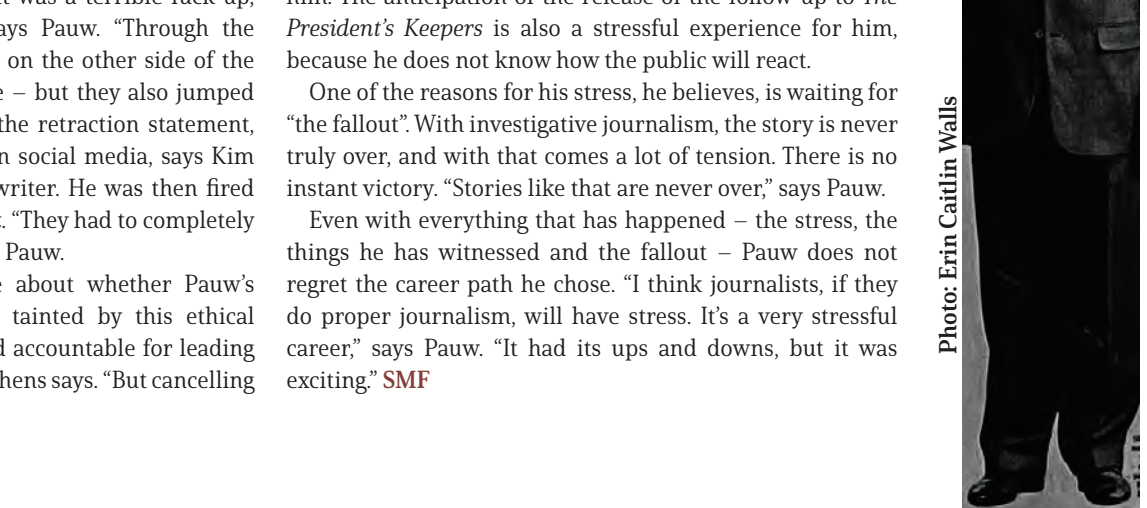
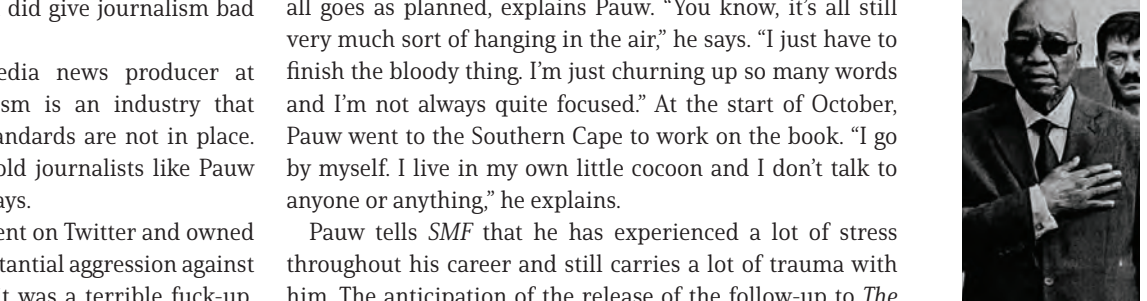
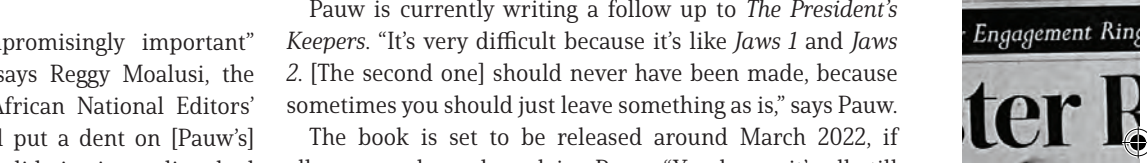
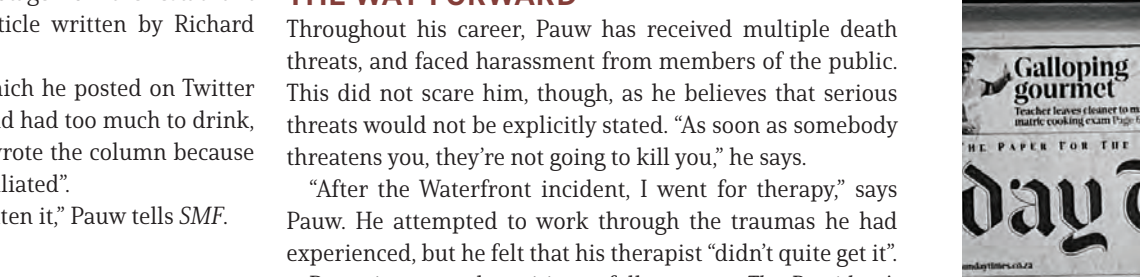
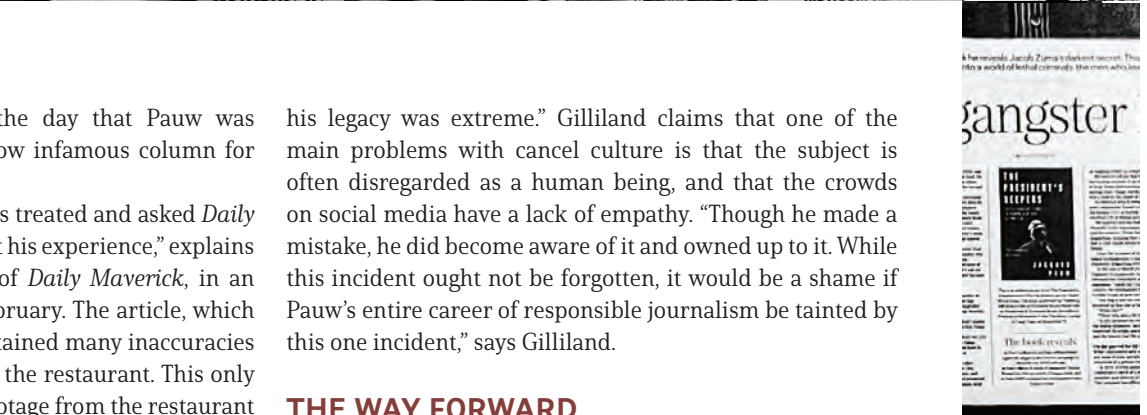
In 2021, a woman named Maria contacted Pauw with a similar story about her father. She asked to meet him, so that he could help her write her father’s story, says Pauw. They met at Den Anker at the V&A Waterfront on 6 February.

The woman ordered drinks for them and her friends, who were sitting outside the restaurant, recalls Pauw, and the bill ended up including 20 tequila shots and a few bottles of wine. “I got fucked,” explains Pauw.

When the time came to pay the bill, the trouble began.

Pauw’s card was blocked after he put the wrong pin in too many times. He tried to pay the majority of the bill with R1 000 in cash that he had on him, and went to withdraw the remainder of the money at an ATM. The woman took the R1 000 cash and left the restaurant, as seen on the CCTV footage of the restaurant.

Pauw was ultimately arrested for attempted theft and, after struggling back and forth with the restaurant’s waiters, spent the night in Table Bay Harbour Police Station. He had to appear in court for theft.



The events that occurred on the day that Pauw was arrested comprised most of his now infamous column for *Daily Maverick*.

"He was livid with the way he was treated and asked *Daily Maverick* to publish a column about his experience," explains Branko Brkic, the editor-in-chief of *Daily Maverick*, in an apology statement issued on 19 February. The article, which was published on 12 February, contained many inaccuracies about the events that took place at the restaurant. This only became apparent after the CCTV footage from the restaurant was released, according to an article written by Richard Poplak for the *Daily Maverick*.

In Pauw's apology statement, which he posted on Twitter on 16 February, he states that he had had too much to drink, his memory was blurred, and he wrote the column because he was "emotional, angry and humiliated".

"Of course I should not have written it," Pauw tells *SMF*.

THE ETHICAL QUESTION

Ethics in journalism is "uncompromisingly important" in building trust in the media, says Reggy Moalusi, the executive director of the South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF). "The incident did put a dent on [Pauw's] reputation. It was unfortunate and did give journalism bad publicity," says Moalusi.

Wianda Gilliland, a social media news producer at *Netwerk24*, believes that journalism is an industry that will implode if ethics and high standards are not in place. As such, it is very important to hold journalists like Pauw accountable for their actions, she says.

Pauw posted a retraction statement on Twitter and owned up to his mistake, which led to substantial aggression against him on social media. "You know, it was a terrible fuck-up, and I completely admitted it," says Pauw. "Through the years, I've made so many enemies on the other side of the media, that they all jumped on me – but they also jumped on *Daily Maverick*." After posting the retraction statement, Pauw "took rather a lot of heat" on social media, says Kim Nicola Stephens, a freelance copywriter. He was then fired as a columnist from *Daily Maverick*. "They had to completely distance themselves from me," says Pauw.

The incident sparked a debate about whether Pauw's reputation and legacy should be tainted by this ethical misstep. "Yes, he needed to be held accountable for leading readers on a wild goose chase," Stephens says. "But cancelling

his legacy was extreme." Gilliland claims that one of the main problems with cancel culture is that the subject is often disregarded as a human being, and that the crowds on social media have a lack of empathy. "Though he made a mistake, he did become aware of it and owned up to it. While this incident ought not be forgotten, it would be a shame if Pauw's entire career of responsible journalism be tainted by this one incident," says Gilliland.

THE WAY FORWARD

Throughout his career, Pauw has received multiple death threats, and faced harassment from members of the public. This did not scare him, though, as he believes that serious threats would not be explicitly stated. "As soon as somebody threatens you, they're not going to kill you," he says.

"After the Waterfront incident, I went for therapy," says Pauw. He attempted to work through the traumas he had experienced, but he felt that his therapist "didn't quite get it".

Pauw is currently writing a follow up to *The President's Keepers*. "It's very difficult because it's like *Jaws 1* and *Jaws 2*. [The second one] should never have been made, because sometimes you should just leave something as is," says Pauw.

The book is set to be released around March 2022, if all goes as planned, explains Pauw. "You know, it's all still very much sort of hanging in the air," he says. "I just have to finish the bloody thing. I'm just churning up so many words and I'm not always quite focused." At the start of October, Pauw went to the Southern Cape to work on the book. "I go by myself. I live in my own little cocoon and I don't talk to anyone or anything," he explains.

Pauw tells *SMF* that he has experienced a lot of stress throughout his career and still carries a lot of trauma with him. The anticipation of the release of the follow-up to *The President's Keepers* is also a stressful experience for him, because he does not know how the public will react.

One of the reasons for his stress, he believes, is waiting for "the fallout". With investigative journalism, the story is never truly over, and with that comes a lot of tension. There is no instant victory. "Stories like that are never over," says Pauw.

Even with everything that has happened – the stress, the things he has witnessed and the fallout – Pauw does not regret the career path he chose. "I think journalists, if they do proper journalism, will have stress. It's a very stressful career," says Pauw. "It had its ups and downs, but it was exciting." **SMF**



Photo: Erin Caitlin Walls



SURVIVING the first draft OF HISTORY

For some South African journalists, the field is a vast and unpredictable place. Pursuing a story may place them in the midst of political turmoil, violent unrest, or even a pandemic. It is important for each journalist to know when to keep pushing for answers, and when to put their own life first.

By Tamsin Metelerkamp



Graphic: Tamsin Metelerkamp

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In July of this year, violent unrest broke out in the South African provinces of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and Gauteng, following the arrest of former president Jacob Zuma. Across the country, citizens turned to news broadcasts and publications to track the events that claimed over 300 lives.

For the journalists on the ground, surrounded by looting and chaos, it was an unprecedented time, according to Jayed-Leigh Paulse, a senior reporter at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). Paulse was on the scene when demonstrators in KZN started throwing rocks at an SABC vehicle.

“We were actually live at that moment in time...I will never forget,” says Paulse. “And while we were reporting – we were in a hybrid van, we were safe – but people were throwing rocks at us. Looters were throwing rocks at us. [T]his was not the first time that we were encountering this kind of behaviour, but the pushback that we got from people...it was terrifying.”

The safety of journalists and camera operators during the unrest was also a concern for the Newzroom Afrika editorial team,

physically go home and just remind myself that I’m human too. I also need to feel.”

RISING FIELD RISKS

The last decade has seen an increase in attacks on South African journalists in the field, according to Mary Papayya, the chair of media freedom for the South African National Editors’ Forum (SANEF).

“When it comes to assaults, attacks, robberies, death threats and other threats of harm, as well as damage to equipment and vehicles, there certainly is a perception that it has become more dangerous for journalists in South Africa,” says Angela Quintal, the Africa programme coordinator for the Committee to Protect Journalists.

The *State of the Newsroom 2019-2020* report, produced by the journalism department at the University of Witwatersrand, listed eight instances of threats from the state, three instances of threats from the public, and four instances of threats from political groups



From left to right: 21 September 2017. Roughly 150 Ocean View residents block Kommetjie Road in Cape Town during a protest; 18 October 2018. Residents protest for services in Witsand in Atlantis; 2 May 2018. Police search for protesters at the Sigalo informal settlement near Mitchells Plain. Photos: Ashraf Hendricks/*GroundUp*

according to Katy Katopodis, the news director for the channel. “There was one moment where a reporter was getting the most dramatic footage of a liquor warehouse being looted, and they were literally standing behind the police. The problem was that the police were coming under attack. [The reporter] needed to move away, and do it in a way that didn’t jeopardise their life at all,” says Katopodis.

While those watching television broadcasts may believe that news crews are trained to handle such situations with ease, Paulse emphasises that journalists, like any other professionals in high-stress environments, need to debrief.

“During the unrest, the things that I saw, the bodies that I saw lying on the ground, [...] it was shocking,” says Paulse. “I think I’m still desensitised when I see bodies, but I need to

or parties against journalists. The 2018 report listed seven threats from the state, three threats from the public or individuals, and eight threats from political parties. These numbers were based on SANEF media statements from 2019 and 2018, respectively.

“We track the media releases from SANEF, which are an indication of an increase or decrease in incidents. However, it is not the case that every incident journalists have to deal with or experience is reported across all media – including community media – even if there are attempts to try to do this,” says Alan Finlay, editor and lead researcher of the *State of the Newsroom* report.

Some scenarios that can involve risks for journalists include service delivery and other protests, investigating corruption, and covering politics and politicians, says Quintal.

“We have seen a new threat over the past two years that cannot be ignored for obvious reasons. A large number of South African journalists have contracted Covid-19, and several have died from Covid-related complications,” says Quintal.

It is difficult to draw a definitive link between a journalist contracting Covid-19 and their work in the field, but the role journalists have played on the frontline during the pandemic has certainly placed them at higher risk of infection, she says.

“Being a journalist now has been more difficult than ever before,” says Pause.

FACING DOWN THREATS

“Sometimes when we go into certain areas, whether it is protests or whether it is more underprivileged areas, what I’ve found is that people seem to be angry,” says Vanessa Poonah, a reporter at SABC News. While Poonah has never been physically attacked in the field, she says that there have been instances in which she felt threatened. “You get the sense that people are looking to lash out.”

“I must say, I was really angry and frustrated, as an incident of this nature hadn’t happened to me in years,” says Thethani, on the impact this encounter had on her. “If such happens [to you], you must immediately take down the names of the officials you are dealing with, and report them to your office, so they can get in touch with their superiors. That’s the only way to deal with some police officials who attack journalists.”

SAPS launched an internal investigation in response to the incident, and SANEF called on “senior officers in charge of these operations to brief their teams appropriately to allow the media to play its critical role of informing the public”, according to the release.

In some instances, journalists also face pushback from community members who feel that previous reporting was not fair to them, or did not provide them with enough coverage, according to Mzwandile Khathi, the editor of five publications under the *Soweto Urban* banner.

“There does appear to be a growing distrust and dislike of journalists in some communities, and journalists have been



From left to right (continued): 21 May 2018. Protesters block the street with a metal container during protests in Vrygrond near Muizenberg and Marina da Gama; 2 May 2018. A protest for better services turns violent at the Sigalo informal settlement near Mitchells Plain. Photos: Ashraf Hendricks/*GroundUp*

Journalists sometimes face threats from those who fear their activities will be exposed by the stories the journalists are covering, according to Katopodis. “There have also been some very worrying instances of reporters who’ve been forced to delete some of their footage, either on their cellphones or on their cameras, by people who don’t approve in terms of what the journalists on the ground are doing,” she says.

In one such instance, a Newzroom Afrika journalist, Mbali Thethani, and cameraperson, Muraga Mphaphuli, were forcibly removed from a scene by members of the South African Police Service (SAPS). The news team was attempting to cover the demolition of housing units in Diepsloot, Johannesburg, according to a SANEF news release from 25 November 2020. They were also asked to delete their footage of the scene.

attacked or forced to leave when covering stories,” says Finlay. He adds that a growing threat to journalists is crime, with some media professionals being mugged for their newsroom equipment while out in the field.

IMPACT ON JOURNALISTS

Being threatened by members of the public while working on stories can be demoralising for journalists, according to Quintal.

“There are so many of us that are leaving the field...there are so many of us who are going into corporate or are going into government, and it’s not because we’re not good journalists, [...] but because the pressures are insurmountable,” says Pause.

However, while some may opt to leave journalism or focus on soft news due to these factors, for many it simply reinforces



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the attitude that they are doing the right thing, says Quintal. “Journalism is a calling. It’s not necessarily something that one does to get riches or earn loads of money. [I]t’s an essential service, and a strong and healthy media fraternity, I’ve always believed, is very closely aligned to a healthy and strong democracy,” says Katopodis.

Journalists should be treated with the utmost respect and allowed to do their jobs freely, according to Papayya.

“[Journalists] should not be in a position where they are threatened, where they are intimidated. We should, at all times, be allowed to tell our stories,” she says.

MANAGING RISKS

There are courses and online materials available through SANEF that not only provide journalists with information, but also capacitate them with skills that allow them to better manage various threats, and monitor the spaces in which they are working, according to Papayya.

“From a Covid-19 perspective, given the health risks that journalists face – you know, we’ve lost many journalists as well – we also offered a manual on covering pandemics,” says Papayya.

Journalists are advised to do risk assessments before going out on assignments, according to Quintal.

“[At Newzroom Afrika] we do a security assessment,” says Katopodis. “We have a look at whether or not the reporter should be going out into the field alone, whether or not that reporter needs to have additional security.”

Building relationships with community leaders and stakeholders is particularly important when working in the field, according to Poonah. “They know the people, they know the circumstances, they know the situation...so it is very important for fieldworkers like ourselves to actually have that rapport on the ground with people who can take us, for example, into an area that we don’t know,” she says.

While journalists may feel unsafe in certain situations, that usually abates once they start talking to people in the area, according to Ashraf Hendricks, a photojournalist at *GroundUp*.

“You just feel safer once you start speaking to people, and they kind of let you into their space,” says Hendricks. “They get to know

you, and they get to know who you are, instead of just this person with a camera on the sidelines.”

That said, in truly dangerous situations, a journalist’s life should be their first priority, says Katopodis.

“You’re always going to find yourself in the firing line as a journalist, but I think, to be honest and blatant, no story is worth your life,” says Paulse.

If a journalist feels threatened in any situation at any time, the onus is on them and their editor to pull out of that story, she added.

“There have been instances when I’ve covered gang-related stories, where people have come to me and said, ‘You know what, I don’t think you should continue pursuing the story, because so-and-so has a target on your back’, or ‘They don’t like the way you asked this particular question to that particular person’, or ‘They overheard you speaking to an enemy,’” says Paulse.

FINDING A WAY

The safety issues that journalists face in certain areas are often issues that the people living in those areas have to face every day, according to Poonah.

“Most times, we [journalists] get to leave a specific area, but the people left behind are people that are facing those challenges and issues on a daily basis,” she says.

In previously and currently disadvantaged areas, Covid-19 has exacerbated many of the social issues facing residents, explains Poonah. “On the ground, people are frustrated, and here I’m talking about marginalised people. So, I understand sometimes when people do lash out, because they don’t feel or perceive that anybody is actually listening to them, or has their best interests at heart.”

Journalists should not shy away from being a mouthpiece for those in volatile communities, according to Paulse. Rather, they should continue finding “means and creative ways to also tell these stories without jeopardising your sources – without revealing them, without putting them in the firing line – while also keeping yourself and your teammates safe.”

It is unlikely that journalists will avoid areas and situations that could be dangerous, according to Katopodis. “I haven’t come across a reporter who avoids an area completely,” she says. “When others run away, we run towards.” **SMF**

15 September 2021. A news crew from the South African Broadcasting Corporation adheres to Covid-19 protocols while interviewing a source. Photo: Tamsin Metelerkamp





THICK SKIN comes at a price

Journalists are exposed to dangerous, traumatic, gruesome and stress-inducing situations in the field on a daily basis. News reporters often have to investigate fraud, cover devastating stories, talk to families that have lost loved ones, write about horrible crimes and navigate violent protests. When reporting on sensitive matters, many are subjected to bullying and scrutiny for merely doing their jobs. Even though journalists are viewed by the public as having thick skin, they remain human, and the mental impact of the job can be a serious one.

By Marianne Francis Stewart

TRIGGER WARNING: THIS ARTICLE MENTIONS MENTAL HEALTH, MURDER AND SEXUAL ASSAULT.

Since journalists are often first responders to newsworthy events – at times arriving on a scene even before the police or paramedics – they are often first-hand witnesses to shootings, protests, fatal accidents, wars and natural disasters.

“It is a profession with a lot of highs and rapid lows,” says Charles Smith, news editor for *Volksblad*. “It is much like surfing – one moment you are on top, and the next you are hit over by a wave.”

While endangering their lives by running towards violent protests, fires and gruesome scenes, journalists have to do what they do best – keep the public informed, according to Maygene de Wee, an award-winning crime reporter at *Netwerk24*.

“Mental health is a key and pivotal issue that affects everybody – journalists included. Journalists have in recent times gone through a lot, way before the outbreak of Covid-19,” says Reggy Moalusi, executive director of the South African National Editors’ Forum (SANEF). However, the pandemic also made things worse, which resulted in “an urgent need” to assist journalists in dealing with mental health issues, Moalusi says.

THE JOURNALISTIC EXPERIENCE

Different types of journalism – such as crime reporting, investigative reporting or political reporting – involve different pressures and challenges. Even though there are some common

experiences for many journalists within the profession, there are also ordeals that only a certain type of journalist will understand, according to Anena Burger, photojournalist at *Volksblad*. “I, myself, am a crime reporter. And at times I feel like an investigative journalist will not fully grasp or understand the gruesome scenes that we, as crime reporters, are called out to,” says De Wee.

Reporters may also experience indirect, secondary trauma when they interview victims or witness graphic scenes. De Wee says that the murder of 17-year-old Anene Booysen in February 2013 changed her life as a reporter. Booysen was gang-raped and disemboweled at a construction site in Bredasdorp.

De Wee, who was expecting her first child at the time of the incident, says that covering such a gruesome murder caused her to develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which she still deals with eight years later. “Since that case, I have been on medication in order to cope with what I experienced sitting in that courtroom day in and day out...reliving the case every day,” explains De Wee.

Jana Marx, in-depth reporter at *Netwerk24* and author of *The Krugersdorp Cult Killings: Inside Cecilia Steyn’s Reign of Terror*, covered the infamous Krugersdorp cult killings by reporting on the court cases during 2018 and 2019. “Whilst I was busy covering the court proceedings, I was okay. There is little to no time to brood



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about things. After hours, it was more difficult – especially when I started to write the book on the killings, because I had to dig even deeper into the police files to study the photos,” she says.

It is difficult for journalists to distance themselves from a case, especially if they are constantly busy with it, according to Marx. After her in-depth study of the cult-related murders, “a secondary trauma” originated within her and she started seeking support. “Luckily, I realised it before it was too late,” says Marx, who went to a clinical psychologist for two sessions. “The therapy helped me work through the trauma I experienced.”

Covering the Krugersdorp murders changed Marx’s attitude towards crime. She learned that crime is not something that always happens at a distance, but could also occur within your immediate environment. Moreover, a criminal’s profile does not always align with one’s preconceived ideas, she says. “At times, it is ordinary people, with ordinary jobs. It is not necessarily someone that you will be able to pinpoint from a distance,” she explains.

Pieter-Louis Myburgh – an investigative journalist at *Daily Maverick*’s investigative unit, *Scorpio* – says that the stress that comes with being an investigative journalist is different from that experienced by everyday reporters. Having started out covering sports news, Myburgh never realised the underlying stress he would endure in the field of investigative journalism. “There is an added layer for investigative journalists due to the sensitivity of the things that we work on, and also just the high stakes involved, together with the possible risks,” says Myburgh.

Myburgh’s job as an investigative reporter requires him to dig deep into political figures’ dubious dealings. As a result of this, he is a walking target for some of these individuals, he says.

In 2015 Myburgh uncovered fraudulent activities that took place within the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA). He went to question the then chief executive officer (CEO), Lucky Montana, over his expenditures. During this encounter, Montana threw a brick at Myburgh, causing some damage to his corporate vehicle. “It was incidents like this that definitely made me more on guard,” Myburgh reflects.

SUPPORT FOR JOURNALISTS

SANEF recently partnered with the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) to help journalists with their mental health. “The partnership entails an SMS-line that has been created for journalists to reach out when they need help,” says Moalusi. SANEF identified the need for this support mechanism, since the stress levels that journalists work under are unbearable at times. Journalists’ mental health should be addressed and taken seriously, according to Moalusi.

Media24 also has a number of support mechanisms in place. “We use Life EHS [Employee Health Solutions] as our employee wellness programme provider. They provide free, confidential counselling to our employees and their families,” says Shelagh Goodwin, the head of human resources at Media24.

The Media24 policy on the safety of journalists requires editors to refer journalists for counselling if they have been exposed to trauma, explains Goodwin. This counselling is then focused on support in the aftermath of traumatic incidents. Media24 offers up to six free sessions per traumatic incident that a journalist experiences, but “there is no limit to the number of incidents you may receive counselling for”, adds Goodwin.

“The most important thing is that journalists, like anybody else, need a safe space to process what is going on in their lives. I help them by providing a safe space for them...a space that is completely and utterly non-judgemental and confidential,” says Freddie van Rensburg, a counsellor for the *Daily Maverick*.

Van Rensburg identified anxiety as a recurring theme when counselling journalists. This anxiety often stems from a feeling of helplessness. Journalists tend to believe that they can make a change by being a voice for the voiceless, but making a change is sometimes difficult, according to Van Rensburg. “The *Daily Maverick* team – specifically with investigative journalism – find that the wheels turn very, very slowly from exposing things to actual change happening, and they find that very frustrating, which then evokes feelings of powerlessness and helplessness,” explains Van Rensburg. The violent riots in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng during July 2021 caused a spike in panic attacks among some journalists who had to cover it, said Van Rensburg. Depression and anxiety increased significantly, he says, adding that he worked extremely hard during this time period.

HUMANISING THE NEWSROOM

The newsrooms where journalists work should be places in which there is empathy for those going through trauma, stress and anxiety, according to Burger. As news editor, Smith advises journalists to speak to their own counsellor or psychologist, or make use of the counselling services that the news agency offers.

“I will also recommend to them to take a break...go and have a coffee. To take the day off. I also advise them to talk to me and I try to give advice where I can,” says Smith. Myburgh encourages all journalists to seek support when they need it. Journalists should share their experiences with one another, he says. “When we as investigative journalists convene, we only discuss work. I think it is a good idea to discuss amongst one another the impact that our jobs have on us,” says Myburgh. **SMF**



Graphic: Marianne Francis Stewart

Suna Venter's car window after being shot at in Melville, Johannesburg. Photo: Supplied/Foeta Krige

RED CENSORED CENSORED CENSORED

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RED CENSORED CENSORED CENSORED

‘HOW MANY WARNINGS DO YOU NEED?’

“An attempt to silence, frighten or create a chilling effect on a reporter, especially by newsmakers, to try and stop the reporter from going ahead with the news report and take the sting out of their story.” This is how Mahlatse Mahlase, the group editor-in-chief of *Eyewitness News*, defines intimidation. The story of the SABC 8 is a recent example of how journalists can be intimidated for doing their jobs. *SMF* looks back at the fateful events of five years ago and reflects on how intimidation has changed since then.

By Wessel Krige

TRIGGER WARNING: THIS ARTICLE MENTIONS INTIMIDATION, PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL ASSAULT.



On Saturday 19 November 2016, Foeta Krige* – the then executive producer of Radio Sonder Grense – found his colleague, Suna Venter, tied to a tree in the Melville Koppies Nature Reserve in Johannesburg. Venter was bruised and dirty, with her legs and head tied to the tree with duct tape. The grass around her was burned.

According to *The SABC 8*, a book written by Krige, this was one of multiple acts of intimidation that he and Venter had faced since June 2016.

Krige and Venter were among eight journalists fired from the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) on 18 and 19 July 2016, according to Krige. Their dismissal was the outcome of their refusal to comply with policies set out by Hlaudi Motsoeneng – SABC chief operating officer (COO) at the time – that prohibited journalists from reporting on certain events or criticising the management of the broadcaster, says Krige.

Krige and Venter – along with Busisiwe Ntuli, Jacques Steenkamp, Krivani Pillay, Lukhanyo Calata, Thandeka Gqubule and Vuyo Mvoko – protested their dismissal and further criticised the misuse of power at the public broadcaster, says Krige.

These eight journalists, who later became known as the SABC 8, paid a price for speaking out. Each member of the eight was subjected to intimidation, ranging from death threats to kidnapping and physical violence, according to a News24 article written by Jenna Etheridge.

Although five years have passed since the events surrounding the SABC 8 occurred, threats and intimidation against journalists in general have not lessened, according to William Bird, the director of Media Monitoring Africa.

“Journalists are threatened with violence. Journalists were shot at during the recent violence in July. Where were the political parties out there, saying

[that] this is completely unacceptable?” asks Bird.

The experiences of the SABC 8 demonstrated to the public the level of intimidation that journalists face in the service of transparency. Although manifestations may have changed since 2016, intimidation remains an issue for journalists in the country today.

THE ORIGINAL EIGHT

On 23 June 2016, Krige changed his profile picture on Facebook. The black and white image shows the veteran journalist with his eyes closed, his mouth taped shut with black tape and his fingers in his ears. A day later, Venter posted a similar image of herself, covering her mouth with her hand. This was done to protest against the new policies that censored SABC journalists, according to Krige.

“In 2016, SABC COO, Hlaudi Motsoeneng, changed the editorial policy, declared himself editor-in-chief, and issued various dubious instructions to the newsroom. One was a statement which prohibited the broadcasting of any violent scenes amidst the [build-up] to the [upcoming] local elections,” explains Krige.

After objecting to having certain stories removed from their news diary, Krige, Venter and Gqubule were suspended, says Krige. They were soon joined by Pillay, Ntuli, Steenkamp, Mvoko and Calata, who also criticised the SABC, according to Krige. All eight members were fired between 18 and 19 July 2016, according to a News24 article published on 19 July 2016.

“Before the disciplinary action was completed, all eight of us received letters of termination of employment. Four of us [Krige, Pillay, Steenkamp and Venter] won a labour court ruling [on 26 July 2016], with the court instructing our employer to reinstate us,” says Krige via email correspondence to SMF.

Krige tells SMF that the threats began after the issue of their dismissal was taken to the Constitutional Court of South Africa.

“I received approximately 14 SMS-threats – some of them death threats. Gmail correspondence between us and our legal team was intercepted, and Suna’s car was broken into in front of our front door while our family was giving her refuge for the night,” says Krige.

One of the threatening messages Krige received read, “Still yet you continue with your



Foeta Krige's Facebook profile picture on 23 June 2016.
Photo: Supplied/Jamaine Krige



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destabilizing [sic] today. How many warnings do you need?"

Calata, who now works as the programme editor for e.tv News and Sport, says that he also received threats that made him worry for his family.

"I was deeply worried for my wife, and I was worried for my son, who was three years old at the time," says Calata.

Despite this, Calata – son of apartheid activist and member of the Cradock Four, Fort Calata – says he was not worried for his own life. He continued to use public transport, despite being threatened with death.

"Coming from the family that I come from... the fact is that death isn't anything new. For me, it was like, 'What's the worst that they can do to me? To kill me for standing up for something that I believe in – literally for history to repeat itself?' Much like my father, I stood up for something that I believed in," says Calata.

SUNA VENTER

While all the members of the SABC 8 received threats, both by phone and in public, it was Suna Venter who endured the worst forms of intimidation, according to Krige. It is speculated that she was heavily targeted because she was the only woman in the group who was single, or due to her role as an envoy between the SABC 8 and their legal team, according to Krige.

Venter's car and flat were broken into, her car brakes were cut, and she was violently assaulted on multiple occasions, says Krige.

"On her way back [from an interview], at an intersection at Melville Koppies, her windscreen was shattered by what the police believe were ceramic bullets from a paint gun," recounts Krige.

Following this incident, Venter was kidnapped and tied to a tree in Melville Koppies, close to the Westpark cemetery, according to Krige's book.

The stress of the attacks and the continued death threats she received took a toll on Venter, causing her to develop takotsubo cardiomyopathy or "broken heart syndrome". This weakened the muscles around her heart, according to Glenda Daniels, in her book *Power and Loss in South African Journalism: News in the age of social media*.

In spite of this, Venter remained valiant in

her efforts to fight against her intimidators, according to Calata.

"She was the feistiest one out of all of us," says Calata. "She was the most militant. She was relentless, and I think she understood our cause a lot better than most of us. She always felt that we constantly needed to be doing this. She was a lovely person."

The following year, on Thursday 29 June 2017, Venter's body was discovered in her flat, according to Krige's book. Her death was reportedly caused by her cardiomyopathy.

THE NEWSROOM AFTER 2017

The experiences of the SABC 8 showed that journalists can be intimidated not only by those outside of their organisation, but also those within the newsroom, according to Bird.

"I think that one of the things that made it so sinister at the SABC, was that generally these things come from outside, whereas that intimidation clearly came from within the newsroom, or was driven by people in the newsroom," says Bird.

Krige corroborates Bird's statement, noting that he believes that this form of intimidation goes unnoticed sometimes and comes at a great cost for journalists.

"Intimidation can also come from within an organisation or the newsroom where management pushes certain agendas – political or otherwise. This can lead to self-censorship or the loss of objectivity in exchange for job security," explains Krige.

Intimidation can also be employed by external entities, such as businesses and communities, according to Pontsho Pilane, a health journalist at *Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism*.

"I was doing a little digging on a quote-unquote pharmaceutical company that produces supplements. All of a sudden I was getting calls from very senior people within the organisation, who knew intimidating, intimate details about my life and what I do outside of my work," says Pilane. "It wasn't overt intimidation, but I think I was being intimidated [by them saying] that they know more about me than I know about them."

Since 2017, however, the rise of social media has caused drastic changes to the intimidation methods used to target journalists, according to Bird.

"If you look at some of the dreadful things

that they did to the members of the SABC 8, a lot of that relied on old-style techniques, from physical threats to breaking into homes," says Bird. "Now, the nature of intimidation becomes one where you make [journalists] the subject of a disinformation campaign, which of course isn't about a physical threat, but about their integrity and credibility. It tends to become a lot closer to something like psychological warfare."

The use of social media in the intimidation of journalists has become an alarming trend, according to Mahlatse Mahlase, the group editor-in-chief of *Eyewitness News*.

"Currently, the one method that is being used is using social media, in particular Twitter, to try and intimidate journalists – basically people threatening you with your life. We've had women journalists being threatened with rape [or] people saying they would like to find your home, just in an effort to silence you," says Mahlase.

The sexual harassment of reporters while they are on the scene, doing their job, is also recurring, according to Pilane.

"I've even had government officials harass me while doing my work, and so sexual harassment is a really big part of the intimidation I face as a woman journalist in this country," says Pilane.

THE WAY FORWARD

While the intimidation of journalists is still very prevalent, Pilane believes that there is hope, and that journalists are speaking up more.

"We're not only having these conversations in my newsrooms with our closest confidants or colleagues around intimidation, but we're talking about it openly," says Pilane. "Journalists don't stand for intimidation anymore."

When asked what advice he would give to young journalists facing intimidation, Krige encourages them to not stay quiet.

"Go public. Speak to your editors and management. Inform SANEF [the South African National Editors' Forum]. If your life is threatened, go to the police. Get politicians involved, especially the opposition parties, and stay safe," advises Krige. **SMF**

***DISCLAIMER: THE WRITER OF THIS ARTICLE, WESSEL KRIGE, IS A RELATIVE OF FOETA KRIGE.**

Om 'n storie te vang

'n Kortkortverhaal

Elke oggend daal ek uit my dakkamer na benede om met woord en water my brood te verdien. Ek fokus op die doel voor oë. Ek karring al die waarhede om en staan dan terug om te kyk watter na bo skif en watter swaar onstuimighede soos drome na die bodem sink.

Die ligtes skep ek maklik af. Dis dié op die bodem wat gevis en na die oppervlak gebring moet word. Dit is met hulle dat ek op loop moet gaan. Húl stemme wat ek tot in die woud moet volg, of tot by die wal waar die waters druis. Of tot in die kombuise en badkamers en gange en stegies waar die skimme hul waarhede en leuens bekonkel en bewaar.

Op pad moet ek wegstrem vir troppe drawwers wat van voor op my toesak. Vir konstruksietrokke, fietsryers, slote, graspolle, vlermuise, rondloperhonde, onverskrokke motoriste.

Ek draf een vir een agter elke stukkie ongemak aan totdat ek sy aard begin vermoed. Ek klop aan elke deur. Ek loer by vensters in. Ek lig klippe op, klim in bome, kyk in vullisdromme, besigtig die blaarveër se afval. Hoe langer ek volhou, hoe duideliker kan ek die oorsprong van die onraad sien deurskemer en dan noukeurig naspur.

Ek kom nie sonder skaafmerke en skrape daarvan af nie. Soms is die wond tot op die been sodat ek die wit van my oë daarin sien glim voordat ek die nerwe voel vonk.

Soms skrou die voëls in die woud opeens so hard dat ek die fluister nie meer kan volg nie.

Soms begin die gety stoot en die water raak troebel.

Soms, wanneer ek die swaarste stukke uit die droesem lig, gluur hulle my in die oë. Hulle spoeg vonke en slym. Hulle vervloek my. Verlei my. Tart my. Koggel my. Dan moet ek hulle blitsig om die nek gryp en tem. Of bloots op die naaste een se rug spring voordat hy aan't draf gaan na waar sy gode skuil – daar kan ek heul met die slinkstes en my vrae voor hulle staanmaak.

Die antwoorde verpak ek in netjiese, bondige sinne. Ek skaaf die rondings en span die lyntjies styf sodat hulle soos snare sing wanneer ek daaraan pluk. Ek luister toe-oog om te hoor of dit saam met die stemvurk vibreer.

Dan knoop ek daar 'n lint om en stuur dit die niet in. SMF

Deur Anneli Groenewald

Rykie van Reenen-genoot aan die
Universiteit Stellenbosch se departement
joernalistiek



Anneli Groenewald. Foto: Sibulela Bolarinwa

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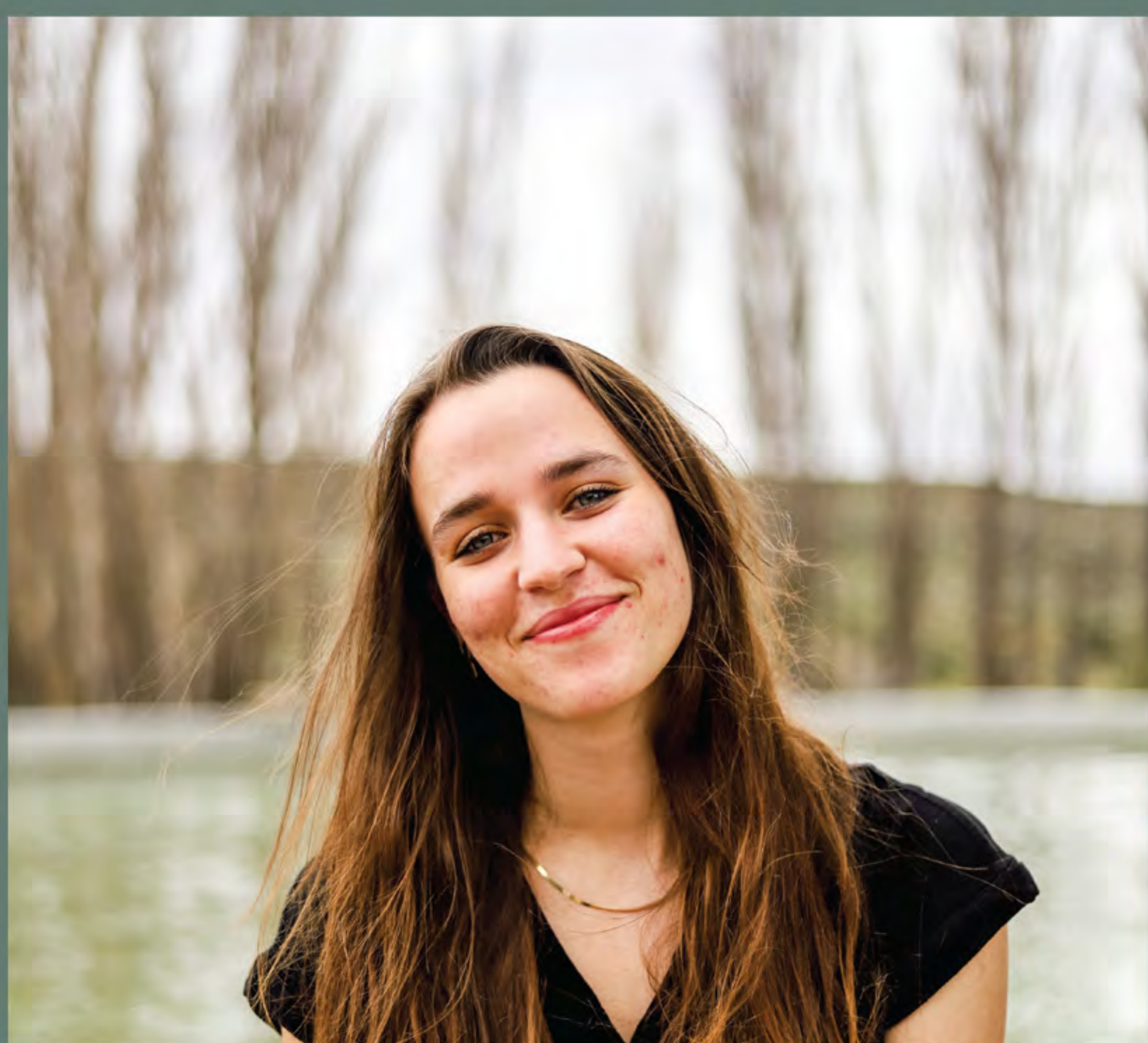
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