

A photograph of a destroyed building with a fire burning in the foreground and two people standing in the background. The scene is dark and smoky, with a bright orange fire in the center. The background shows a hazy, orange-tinted sky. The foreground is filled with debris and charred remains. The overall mood is somber and chaotic.

STATE OF THE NEWSROOM 2018

STRUCTURED UNSTRUCTURED

**A Wits Journalism Project
Edited by Alan Finlay**



This issue of *State of the Newsroom* is dedicated to Raymond Louw (1926-2019), a veteran of journalism and life-long voice for media freedoms.

EDITORIAL

Editor and lead researcher: Alan Finlay

Content advisory group: Anton Harber, Indra de Lanerolle, Bob Wekesa, Kevin Davie, Lesley Cowling, Lizeka Mda, Susan van Zyl

For Wits Journalism: Professor Franz Krüger

Production, design and layout: Irwin Manoim

Proofreading: Lizeka Mda

Additional research: Gemma Gatticchi

PHOTOGRAPHY

All photographs by GroundUp used in this issue of *State of the Newsroom* are published under the Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International Licence.

DONORS

Thanks to our donors and other contributors: *fesmedia* Africa, The Press Council and the South African National Editors' Forum.

COVER PHOTOGRAPH

A hazardous profession. News photographers reflected in the broken windows of a damaged shack at Siqalo informal settlement near Mitchells Plain, after a protest for better services turned violent on 2 May 2018. Enlarged detail from a photograph by Ashraf Hendricks/GroundUp.

Electronic copy available at: www.journalism.co.za



UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

WITS
Journalism



29



39



52

Contents

2 Preface — *Franz Krüger*

3 Introduction — *Alan Finlay*

5 NEWSROOM IN REVIEW

Fallout from state capture, retrenchments ongoing, yet more turmoil at the SABC — *Alan Finlay*

12 INDICATORS

Declining circulation, steady broadcast audiences, threats to the media

IN FOCUS

17 LEFT OUT IN THE COLD

Retrenched journalists pushed into the “gig” economy with little institutional support — *Glenda Daniels*

27 GETTING BACK TO THE FUTURE

Can the SABC save itself by cutting jobs? — *Dimitri Martinis*

38 VULNERABILITIES AND SILENCES

Are the risks faced by journalists working in South Africa taken seriously by newsrooms? — *Alan Finlay*

INSIDE ANGLE

50 HIGHS AND LOWS OF INVESTIGATIONS

A fresh approach is needed to drive investigative reporting in South Africa — *Anton Harber*

52 MEDIA AND STATE CAPTURE

We still have a lot to learn about how the media covered the state capture saga — *Emeka Umejei*

57 PRESS COUNCIL REPORT

Causing unnecessary public harm — *Latiefa Mobara and Johan Retief*

60 APPENDICES

Preface: Another tumultuous year

FRANZ KRÜGER

STATE OF THE NEWSROOM
IS AN ATTEMPT TO BE
ACADEMICALLY
RIGOROUS WHILE ALSO
BEING ACCESSIBLE TO
A WIDER PUBLIC

The year 2018 was again tumultuous for the South African media. There were further job losses in print and an apparent avalanche of inquiries of various kinds, while political attacks lessened somewhat in the wake of a change of guard in the ruling ANC. Investigative journalists rightly claimed considerable credit for shifting the political discussion, but some also had to admit major missteps. These are some of the markers on the terrain traversed by this new edition of our *State of the Newsroom* report, presented by Wits Journalism. It is the fifth edition, chronicling the year's ups and downs and presenting a few deeper dives into specific issues.

This year, we have added some new elements to the mix. For one thing, we introduce a set of indicators – a selection of statistical insights that highlight important trends. They include audience trends in the different media, key numbers which show the much discussed decline in print, for instance. We intend to make this a regular feature in order to enable readers to track some of the big trends over time.

We have also added some commentary pieces by people who have thought deeply about some specific issues facing the media. Again, this is intended to become a regular feature of the report. This year, we include reflections on the state of ethics in print journalism and on the successes and failures of investigative journalism, among others.

Finally, we hope you enjoy the more polished look we have developed for the report.

As before, *State of the Newsroom* is an attempt to be academically rigorous while also being accessible to a wider public. It is no longer feasible for a university-based journalism programme to lose itself in purely academic research. With the media environment changing so quickly, programmes like ours need to be deeply embedded in the professional world and be prepared for constant adaptation and change. This approach has always been central to our programme at Wits. Our teaching is focused on both practical skills and the ability to reflect critically on the practice of journalism, coupled with a strong emphasis on core journalistic values. While we continue to teach young people wanting to enter the profession, a growing aspect of our teaching programme reaches people already working who want to upskill in an uncertain job market, and “accidental journalists”, people who want a particular skill to use in a range of different fields. Increasingly, we support innovative journalism and are involved in direct experimentation of different forms.

We hope you enjoy this snapshot of South African journalism. Work is already beginning on the 2019 edition, and we welcome feedback and suggestions on aspects we should be highlighting. We believe the strength of the report builds over time, and its regular publication creates a rich narrative of a changing landscape.

A word of thanks must go to everyone who worked on this report, particularly Alan Finlay, the lead researcher and editor, who spent many hours working with various writers to hone their contributions. Many others played a role, and are acknowledged elsewhere. We are particularly grateful to Fesmedia, the media programme of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, who again supported aspects of the research.

Introduction: Taking a hard look

ALAN FINLAY

In past issues of *State of the Newsroom* we suggested that there was a gradual dissolution of “the newsroom” as we know it – largely due to the proliferation of the internet, the everyday news diet for many South Africans has changed, coming from multiple formal and informal sources. Particularly in times of crises and controversy, social media, for example, can serve as an immediate news feed, providing us with much more up-to-date information, much closer to the source of the news, than newspapers or even radio can. So much was evident during the recent #FeesMustFall protests, where students and academics were reporting “live” from the front lines of the protests. Newsrooms were in many cases caught off guard, following the news that had already broken.

This *State of the Newsroom* points to real shifts in the industry that suggest an ongoing weakening of the what we think of as the traditional newsroom. Newspaper circulation is still on its downward spiral, with a few titles looking as if they might not make it. Retrenchments in both broadcast and print remained a feature in 2018, most dramatically in the announcement by the SABC that it intended to shed over 980 jobs, about a third of these from its news division. Online news sites appear to be robust, but HuffPost SA could not make its business model work, blaming a lack of advertising revenue that has reportedly disappeared to Google and Facebook.

How long will the newspapers we consider as an inevitable part of our media landscape survive – and if so, will we still think of them in the same way? While Independent Media’s future is unclear, the *Sunday Times* suffered a serious blow to its reputation in 2018 when investigative stories it had published were discredited. Independent Media – publisher of institutionalised metropolitan titles such as *The Star*, *Cape Times* and *The Mercury* – has reputation problems of its own, with the repeated use of its newspapers as a public relations frontpiece for its owner, rather than reporting the news.

In this issue, Anton Harber suggests that fewer media houses are doing the hard work of investigative journalism, if contributions to the Taco Kuiper Awards are anything to go by. Donors are now supporting some of the most important journalism happening in South Africa – the investigative work of amaBhungane, amongst other projects such as GroundUp and the long-standing Health-e News. This is not a bad thing, but it does point to deficiencies in our commercial newsrooms.

It is not just skills that leave the door when retrenchments proceed, it’s hard-won experience too; and what gets damaged in the process is the public’s trust in journalism, something that the neglect of simple journalist responsibilities exacerbates. As The Press Council’s Latiefa Mobarra and Johan Retief write in this issue, the right to reply and “turning a question mark into an exclamation mark”, are two things journalists are getting wrong, with serious, real-life implications. Emeka Umejei meanwhile echoes calls for more nuance in the treatment of the news by the media, and argues that a lack of nuance is what makes the media vulnerable to third-party agendas. The implication is that nuance – reporting the difficult story – rather than

NEWSPAPER CIRCULATION IS STILL ON ITS DOWNWARDS SPIRAL, WITH A FEW TITLES LOOKING AS IF THEY MIGHT NOT MAKE IT. RETRENCHMENTS IN BOTH BROADCAST AND PRINT REMAINED A FEATURE

OUR ARTICLE ON
JOURNALIST SAFETY AND
VULNERABILITY IS A CALL
FOR EDITORS TO TAKE
MORE TIME AND
THOUGHT IN PLANNING
ASSIGNMENTS, TO
PROPERLY CONSIDER THE
RISKS JOURNALISTS FACE
BOTH IN THE NEWSROOM
AND ON THE BEAT

sensationalism or the thirst for a dramatic headline, is part of the public interest responsibility of the press. The news might look a lot quieter, but it will be more reliable.

What's going on at the SABC doesn't help allay the general *zeitgeist* of uncertainty. In his analysis of the SABC Dimitri Martinis says that the broadcaster is in an impossible situation. Its turnaround strategy appears to be on another roundabout. The broadcaster faces probably insurmountable debt, has its digital future on hold, and does not appear to know what skills it will need to make the changes it needs. Some say job cuts are the only answer; others ask how this is possible if the broadcaster has no clear idea of its capacity needs. It's worth considering how committed to the news journalists in its news division must feel not knowing if they will have a job in a year's time.

As Glenda Daniels writes in a summary of her research into job losses in the industry, many retrenched journalists go into the gig economy, including doing public relations, scratching out an odd-jobs living. But her research also showed how unsupported journalists are when they lose their jobs – they are often treated shoddily by employers, while unions have little influence outside of the SABC. Meanwhile the freelancers' association Safrea needs to reinvent itself to respond properly to the new reality of unemployed journalists who need a voice.

Journalists on the job face a different kind of vulnerability, unrelated to their next pay cheque. Journalism can be a dangerous job: In 2018 three reporters were seriously injured covering service delivery protests outside Eersterust, Pretoria. While journalists in KwaZulu-Natal appear to be working in a particularly hostile environment, journalists are attacked online, and there are attempts by political parties and groups to intimidate them into silence that can't be taken lightly. The affidavits for the court action by five journalists against the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in 2018 make for important reading on how these kinds of intimidation tactics work, and the negative impact they have on the personal and professional lives of those affected.

Moreover, as one of the journalists, Adriaan Basson, described in his affidavit, the intimidation tactics have a knock-on effect on the confidence of journalists generally: "As an editor, I am equally worried about the impact that [EFF leader] Mr Malema's comments may be having on young journalists who attend his press conferences and his political party events. It is likely that they may fear to ask critical questions of the party when they see the viciousness of his attacks on senior journalists."

With the pressure on fewer journalists to do more to make the news, our article on journalist safety and vulnerability is a call for editors to take more time and thought in planning assignments, to properly consider the risks journalists face both in the newsroom and on the beat.

In Daniels' write-up of her survey, the observation is made that the "industrial age" of journalism is shrinking. While something of what we know of as "the media" will remain – a lot now feels unsettled. Will our media landscape look the same in 10 years' time? What will remain, and what will change, what will shatter, and what will disappear entirely? We have called this issue of *State of the Newsroom* "structured/unstructured" to try and capture this uncertainty.

Newsroom in review: 2018

ALAN FINLAY



Yesterday's circulation winners, the *Daily Sun* and *City Press*, were among many whose sales have dropped by a third and more over the past three years

The year was marked by the fallout from the state capture project, seriously damaging the reputation of one Sunday paper and resulting in what seems like the inevitable demise of a news channel and newspaper. Retrenchments in the sector continued, as media titles in print and online battled to attract advertisers. While the ghost of the apartheid regime's propaganda campaign reared its ugly head, the SABC continued to struggle to turn its ship around, insisting it needed to cut jobs to stay afloat, but ending up rudderless by the end of the year instead.

JOB CUTS, RESTRUCTURING, CLOSURES

The spectre of job losses tightened its grip on the sector in 2018, as low advertising revenue took its toll on print and online titles and restructuring in the industry continued. Newspaper circulation continued its downward trend across the board, with the top-selling daily, the *Daily Sun*, dropping about 20% in circulation from last year. Amongst the weekend papers a similar decline was seen

in the circulation of *City Press*, while the number of copies of the Sunday Sun on the stands dropped by nearly a third. Uncertainty was also felt in the broadcast sector as mass retrenchments at the SABC were announced, and the licence for the 24-hour news channel Afro Worldview was not renewed.

In July 2018 Media24 and HuffPost said that they had decided to end their partnership and with that the news site's licence to publish in South Africa. The two had launched HuffPost SA in November 2016. Although its 1.63-million unique users made HuffPost SA the ninth biggest news site in South Africa, Media24 said that advertising revenues had remained "challenging".¹ The website's inability to attract enough advertising revenue to ensure its long-term sustainability despite a strong readership was met with concern in the sector, with some commentators blaming the impact of platforms such as Google and Facebook on online adspend in South Africa.²

In October 2018 Independent Media announced restructuring and further retrenchments – although the exact number of employees to lose their jobs remained

unclear at that point. One report suggested that over 40 people would be affected.³ Employees that remained could also face a reduction in salaries. In its Section 189 notice to staff, Independent Media stated the reasons for the retrenchments as “constant pressure on the media industry, with declining revenues, increasing costs, and the continued competition by overseas technology platforms”.⁴ The restructuring was expected to be completed by the end of December.

The fallout from the exposure of state capture continued to be felt in 2018, both in the broadcast sector and in print. The foray into media ownership by former government spokesperson Mzwanele Manyi came to an abrupt end in 2018. In June it was announced that the broadsheet *Afro Voice* (formerly *The New Age*) would shut down at the end of that month, less than a year after its acquisition.

Manyi had bought *The New Age*, together with the news channel ANN7, from the Gupta brothers, businessmen who had been shown to be instrumental architects in the country’s state capture project. Staff at the paper were said to be shocked by the sudden announcement of the closure, which, like HuffPost SA, was attributed to low advertising revenue. About 350 employees were reported to be affected.⁵

Meanwhile the contract for Afro Worldview – the new name for ANN7 – to broadcast on DStv expired on 20 August, resulting in the retrenchment of hundreds more employees.⁶ Multichoice had already decided in January not to renew the contract with Afro Worldview when the contractual arrangement struck with ANN7 in 2013 came to an end. It had also launched an investigation into wrongdoing in its dealings with the news channel. Manyi was informed that he would have to re-bid for the licence alongside other competitors to command the broadcast space allocated to a black-owned news channel.

Although the investigation found no evidence of corruption, Multichoice was criticised for being self-serving, and did not make its final report public. Multichoice said it had made “mistakes” in negotiations with ANN7, including a R25-million payment to the channel.⁷ The payment, together with accusations that Multichoice sought to pay the SABC some R100-million for political influence over digital migration, had led to allegations that it was part of

the state capture project. Multichoice said, however, that the failure lay in its managers not doing proper due diligence nor raising concerns they had with ANN7 when these came to light.

Meanwhile the magazine trade continued to battle its own difficulties. In December Ndalo Media, owner of magazine titles such as *Elle*, *Destiny* and *Destiny Man*, announced it was shutting down. It was said to owe printers some R13-million, and staff had not been paid. Ndalo Media was considered the only “black-owned premium magazine publisher in the country”.⁸

NEW BLACK-OWNED NEWS CHANNEL

Multichoice received some 60 bids for the news channel slot following the decision not to renew Afro Worldview’s licence. The winning bidder was announced in August 2018 as Newzroom Afrika, a 100% black-owned company with a 50% female equity stake. Its directors Thokozani Nkosi, who ran a production company, and Thabile Ng-



A confident Mzwanele Manyi, former Zuma-era government 'spin doctor', bought the Gupta news channel ANN7, renaming it Afro Worldview. He also bought the Gupta newspaper *The New Age*, renaming it *AfroVoice*. His media ownership ambitions lasted only a few months, putting hundreds of staff on the streets

wato, a former producer and news anchor at the SABC, said it had put “digital at the heart” of its vision for the channel.⁹ The channel said that Afro Worldview staffers would be prioritised in its recruitment process. The channel launched in May 2019.

SABC: TURNING AROUND, AGAIN, AGAIN....

It was another difficult year for the public broadcaster, following an auspicious start with the appointment of new executives, seasoned journalists, and rebranding in the news division. Chris Maroleng¹⁰ was appointed permanent chief operating officer in January, and Phathiswa Magopeni as the group executive of news and current affairs the following month. The group chief executive officer, Madoda Mxakwe, and chief financial officer, Yolande van Biljon, were both appointed in July 2018. Journalist and political commentator Stephen Grootes, talk-show host and author Redi Tlhabi¹¹ – both well-known personalities



The SABC reports on the resignation of four of its own board members

from the Primedia stable – and investigative journalist and former Carte Blanche anchor Bongani Bingwa joined the SABC news division.

In June 2018, as part of its efforts to rebuild public trust after years under the reign of former-COO Hlaudi Motsoeneng, the SABC launched two commissions of inquiry into its affairs: one into editorial interference in its news division between 2012 and 2018, and the other into sexual harassment at the broadcaster.

The inquiry into editorial interference – by political and commercial interests, and, somewhat surprisingly, NGO pressure groups – was headed by then executive director of the Press Council, Joe Thloloe. Then acting-CEO Nomsa

Philiso said the inquiry was not a “witch hunt”, but that it was “absolutely key that the integrity of news is beyond question”. “We want to start by saying that we are in the phase of renewal, we are in the phase of fixing, and this is one of the things we are starting to do as we go into the road of recovery,” she said.¹²

However, a decision to hold the inquiry behind closed doors was slammed by media activists, with Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) filing an urgent court application to force it to be open to the public. An out-of-court agreement was reached that submissions by the broadcaster’s board members and senior executives, as well as those by outside groups such as political parties, would be open to the public. The submissions by staff members and whistleblowers would remain protected – an assurance given at the start of the inquiry process. Political parties were amongst those that made submissions at the inquiry, which by the end of 2018 had yet to be concluded.

The inquiry into sexual harassment at the broadcaster – which was chaired by development worker and gender activist Barbara Watson – was not limited to employees, but included investigating allegations of harassment of freelancers, service providers, and even “youngsters who [had] aspirations to be in [the] business”.¹³

The inquiry was finalised by November 2018, and found that managers – including staff working in human resources – had covered up cases of sexual harassment at the broadcaster. It found that: “[The SABC staff] demonstrated a serious lack of knowledge and understanding of human rights statutes, gender relations and issues of power relations between men and women.”¹⁴

Alleged perpetrators of sexual harassment were suspended the following month.

The severely cash-strapped broadcaster presented its turnaround strategy to parliament in September 2018. It told the communications portfolio committee that its rescue strategy included growing its audience base, diversifying its revenue streams, and “aggressive” cost containment.¹⁵ Both advertising (accounting for 85% of its revenue) and licence fees (12%) were key revenue streams – but in the case of advertising the broadcaster was failing to attract a competitive share despite high audience numbers. It said about 1.8-million households and businesses with TVs paid their TV licences – only 20% of the number of licence holders listed on its database. It told the committee that the salary costs at the broadcaster were high due to

irregular salary increases made during Motsoeneng's time at the helm. The broadcaster, whose wage bill accounted for over 40% of its operating expenses, had already started engaging with unions on retrenchments at the broadcaster, and had sent an internal memo to staff on the matter.

In late October the SABC publicly announced its intention to lay off staff at the broadcaster saying that it would retrench 981 employees – about a third of them from the news division – while also cutting the lifeline of a further 1200 freelancers. It claimed that by March 2019 it would not be able to pay employee salaries. The action was quickly opposed by unions who threatened to shut down the SABC if the retrenchments went ahead. The broadcaster's plans were also criticised by members of parliament who called for a skills audit to be conducted at the broadcaster first. The recently appointed communications minister Stella Ndabeni-Abrahams was said to have threatened to report the board to President Cyril Ramaphosa if it went ahead with the job cuts, a move that in turn was criticised by the civil society watchdog SOS Coalition as a potentially unlawful interference in the affairs at the broadcaster.

In November, SABC executives appeared before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa) and said that the public broadcaster needed a R3-billion government guarantee to avoid financial collapse. Scopa heard that the SABC was R1.3-billion in debt.¹⁶

The pressure on the retrenchment plans reportedly contributed to the resignation of four board members – Mathatha Tsedu, John Matisonn, Khanyisile Kweyama and Krish Naidoo – towards the end of 2018. Tsedu said that the board was not being supported in its efforts to turn the broadcaster around. It was speculated that the clash with Ndabeni-Abrahams over the retrenchments had played its part. The resignations left the board without a decision-making quorum.¹⁷ In January 2019, the SABC officially announced that the retrenchment plans had been put on hold and that a skills audit would be conducted at the broadcaster.

CORRUPTION IN THE BROADCAST SECTOR

The Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture (Zondo Commission) began its hearings in Johannesburg on 20 August 2018. The commission had

been set up by former president Jacob Zuma in January, and tasked with investigating and making recommendations into any allegations of state capture, corruption and fraud in the public sector. In September MMA, together with the SOS Coalition submitted a joint statement to the commission asking for the extent of state capture in the broadcasting sector to be investigated. It said in a statement that the effects of state capture were being felt at the SABC, including “financial mismanagement, abuse of corporate governance, corruption, editorial interference, sexual harassment and threats to journalists”. “We believe that the commission needs to also uncover the complexities of seemingly corrupt practices involving the SABC, Multichoice, ANN7, the Department of Communication and former Minister Faith Muthambi in particular,” it said.¹⁸ By the end of the year, however, it remained unclear whether this would become part of the commission's remit.



New communications minister Stella Ndabeni-Abrahams was said to have threatened to report the SABC board over job cuts

FRONT PAGE LIES

The reputation of the country's biggest weekend paper, the *Sunday Times*, came under strain in October 2018 after three investigative stories that had appeared in the paper over a period of eight years were discredited. They included stories on a “rogue unit” at the South African Revenue Service (Sars), a police “death squad” operating in Cato Manor in KwaZulu-Natal, and a story on the illegal deportation or “rendition” of Zimbabweans to their home country where they would face execution.

The political fallout from the reports had been far-reaching, including senior executives resigning from Sars, and the establishment of an inquiry into tax administration and governance at the revenue service. Criminal charges had been laid against a number of people implicated in the



Poster advertising the controversial *Winnie* documentary, above. Journalist Thandeka Gqubule, below, hits back at accusations made in the documentary

stories, while others had lost their jobs or been suspended.

Two journalists who had written the reports resigned, while two others had earlier left the paper. In the paper's apology, *Sunday Times* editor Bongani Siqoko – who was not editor of the paper when the stories were published – said that a “parallel political project” had used the paper to undermine democracy, attack state institutions and target individuals that were “seen as obstacles to [the] project”.¹⁹

The apology resulted in some controversy, not least because it came after a meeting between the Hawks and the paper, and included a direct apology to former KwaZulu-Natal Hawks head Johan Booysen. Ray Hartley, the editor at the time of the publication of two of the stories, also criticised Siqoko for misrepresenting the articles.²⁰

“STRATCOM”

The 2017 documentary *Winnie* that dealt with the life of struggle icon Winnie Madikizela-Mandela premiered for the first time on public television in South Africa in April 2018. The interest in the documentary resulted in some controversy on the secret role of journalists in supporting the apartheid regime through Stratcom – the name of the apartheid state's covert disinformation campaign. In *Winnie*, the former head of Stratcom, Vic McPherson, alleged that 40 journalists were either directly or indirectly working for the apartheid government.

He said the journalists were involved in a smear campaign against Madikizela-Mandela – a revelation he first made at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1997.²¹ Then he said articles critical of Madikizela-Mandela had been placed in order to discredit the ANC in a number of prominent British newspapers, and in *Vanity Fair* in the United States.

The controversy was partly the result of poor editorial decision-making at HuffPost SA, which on 4 April, two days after the death of Madikizela-Mandela, posted an extract from the documentary with McPherson's comments, together with an excerpt from its own interview with Madikizela-Mandela that it had conducted when the documentary

was first screened in 2017. In the interview she specifically mentioned the alternative tabloid *Weekly Mail* as being so critical of the ANC and of her that it “actually did the job for Stratcom”.²² This, despite the fact that the *Weekly Mail* had been instrumental in exposing numerous covert apartheid dirty tricks and programmes, including Stratcom.

She singled out then co-editor of the *Weekly Mail* Anton Harber, and then journalist at the newspaper Thandeka Gqubule in her comments. It was a moment for political opportunism for some, who read Madikizela-Mandela's comments as an insinuation that the journalists at the *Weekly Mail* were part of the Stratcom programme. This included the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) which put out a statement threatening to reveal the names of the 40 journalists and accusing Harber and Gqubule of being Stratcom spies.

The HuffPost SA video was soon taken down, with commentators calling for clear-headed discussion on any alle-

gations of the role of journalists in propping up the apartheid state. Meanwhile the EFF was being taken to court by Gqubule and Harber, in order to press the political party to retract its allegations that they were Stratcom spies, or to pay R1-million in damages. The two had filed Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) application at the police and defence departments to clear their names. The documents revealed that Stratcom had in fact been spying on Gqubule.

“BULLFIGHT” AFTER FAILED LISTING BY STRUGGLING INDEPENDENT GROUP

The future of cash-strapped Independent Media was uncertain after then finance minister Nhlanhla Nene told parliament in July that the Public Investment Corporation (PIC) had started to wind-down its 25% equity stake in Independent Media. Independent Media also defaulted on a R253-million payment due to PIC in August for a loan to the media group.²³

The news came just months after the failed attempt by the media group to list Sagarmatha Technologies on the JSE, which it blamed on a smear campaign by its competitor Tiso Blackstar. Sagarmatha Technologies had been set up as an umbrella company to media boss Iqbal Survé’s various media interests. The listing of Sagarmatha, due for April 13, was halted by the Johannesburg Stock Exchange after the company failed to meet a listing condition.

It had also not managed to secure a R3-billion investment in Sagarmatha from the PIC, which it claimed had been “unduly” pressurised by journalists working at Tiso Blackstar, the website Daily Maverick, and amaBhungane. A week after the failed listing – and the same month as the HuffPost SA Stratcom controversy erupted – Independent Media published front-page stories in its newspapers accusing the journalists of a “dirty tricks campaign similar to those employed by Stratcom during the apartheid era”²⁴

What was described as a “bull fight”²⁵ between the two media companies involved the financial transparency of Independent Media, with the PIC, with troubles of its own, at the centre. The PIC, which had invested in several South

African media companies, had a 25% stake in Independent Media and just short of a 11% shareholding in Tiso Blackstar.²⁶

While Survé claimed in a column that Tiso Blackstar wanted to “consolidate the newspapers of the two businesses” and had “surreptitiously” lobbied for this, in October Tiso Blackstar put out a statement that the PIC had approached it to discuss the possibility of it helping with the management of titles owned by Independent Media.²⁷ The PIC was apparently also concerned about Independent Media’s ability to repay its loan to Survé when he acquired Independent Media. In October the PIC put out a statement denying the Tiso claims, and appealed for an end to the public feud between the two groups.²⁸

Meanwhile in August President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that a commission of inquiry into the PIC would be launched to determine the truth of “alleged improprieties” at the asset manager.²⁹ This followed numerous media reports published since 2017 detailing governance and financial management irregularities at the PIC. The Commission of inquiry into allegations of impropriety regarding Public Investment Corporation commenced with public hearings in January 2019.



Independent Media’s Iqbal Survé ... feuds with Tiso Blackstar *Ashraf Hendricks, Ground Up*

PRICE-FIXING

In February the Competition Commission announced that 28 media companies would be referred to the Competition Tribunal after a probe that started in 2011 found evidence of price-fixing and fixing of trade conditions. These included the SABC, Primedia and the *Mail & Guardian*. The Competition Commission said that Independent Media, Caxton and DSTv had already admitted to the charges and agreed to pay penalties totalling more than R30-million, as well as contributions to the Economic Development Fund (EDF).³⁰

The commission had found that the media companies had colluded on advertising discounts and payment terms for members of the Media Credit Co-ordinators (MCC), who were given a 16.5% discount compared to the 15% offered non-members.

DIGITAL TERRESTRIAL TELEVISION UPDATE

The planned switchover from analogue to digital terrestrial television (DTT) in the Free State was pushed forward to the end of February 2019 after the department of

communications delayed its 31 December deadline for the switchover in the province. The Free State will be the first province in the country to migrate to digital, followed by the Northern Cape. The department said that it wanted to give Free State residents more time to register for set-top boxes that were subsidised by the government. It said 75% of households with a television had already registered for set-top boxes in the province. The digital migration in South Africa was now expected to be completed by mid-2020 after the country missed a 2015 deadline by the International Telecommunication Union to migrate to digital.³¹

CHANGES AT THE PRESS COUNCIL

The year 2018 saw the retirement of the executive director of the Press Council, Joe Thloloe, and the resignation of Press Ombud Johan Retief, who had worked at the council for close to 10 years. Changes to the Press Code were also made: the definition of sexual violence was expanded to include sexual harassment and intimidation, while the definition of hate speech was brought in line with the constitution's definition.

As the Press Council writes in its summary of rulings in this year's *State of the Newsroom*, the Press Code now "addresses the intent to cause harm, incitement of violence, advocacy of hatred and propaganda for war, and excludes mere hurtful speech". Meanwhile the council said that 533 complaints were received in 2018, and that of 108 adjudicated cases, 51 were dismissed and 51 upheld.

END NOTES

- 1 Staff report. (2018/07/16) Media24 And HuffPost To End Partnership In South Africa/ HuffPost. https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2018/07/16/media24-and-huffpost-to-end-partnership-in-south-africa_a_23482888/
- 2 Nevill G. (2018/7/17) HuffPost SA: Advertiser support simply couldn't scale to levels the business plan demanded. themedialine.co.za/2018/07/huffpost-sa-advertiser-support-simply-couldnt-scale-to-levels-the-business-plan-demanded/
- 3 Smith C. (2018/10/25) Independent Media confirms restructuring amid talk of job cuts. <https://www.fin24.com/Companies/ICT/independent-media-confirms-restructuring-amid-talk-of-job-cuts-20181025>
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Mafokwane, P. (2018/6/29) Afro Voice staff, formerly The New Age, out in the cold as newspaper shuts down. [Sowetanlive. https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2018-06-29-afro-voice-staff-formerly-the-new-age-out-in-the-cold-as-newspaper-shuts-down/](https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2018-06-29-afro-voice-staff-formerly-the-new-age-out-in-the-cold-as-newspaper-shuts-down/)
- 6 Madisa, K (2018/8/28) Afro Worldview viewer takes MultiChoice to Competition Tribunal. [Sowetanlive. https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2018-08-28-afro-worldview-viewer-takes-multi-choice-to-competition-commission/](https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2018-08-28-afro-worldview-viewer-takes-multi-choice-to-competition-commission/)
- 7 Staff reporter. (2018/8/28) MultiChoice to announce Afro Worldview replacement. [eNCA. https://www.enca.com/news/multi-choice-announce-afro-worldview-replacement](https://www.enca.com/news/multi-choice-announce-afro-worldview-replacement)
- 8 Staff report. (2018/12/13) Ndalo Media no more, come 2019. [Bizcommunity. https://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/39/185502.html](https://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/39/185502.html)
- 9 Staff reporter (2018/8/28) Here's what we know about the new Dstv channel Newzroom Afrika Channel14. <https://www.channel24.co.za/TV/News/dstv-announces-replacement-for-afro-worldview-20180828>
- 10 In late April 2019 Chris Maroleng was axed following a disciplinary inquiry.
- 11 Staff reporter. (3/10/2018) Redi Tlhabi to host 'Unfiltered' current affairs show for SABC News. [Themedialine. https://www.themedialine.co.za/2018/10/03/redi-tlhabi-to-host-unfiltered-current-affairs-show-for-sabc-news/](https://www.themedialine.co.za/2018/10/03/redi-tlhabi-to-host-unfiltered-current-affairs-show-for-sabc-news/)

- 12 Author unstated (2018/6/1) SABC starts two commissions of enquiry to investigate editorial interference in the SABC newsroom, as well as sexual harassment at the public broadcaster. TV with Thinus. [Blog. http://teeveetee.blogspot.com/2018/06/sabc-starts-two-commissions-of-enquiry.html](http://teeveetee.blogspot.com/2018/06/sabc-starts-two-commissions-of-enquiry.html)
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Smit, S. (2018/11/6) Senior SABC managers and HR covered up sexual harassment' – report. [Mail & Guardian. https://mg.co.za/article/2018-11-06-senior-sabc-managers-and-hr-covered-up-sexual-harassment-report](https://mg.co.za/article/2018-11-06-senior-sabc-managers-and-hr-covered-up-sexual-harassment-report)
- 15 Phakathi, B. (2018/9/26) SABC job axe to fall across the board. [BusinessDay. https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/national/2018-09-26-sabc-job-axe-to-fall-across-the-board/](https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/national/2018-09-26-sabc-job-axe-to-fall-across-the-board/)
- 16 Magubane, K. (2018/11/14) All we need is R3bn from government to avoid collapse, SABC tells Scopa. [Fin24. https://www.fin24.com/Companies/all-we-need-is-r3bn-from-government-to-avoid-collapse-sabc-tells-scopa-20181114](https://www.fin24.com/Companies/all-we-need-is-r3bn-from-government-to-avoid-collapse-sabc-tells-scopa-20181114). The broadcaster first appeared before SCOPA on 7 November, but was rebuffed by the committee for not providing it with the necessary information on the SABC's irregular expenditure.
- 17 Four seats were already vacant for different reasons.
- 18 Smith, T. (2018/9/21) SOS and MMA make submissions into the Zondo Commission. [Media Monitoring Africa. https://www.mediamonitoringafrica.org/sos-and-mma-make-submissions-into-the-zondo-commission/](https://www.mediamonitoringafrica.org/sos-and-mma-make-submissions-into-the-zondo-commission/)
- 19 Siqoko, B. (2018/10/14) We got it wrong, and for that we apologise. [Sunday Times. https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/news/2018-10-13-we-got-it-wrong-and-for-that-we-apologise/](https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/news/2018-10-13-we-got-it-wrong-and-for-that-we-apologise/)
- 20 Author unstated. (2018/10/21) READ: Former Sunday Times editor Ray Hartley's blistering response to 'death squad' criticism. [News24. https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/read-former-sunday-times-editor-ray-hartleys-blistering-response-to-death-squad-criticism-20181021](https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/read-former-sunday-times-editor-ray-hartleys-blistering-response-to-death-squad-criticism-20181021)
- 21 Author unstated. (1997/11/28) Stratcom used Winnie to discredit ANC: Mcpherson. [SAPA http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/media%5C1997%5C9711/s971128n.htm](http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/media%5C1997%5C9711/s971128n.htm)
- 22 Author unstated. (2018/4/13) HuffPost removes Madikizela-Mandela 'Stratcom' video. [Eyewitness News. https://ewn.co.za/2018/04/13/huffpost-removes-madikizela-mandela-stratcom-video](https://ewn.co.za/2018/04/13/huffpost-removes-madikizela-mandela-stratcom-video)
- 23 Paton, C. (2018/11/1) Iqbal Surve fails to make debt repayment to PIC. [BusinessDay. https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/companies/2018-11-01-iqbal-surve-fails-to-make-debt-repayment-to-pic/](https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/companies/2018-11-01-iqbal-surve-fails-to-make-debt-repayment-to-pic/)
- 24 Staff writers. (2018/4/20) Stratcom 2018 exposed. [lol. https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/stratcom-2018-exposed-14551588](https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/stratcom-2018-exposed-14551588)
- 25 Smith, C. (2018/10/24) Bull fight between Tiso Blackstar and Independent's Survé heats up over PIC claims. [Fin24. https://www.fin24.com/Companies/ICT/bull-fight-between-tiso-blackstar-and-independents-surve-heats-up-over-pic-claims-20181024](https://www.fin24.com/Companies/ICT/bull-fight-between-tiso-blackstar-and-independents-surve-heats-up-over-pic-claims-20181024)
- 26 Author unstated. (2018/10/26) PIC calls for ceasefire in Tiso Blackstar, Independent Media spat. [BizNews. https://www.biznews.com/briefs/2018/10/26/pic-calls-for-ceasefire-in-tiso-blackstar-independent-media-spat](https://www.biznews.com/briefs/2018/10/26/pic-calls-for-ceasefire-in-tiso-blackstar-independent-media-spat)
- 27 Smith, C. (2018/10/24) Bull fight between Tiso Blackstar and Independent's Survé heats up over PIC claims. [Fin24. https://www.fin24.com/Companies/ICT/bull-fight-between-tiso-blackstar-and-independents-surve-heats-up-over-pic-claims-20181024](https://www.fin24.com/Companies/ICT/bull-fight-between-tiso-blackstar-and-independents-surve-heats-up-over-pic-claims-20181024)
- 28 Author unstated. (2018/10/26) PIC calls on Tiso Blackstar & Independent Media to end public spat. [EyeWitness News. https://ewn.co.za/2018/10/26/pic-calls-on-tiso-blackstar-and-independent-media-to-end-public-spat](https://ewn.co.za/2018/10/26/pic-calls-on-tiso-blackstar-and-independent-media-to-end-public-spat)
- 29 Kekana, M. (2018/10/18) Ramaphosa appoints commission of inquiry into alleged PIC 'improprieties'. [Mail & Guardian. https://mg.co.za/article/2018-10-18-ramaphosa-appoints-commission-of-inquiry-into-alleged-pic-improprieties](https://mg.co.za/article/2018-10-18-ramaphosa-appoints-commission-of-inquiry-into-alleged-pic-improprieties)
- 30 Caxton would pay R5.8 million in penalties and another R2.1 million to the EDF. Independent Media would pay R2.2 million penalties and just under R800,000 to the fund. DSTV Media sales, which handles advertising sales for the satellite company, would pay R22.2-million in penalties and R8-million to the fund. [De Wet, P. \(2018/2/27\) Three media companies have agreed to pay R41 million to settle anti-competition charges – and now the Competition Commission is coming for everyone else. \[BusinessInsider SA. https://www.businessinsider.co.za/competition-commission-comes-for-media-companies-2018-2\]\(https://www.businessinsider.co.za/competition-commission-comes-for-media-companies-2018-2\)](https://www.dewet.com/2018/2/27/three-media-companies-have-agreed-to-pay-r41-million-to-settle-anti-competition-charges-and-now-the-competition-commission-is-coming-for-everyone-else)
- 31 Mzekandaba, S. (2019/28/2) D-day for DTT in Free State. [ITWeb. https://www.itweb.co.za/content/RgeVDMp05y97KJN3](https://www.itweb.co.za/content/RgeVDMp05y97KJN3)

Newspaper circulation

The circulation of newspapers continues to slide, with some weekend papers losing their foothold entirely...

Fewer and fewer people are reading newspapers in South Africa. The circulation of daily, weekly and weekend newspapers all dropped on average 20% from 2016-2018. The circulation of local papers has also declined, but only dropping on average 13% over the period. Free newspapers have been relatively stable, although showing a slight decline in circulation.

	2016	2017	2018	% drop in circulation
Dailies	1266715	1135956	1007439	20
Weeklies	512540	472802	410663	20
Weekend	1553043	1372633	1241053	20
Local	362266	337419	314950	13
Free	6316187	6190931	6180256	2

Table 1: Total circulation of South African newspapers. Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa

Daily Sun had the sharpest decline in circulation amongst the country's biggest dailies – a decline of more than 30% over the past three years. Meanwhile the country's strongest weekend papers, *Sunday Times*, *Isolezwe ngoMqibelo*, and *Rapport* showed a drop in circulation of around 14%. The circulation of both *Sunday Sun* and *City Press* slid dramatically from 2016 to 2018, with the *Sunday Sun* nearly halving its circulation over the period.

	2016	2017	2018	% drop in circulation
Daily Sun	191494	159808	128200	33
Isolezwe	96011	86551	79375	17
The Star	86100	78753	75100	13
Sowetan	87262	74767	70190	20
Son	75985	69626	58412	23
The Times	64930	36126	Shut down	
Die Burger	50691	47734	44575	12
The Citizen	47353	43884	42974	9

Table 2: Circulation of South African daily newspapers. Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa

	2016	2017	2018	% drop in circulation
Sunday Times	292903	261772	252813	14
Rapport	129099	119482	110577	14
Isolezwe ngoMgqibelo	74006	67906	63364	14
Sunday Sun	105779	77172	53922	49
City Press	87255	64843	50772	42
Mail & Guardian (weekly)	31329	28826	24868	21

Table 3: Circulation of South African weekend newspapers. Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa

Radio audiences

Audiences are high and stable, with a third of listeners listening on their cellphones. More listeners are tuning into the big community radio stations ...

Radio audiences remained high and relatively stable overall. About 28-million people tuned into South African radio stations every day between 2016 and 2018.¹ Radio had an overall reach of about 90% in 2018. While most listening happened at home (around 85%), about a third of listeners (30-38%) used their cellphones to tune into their favourite stations. A lot of listening also happened while people were on the road – around 30% of radio audiences were likely to have heard their news while driving in a car or travelling in a taxi. Only 2% of listeners used their computers to listen to a radio station.

	2016	2017	2018
Ukhozi FM	7311	7424	7575
Umhlobo Wenene FM	5253	5464	5357
Metro FM	3931	4082	4260
Lesedi FM	3416	3166	3134
Thobela FM	2829	2864	2750
Motsweding FM	2621	2450	2407
RSG	1386	1259	1275
Ligwalagwala FM	934	1018	1137

Table 4. Top SABC radio stations. Listenership past 7 days, in thousands. Source: The Broadcast Research Council of South Africa.

	2016	2017	2018
Gagasi FM	1344	1538	1608
East Coast Radio	970	1093	1044
Jacaranda FM	1247	1025	998
947	926	935	962
Kaya FM	837	942	841
KFM	672	723	840
Heart FM	787	740	761
YFM	648	623	617

Table 5. Top commercial radio stations (non-SABC). Listenership past 7 days, in thousands.

Source: The Broadcast Research Council of South Africa.

	2016	2017	2018
Jozi FM (Gauteng)	495	578	599
Radio Zibonele (Western Cape)	193	214	237
Unitra Community Radio (Eastern Cape)	311	255	199
Radio Tygerberg (Western Cape)	225	184	172
Voice of the Cape (Western Cape)	127	135	170
Kasie FM 97.1 (Gauteng)	167	267	194
Thetha FM (Gauteng)	141	168	158
CCFM 107.5 (Western Cape)	144	144	157

Table 6. Top community radio stations. Listenership past 7 days, in thousands. *Source: The Broadcast Research Council of South Africa.*

The SABC’s public broadcast stations continued to have significantly more listeners than the (non-SABC) commercial stations, with Ukhozi FM’s national footprint targeting an isiZulu audience four-and-a-half times bigger than Gagasi FM, which broadcasts in English and isiZulu, but only in KwaZulu-Natal. Amongst the commercial stations, weekly audiences of Jacaranda FM declined noticeably over the period.

Meanwhile the listenership for top community stations such as Jozi FM and Radio Zibonele rivalled prominent commercial and PBS radio stations such as Talk Radio 702 and SAFM, although talk radio overall had a much lower audience base than music-driven stations. Both Jozi FM and Radio Zibonele showed growth in audience numbers from 2016 to 2018. If the trend continues, this might result in Jozi FM challenging the youth-orientated YFM, which is currently on the bottom rung of the top eight (non-SABC) commercial stations.

Free-to-air TV news

Audiences of free-to-air television are reported to be decreasing over the long term in South Africa due to the pull of pay-for-TV and the impact of online news.² About 13-million viewers each month switched to one of the top prime time news slots on the five free-to-air TV channels from 2016-2018. While an overall downward audience trend is suggested by the numbers, the top SABC news slots in isiXhosa and isiZulu show some resilience, attracting about a third each of the monthly viewers for the top news slots on the channels. Meanwhile the top English prime time news slot on eTV attracted significantly more viewers than the top news slot on SABC 3.

	2016	2017	2018	% of total
eTV	3534157	1572687	1453485	16
SABC 1 (Xhosa)	4287164	4561887	4618443	34
SABC 1 (Zulu)	4173485	4770244	4408840	33
SABC 2 (Afrikaans)	1450328	1965928	1445580	12
SABC 3	666162	725741	521501	5
Total	14111296	13596487	12447849	

Table 7: Audience numbers of the top prime time news slots for free-to-air channels (September 2016, 2017, 2018)³

Internet news

Internet news has remained a vital source of news for millions of South Africans over the past three years. New24.com was the most visited South African news site in January 2018, recording more than 7-million unique browsers accessing its site in a month. This is over three-million more than timeslive.co.za, which recorded about 4-million unique browser visits, and iol.co.za, which had nearly 3.9-million unique browsers downloading its news.⁴ As the data shows, Eyewitness News was the most visited site for broadcast media.

	Unique browsers
news24.com	7301866
timeslive.co.za	3953239
iol.co.za	3888473
ewn.co.za	3585820
enca.com	2291435
sowetanlive.co.za	1824844
thesouthafrican.com	1793330
huffingtonpost.co.za (now shut down)	1630453
Netwerk24	1352184
citizen.co.za	1299606

Table 8. Unique browsers measured for top South African news sites (January 2018). Source: www.narratiive.com⁵

END NOTES

- 1 According to BRC RAM statistics, between 2016 and 2018, the number of daily listeners was between 27.9 million and 29 million. The number of weekly listeners during the period ranged between 34.9 million and 35.7 million.
- 2 For more on the migration to pay-for TV trend, see Ferreira, T. (2018/05/09) Broadcaster e.tv warns: Free-to-air TV in SA is in peril. Channel24. <https://www.channel24.co.za/TV/News/broadcaster-etv-warns-free-to-air-tv-in-sa-is-in-peril-20180509>
- 3 The data is for adults fifteen years and over. They should be considered illustrative only. For practical reasons only September data for each year were used.
- 4 This according to data from January 2018 provided by www.narratiive.com
- 5 Narratiive only measures sites it tags.



Media freedoms watchlist

Compiled through a review of Sanef media releases during 2018. For a summary of incidents, please see the appendices.

Media freedoms: 2018

Attempts are being made to silence journalists through intimidation, online harassment and even bribes, while journalists in KwaZulu-Natal are working in a hostile environment

WORLD RATING: PARTLY FREE
 In 2018, South Africa ranked 28th on the World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders, while press freedom in the country was rated “partly free” and the internet as “free” by Freedom House.

SEVERE THREATS

The intimidation and harassment of journalists by the EFF and their supporters escalated in 2018. These included assault, physical intimidation, death threats, threats of rape, online harassment and defamation. A number of similar incidents involving the ANC were also recorded. The extent and severity of the attacks resulted in court action against the EFF by five journalists at the end of the year.

SERIOUS THREATS

Journalists in KwaZulu-Natal were facing threats on a number of fronts in 2018: they were being intimidated by the police, threatened by political parties and leaders, attacked by

members of the public, and harassed online. In one incident a magistrate appeared to have targeted reporters from a particular newspaper. Meanwhile the online intimidation and harassment of journalists is an ongoing serious concern in the country. These online attacks are often highly gendered, including death threats and threats of rape, and can also be accompanied by physical assault, threats and harassment.

ISSUES THAT NEED ATTENTION

Incidents of police intimidation of journalists, including assault, verbal abuse and manhandling, continue to

be reported, suggesting the need for training and awareness-raising on the rights of journalists amongst law enforcement officers working on the ground. Media freedoms also imply responsibilities for journalists and media houses. There was a number of instances when journalists were called out on their ethical conduct during 2018 – including the deputy editor of a major weekend newspaper being fired. Rumours also surfaced during the year of journalists being paid to not write stories.

ISSUES TO WATCH

In March the house of investigative journalist Jacques Pauw, who authored the book *The President’s Keepers* exposing state capture, was raided by the Hawks. Sanef noted with concern a meeting between the Hawks and the *Sunday Times* ahead of an apology for investigative reports published in the newspaper. Future actions of the Hawks in relation to journalists or media houses need to be watched.

LEFT OUT IN THE COLD

Retrenched journalists pushed into the “gig economy” with little institutional support



What happens to journalists when they lose their jobs?

Do they receive support from their employers, in the form of reskilling, or new job placement? Do unions help them negotiate a fair retrenchment package? What sort of work do they turn to in the context of a shrinking media space?

GLENDA DANIELS

A total of 158 South African journalists participated in a recent global “New Beats/Job Losses” survey by the Melbourne-based New Beats research project.¹ The purpose of the survey – which was implemented in this country by Glenda Daniels from the Department of Media Studies at Wits University and former editor of *State of the Newsroom* – was to understand better what happens to journalists when they lose their jobs.

Do they receive support from their employers, in the form of reskilling, or new job placement? Do unions help them negotiate a fair retrenchment package? What sort of work do they turn to in the context of a shrinking media space?

The research, which included interviews with editors and journalists, unions and media-related organisations, sketched a picture of a disorganised media sector, where retrenched journalists enjoyed little support from institutional bodies and unions as they tackled the uncertain and difficult task of reinventing their careers.

DOING MORE WITH LESS

The professional journalist workforce in South Africa has been slashed in half since a decade ago, when it was estimated to be around 10,000-strong – although some people interviewed for this survey say the number of job losses in the sector could be higher. Many who fell victim to the job cuts have been senior, experienced journalists who were not given the opportunity to reskill for the new multi-tasking, digital future of news.

Now junior jobs in the media proliferate, while public relations firms swell their ranks with former journalists – and the public value of mainstream daily news is widely felt to have diminished.

State of the Newsroom has tracked retrenchments reported in the sector since 2013, and the numbers are alarming. It showed that about 1,000 journalist positions were shed in 2012-2013, one of the big years for job losses. ² This included Media24, the second largest media company in the country after the SABC, retrenching 446 people in 2013.

Retrenchments in the following years continued. In 2015 South Africa’s oldest news agency, the South African Press Association (Sapa), closed down, a process that resulted in 48 more staffers losing jobs. In the same year 50 of Independent Media’s

Helen Grange, senior feature writer at *The Star* for 13 years

“ As I started freelancing, I signed a robust contract with Indy to produce six features a month, but it quickly whittled down to barely one or two features a month. My word rate was also reduced in the last contract, from R2.75 per word to R2 per word, which I felt was insulting and frankly, not worth the effort.

When I started freelancing at the end of 2006, the going was good. I worked harder than I had ever done in any newsroom, and earned highly. In the last four years, however, there has been a distinct reduction of freelance work available, and today I earn just over a third of what I once earned as a freelancer. It is reflective of a dying industry. Much of the decently paid work I do now is blatantly advertising-driven editorial for lifestyle magazines, not journalism at all. I’ve made peace with this, as at the end of the day, one has to put food on the table.

staff were retrenched, while the *Mail & Guardian*, then a newsroom with about 60 journalists, announced that 25 jobs would be shed. In mid-2016 reports emerged that 65 employees at Times Media Group (TMG) would lose their jobs, bringing the total number of layoffs at the media group over the previous year to over 100.

In August 2016 it was reported that eTV/eNCA would downsize its Cape Town newsroom, while, despite the staff cuts in April the previous year,

Independent Media announced that more than 70 journalists would accept retrenchment packages in November 2016.³ *The Times*, the relatively short-lived daily tabloid for the *Sunday Times*, published its last edition in December 2017.⁴ In 2018 Independent Media again announced that it would conduct a further round of job cuts, while Huffington Post shut down Huff Post SA, and DStv did not renew the contract of Afro Worldview (previously ANN7). The latter, together with the closure of *Afro Voice* (formally *The New Age*), resulted in hundreds of jobs being cut.

The latest retrenchment notice was fired off by the SABC – the biggest employer of journalists in the country – in October 2018. It announced that it would retrench 981 employees, including journalists.⁵ The process was expected to be finalised by February 2019 before it was suspended pending a skills audit at the broadcaster.⁶

The SABC announcement received much publicity for a variety of reasons: first, it was regarded in the industry as a safe haven from the retrenchments endemic in the commercial sector; second, the number of retrenchments was the highest there had ever been at the broadcaster; third, the salaries of top executives and senior editors were higher compared to other sectors; and fourth, the broadcaster was facing a debt crisis. How do you reconcile all this at a “public broadcaster”? This was one of the debates raging in industry and public circles at the end of 2018.

Journalists get retrenched, or are

“ Journalism has become increasingly undervalued as a profession. Too many bad writers and too few beat specialists, which means that people in power are getting away with murder.
– **Survey respondent**

“ I don’t read newspapers anymore, but I find some excellent pieces in online publications. Generally, newspapers are under-resourced, underfunded and a lot of time, lack specialised writers. (The specialised photographer was made redundant years ago).
– **Survey respondent**

“ I have almost stopped reading newspapers, as the standard of writing has got so low. ‘Big’ design with single stories to a page, very little news content, lots of opinion from non-journalists, and far too much content from outside sources. Plus stuff I’d already read on the internet.
– **Survey respondent**

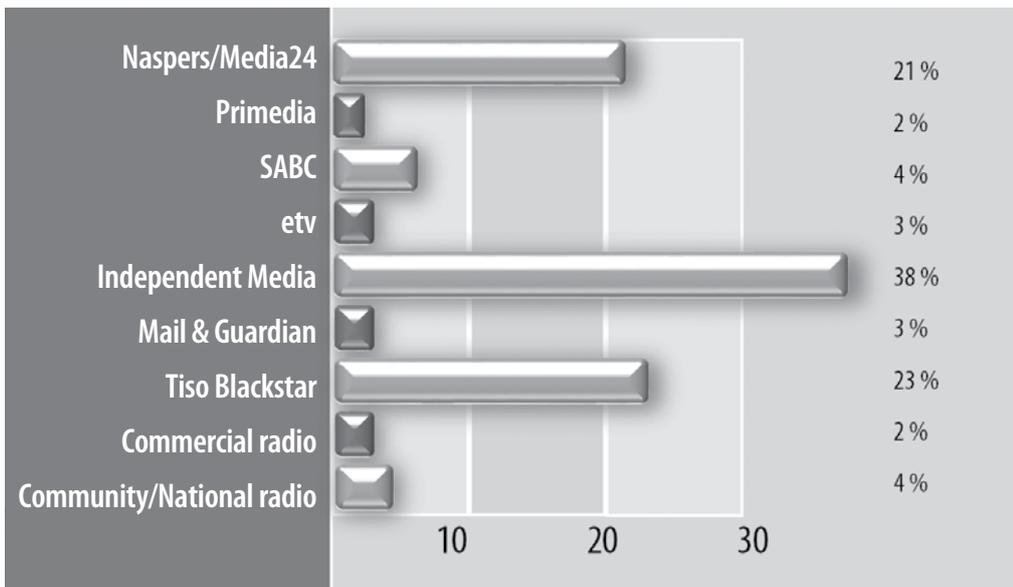


Figure 1: Employer or field of work at the time the journalists lost their jobs. Some 82% were in full-time positions with major media houses. (48 of 158 respondents skipped this question)

made redundant, when companies serve Section 189 notices. Section 189 of the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 (LRA) permits an employer to dismiss employees for “operational requirements or reasons”, referring to economic, technical, structural or similar needs of an employer.

The employer is obliged to engage in a consensus-seeking process to avoid and/or minimise the number of dismissals. The employer could also, as part of the process, advise that in order to remain viable, employees could agree to a reduction in their remuneration or other terms and conditions of employment.

Job losses have also occurred due to closures (e.g. *The Times* in December 2017, and Huff Post SA in July 2018, the latter after just 18 months in operation). In some instances, journalists were charged with “insubordination” because they were attempting to be independent and loyal to the professional codes instead of toeing the ideological line of the owner. In 2014 Independent Media lost most of its senior staff, after ownership interference (by media boss Iqbal Survé) in their day-to-day editorial affairs.⁷

“Consolidation” has, however, been the buzzword with the majority of retrenchments – same “subs hubs” used for different papers, syndicated copy for different papers in the same group,

damaging plurality in the process. Journalists who survived the waves of job losses over the past decade are having to do much more with much less (video making and uploads, writing for online and traditional media, tweeting and Facebook posts and blogging too).

In 2015, the then Times Media Group reduced by half the number of subbing jobs at *Business Day*, opting instead to form a subs hub. This hub amalgamated the subs desks of *Business Day* and *The Times* newspaper. The company was renamed Tiso Blackstar in 2017, and announced salary freezes for the top earners in the newsroom. One floor now houses all

the company’s titles – over 20. Digital and print sit together in the assumption that they work together, but one journalist surveyed said (2018), “like as ever before, no one knows what anyone else is doing” and another said: “we look like a call centre now”.⁸

“Doing more with less” was a theme for a panel discussion at the Menell Media Exchange conference in Johannesburg in 2018, a theme which was met with strong criticism from journalists and editors. Tswana Gumani, general secretary of the Media Workers Association of South Africa (Mwasa) who was interviewed for this research put it bluntly: “Retrenchments are hated by everyone except

Ray Joseph, media trainer

“ I have reinvented myself regularly as it’s the only way to stay current and working in an ever-changing world of journalism. Most of what I’ve learned is self-taught by reading, asking questions, playing with tools to work them out, and also using YouTube tutorials to teach myself.

While redundancies have decimated journos working for legacy media, who have limited skills outside their areas of expertise, journos with good multimedia storytelling skills are in demand and many are getting jobs. I would hazard an educated guess that there has been a big growth in online and digital jobs, although at a rate lower than jobs that have been lost in newsrooms.

I think a big problem with experienced journos who have been retrenched is that they have not updated their skills and instead blame others for their difficulty in finding work. And while management should offer retrenched journos new skills training, it is up to individuals to ensure that they adapt.

organisational change managers who are creaming it all the way as they re-design operations.”

It is difficult to quantify the exact number of job losses over the past years. We have to rely on media reports, company notices, unions, or hear from journalists themselves – and clearly not every retrenchment is reported, nor are new hirings.

People I interviewed for this research suggested there could easily still be 10,000 “media workers” in South Africa – some of whom are freelance journalists with most in public relations and part of the “gig economy” – a day here and a day there of writing, researching, editing, content creating or hustling.

Some also contend that the estimate that the professional journalist workforce is now half of what it was a decade ago might be conservative: “Remember Indy at one point had just under 6,000 staff and has now shrunk

to just about 1,400 inclusive of support staff,” Gumani added.

Mwasa had about 17,000 members in its heyday, and would be lucky if it had a few hundred today, he said. “The sooner we reconcile as stakeholders and sector players, the better the chances get in this gloomy space.”

THE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Twenty local media organisations, NGOs, and journalist-related institutions were contacted in July/August 2018 to post the survey on their websites or to send it out to their members that they knew had lost their jobs in the newsroom. Of these, 19 agreed to participate.⁹ Only one organisation, the Association of Independent Publishers (AIP), queried the methodology, asking how the survey was expected to reach unemployed community media journalists.

Besides the survey – which was completed anonymously – basic journalist information gathering techniques were used in on- and off-the-record interviews with journalists and editors who had lost jobs. Discussions were also held with unionists, media

trainers and associated bodies, such as Mwasa, the Communication Workers Union (CWU), the Broadcasting, Electronic, Media and Allied Workers Union (Bemawu), the South African National Editors Forum (Sanef), and the Southern African Freelancers’ Association (Safrea).

The 158 journalists who participated in the survey were mostly the casualties of downsizing of newsrooms in major media houses, as well as a number of closures of titles and news channels over the past six or seven years. The vast majority, 82%, were in full-time positions when they lost their jobs.

The graph (see top of previous page) shows that survey participants included former employees of commercial print and broadcast groups, the public broadcaster and community media. There was a high number of responses from journalists who had worked for Naspers, Independent Media, and Tiso Blackstar in line with the high number of recorded retrenchments in those groups.

WHAT THEY DO NOW

As Figure 2 suggests, the majority of survey respondents became part of the gig economy, “doing a mix of journalism and other things”, such as public relations.

A small percentage began studying towards MAs or PhDs, while a smaller percentage moved completely out of journalism to do work such as selling property or trading in Bitcoin. Jobs appear to be piecemeal. As one respondent put it: “We take whatever we can get really, after being chewed up and spat out by the company, which didn’t have the courtesy to even say thank you, never mind a farewell party after 20 years”.

Freelance journalism is an obvious choice for skilled journalists to pursue. However, the current media en-

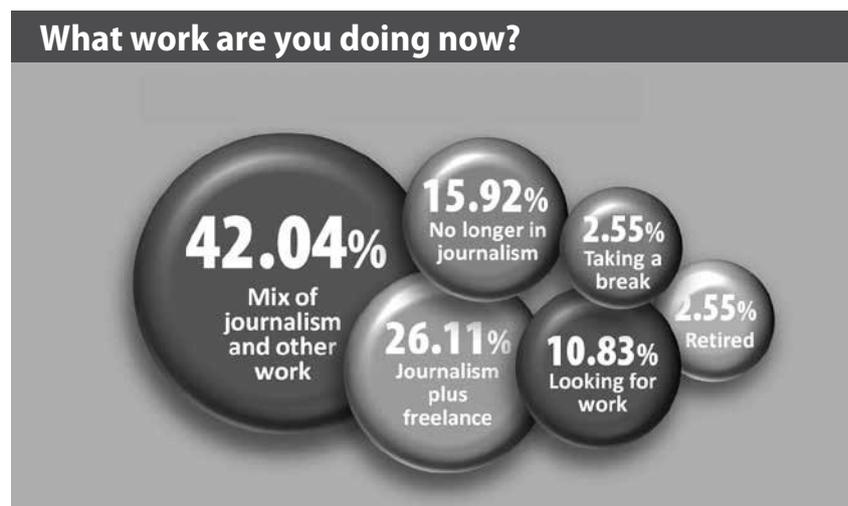


Figure 2: What the journalists do now. (One survey respondent skipped this question)

vironment hardly makes it a sustainable work choice. One respondent said she earned “appallingly low freelance rates in journalism which haven’t kept up with inflation”, and does public re-

lations work in the private and public sector. One said he was “hustling” and was lucky if he got paid for one freelance story in a month – at old rates of R2 a word for 1,000 words.¹⁰

SUPPORT ON EXITING JOBS

Support from unions and associations

Seventy-two percent of survey respondents said they had no union or journalist association support during their retrenchments. In the case of union support, it appears that most of these respondents did not belong to a union that works with journalists, such as Bemawu, CWU, Mwasa or Solidarity. Journalist and editor associations such as Safrea and Sanef do not get involved in worker or shop-floor disputes or retrenchment processes.¹¹

There are several reasons for the lack of unionism among editorial staff in the journalist industry. First, the union which dealt strictly with journalists only was the South African Union of Journalists (SAUJ). It shut down about 10 years ago following the financial mismanagement of funds. It was felt at the time that Mwasa, which had focused on shop-floor workers in media companies, could service both journalists and other media workers. Journalists, however, did not rush to join, and reports are that Mwasa is weak, with few members, as are the other unions in the communications sector, such as CWU and Solidarity.

Second, mainstream, then profit-making media companies dis-



Figure 3. Union or support from membership associations at the time of losing jobs. (Seven respondents skipped this question)

couraged unionisation. Journalists said off the record that unions were intimidated from premises by management, and that they were told they were not allowed to belong to unions because it was “against company policy”. Journalists ought to know this is anti-constitutional, yet they did not write about it – it was not the “done thing” to write about your company. Thirdly, the political affiliation of unions is also one of the reasons for a decrease in unionism in the industry, with many journalists preferring to remain politically neutral in their work. Bemawu has more members at the SABC than any other union, prob-

ably due to the fact that it is not a politically affiliated union, according to its president, Hannes du Buisson.

Sometimes unions, for example Bemawu and Solidarity (associated with Afriforum) represented journalists in retrenchment processes (e.g. in the axing of the so-called SABC 8),¹² but more often than not, journalists speak of going to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) to fight their “constructive dismissals” on their own. The bottom line is that journalists are not organised union-wise, and the media companies appear to be hostile to having unions organise in their newsrooms.



Figure 4: Employer skills support. (Seven respondents skipped this question)

Upskilling and company support

The vast majority of the survey respondents said they had also received no employer-funded career support.

Seventy percent said they had received no training in digital skills before they were retrenched, even though these were the skills the participants were most interested in.

As reported in *State of the Newsroom 2017: Fakers and Makers*¹³ there were indications that newsrooms preferred to employ junior staff to work across multimedia platforms – clearly at a lower salary base – rather than to reskill senior journalists to do the same.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES AND NEW CHALLENGES

The research highlighted three key challenges: the disappearance of “beats” in the traditional newsroom; the weakened state of journalist unions; and the need for better institutional support for freelance journalists.

THE END OF BEATS ...

Traditional journalism is under pressure from advertising going online, especially to Facebook and Google. Sales and revenue have declined steeply as a result.

The international political landscape is becoming increasingly populist, making use of technology to peddle misinformation and propaganda (“fake news”). This is often conflated with journalism, resulting in good or factual content being treated with undue suspicion.

There are other pressures: patterns of consumption are changing and journalists themselves are now competing in a much larger pool, given that they are up against bloggers, “citizen journalists” or people with smart phones, among others.

One of the results of the media landscape changing so rapidly and losing experienced journalists, is that beat journalism is dying. This is a global issue and was raised at a New Beats symposium held in Melbourne in June 2018 (attended by the author) where Australia, Finland, the Netherlands, Brazil, Indonesia, Canada, and the United States were among the countries that participated.

The countries reported a decrease in beat reporting, and some of the research showed that “boots on the ground” reporting in respect of courts, and on rural as well as indigenous people’s issues, is disappearing. For example, reporting on indigenous peoples’ issues in mainstream media has become extremely limited to occasional coverage when resources can

“ Journalism is important. That said, where journalism meets commercial practices that are meant to sustain it, democracy is poorer. The level of under investment, resultant juniorisation and low quality outputs do a disservice not just to investors and those who practice it, but to democracy at large. Where journalism is so impacted globally, the impact, especially on the poor, the infirm, those in camps or inhabitable structures who require institutions to help, is too ghastly to contemplate. – *Survey respondent*

be spared, or only when major news stories arise, the work of one of the research professors, Matthew Ricketson, from Deakin University in Melbourne, showed.¹⁴

In South Africa, the trend towards fewer beat reporters appears to go hand-in-glove with training outfits in media companies having closed down due to budget cuts, well-staffed sub desks being culled to a minimum, young reporters being thrown in the deep end in, newsrooms with no mentors, and news desks which re-write copy as there is no time to train reporters in what was wrong or right with a story.

*State of the Newsroom 2013: Disruptions and Transitions*¹⁵ and *State of the Newsroom 2014: Disruptions Accelerated*¹⁶ showed that training programmes for “cubs”, “trainees” or newsroom “cadets” had closed down at Media24, TMG, Mail & Guardian, Caxton and Independent Media.¹⁵

All these combined mean that rookie journalists cannot learn the tools of the trade necessary to be a good beat reporter. These factors have a strongly negative impact on the news that the

public is receiving, say journalists and editors who have left the newsroom.

WEAK MEDIA UNIONS

Unions working in the interests of journalists are weaker now than they were in the past.¹⁷ However, this is not unique to the media sector.

Dale McKinley, research and education officer at International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG), who was interviewed for the research, said:

“It’s a general trend around the world. Unions themselves have stopped servicing their members and in turn members feel they are paying their dues and not getting much in return. Many have removed themselves. Unions have removed themselves from their basic purpose, especially when they become politicised – for example, Cosatu fighting political battles and taking sides in factions. Interestingly, those unions which have remained close to their purpose, such as Fedusa [Federation of Unions of South Africa], have remained stable.”

McKinley felt there were three issues specific to journalism. First, it



The New Beats symposium in Melbourne, 2018. Glenda Daniels is at the centre. *Photo courtesy of the Melbourne Press Club*

has always been notoriously difficult to organise and unionise journalists. This has been exacerbated by the transient and shifting nature of journalism with the digitisation of newsrooms.

Second, both budget cuts and digitisation mean there is an increase in the casualisation of labour and contract work. “Journalism is more vulnerable due to tech changes and the ‘speeded up’ newsroom. In the early industrial revolution one worker could do five peoples’ jobs. Now that’s happening in journalism.”

For Du Buisson, it was difficult for Bemawu to distinguish how many of the about-to-be-retrenched at the SABC were journalists, as it was increasingly difficult to define what a journalist was. He said journalists thought at one time that they did not need union support, and felt that they could speak for themselves. However, in Du Buisson’s view, they did not end up doing that.

IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN NOTORIOUSLY DIFFICULT TO UNIONISE JOURNALISTS. THIS HAS BEEN EXACERBATED BY THE DIGITISATION OF THE NEWSROOMS

He said it is necessary to go back to the drawing board at the SABC and engage in the missing step from the LRA – sit down, talk, provide information to staff and negotiate before retrenching.

As the general secretary of Mwasa, Gumani has many years of experience of trying to organise journalists into the same camp as other media workers, but he has found it almost impossible. “Something about that professional arrogance that goes with a byline! Do not touch me on my studio? Journalists are very difficult to organise even where

and when their own issues can often best be dealt with collectively,” he said.

He suggests the resistance amongst journalists to work collectively can also be found in an evident resistance to learn new skills for a new kind of newsroom:

“There has been serious and demon-

strated reluctance/resistance to learn new skills [despite] the changing media production and consumption patterns as technology forces a move away from legacy media systems. [There is a] perceived association of that change with the ‘death of journalism as we know it!’”

Lastly, he said that the death of SAUJ, like that of the Association of Democratic Journalists (ADJ) and, he reckons, soon that of Mwasa, could be traced to the political environment, just as much as any other factor impacting on the media environment. “There is a new realignment of the political spaces which has sought to weaken civil society organisations and to render them irrelevant. Mwasa is no exception,” he said.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR FREELANCERS

It is clear that freelance journalists need more support in an industry that eschews proper pay for work done. The only association that represents freelancers in South Africa is Safrea – however, it is struggling to attract new

membership.

Safrea chairperson Meneesha Govender, who lost her job at the *Daily News* in KwaZulu-Natal in 2016 when 50 newsroom staffers were culled during the restructuring process, said that Safrea has seen growth, but that it is slow.

Govender agreed that you would have expected membership to see exponential growth due to retrenchments, but she said “[freelance journalists] also want to know what we are providing”. Membership fees are R550 per year, and “they feel they are not getting enough bang for their buck”. “We are not bringing in freelancers who’ve been retrenched...We are charging a fee for membership but we are not offering jobs.”

Safrea is quite old, having started in 1999. One of its benefits is it offers regional networks, with some provinces such as Gauteng, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal being quite active.

Despite this, Govender felt the association had to now look at “how [it] should evolve”. “We do need to provide more support than we do – [including] online job support,” she said. “Nomad,¹⁸ an online job platform, has 5,000 people [signed up], for example. We need to offer something like a portal perhaps – our present website is ancient.¹⁹”

“At some point Safrea has to consider its identity. It could be the voice of the freelancer,” she said, but warned that this was not as easy as it might seem as there were also old-style, traditionalist members who liked things the way they were: “For a long time this association was for the older and white [members]. I am the first person of colour to chair it, and at the tender age of 40, I am considered old. We need to get a membership drive going which includes young people. There is resistance from older members to

“ The job losses and the bleeding are tragic, but we can’t sword-fight windmills forever. I’ve been thinking that maybe journalists’ individualistic and ego-driven streaks has led to us to be more competitive with each other rather than supportive of each other. Since the demise of the ADJ and SAJJ, there has not been a place, a space for journalists to talk, to organise. It really has been each to their own... when the mines closed down, NUM and other unions organised and negotiated with owners for retraining and skills development for miners.

– **Former editor, interview**

embrace change ... anything new, even our website. But we have taken a few steps and we are getting there. Our social media profile is growing through Facebook and Twitter”.

Some of the issues under discussion include whether Safrea could offer training in the form of “mentorships and upskilling”. “Regarding new skills, there is a divide between younger and older, with the younger equipped with pro-digital skills and the older trying to hold on to the past, unhappy and not prepared to embrace new skills,” she said.

Freelance rates in South Africa also remain a key challenge. Freelance “rates” range from not getting paid at all, to many getting R2 a word (the same rate from more than 20 years ago), and some getting R8 a word. But the answer might not lie in standardising rates for the industry, according to Govender. “We have done research on freelance rates and many are complaining that if you set the rate for them [that may be the] difference between starving and surviving.”

THE END OF JOURNALISM’S “INDUSTRIAL ERA”?

Journalist job losses have occurred in tsunami wave after wave, starting about 10 years ago during the economic downturn of 2008.

Traditional media companies are not making profits from advertising

(which has moved to Facebook and Google) and sales, so they are chasing social media and “innovation” with desperation. The traditional newsroom is basically decimated with very few subs and beats, and no mentors for new entrants to the craft.

Journalists were caught almost off guard by these developments. There was little union support for journalists, according to the 158 who participated in the online survey, and in most cases, no company support through the process. There was little to no training for the digital era by companies. They appeared to prefer hiring young journalists, who knew instinctively what to do with smart phones and videoing and uploading stories.

Journalists forced into freelance work also suffer through a lack of meaningful representation, support and resources offered by organisations.

Both the unionists and trainers interviewed for this research were highly critical of journalists. Unions said journalists felt they were “too

important” to be unionised but were now regretting it. Journalists, on the other hand, were highly critical of the companies they felt had chewed and spat them out. Whatever the case, what is clear is that all of these factors suggest a chronically disorganised sector.

How can this level of disorganisation be reconciled with journalism’s

THERE IS A DIVIDE BETWEEN YOUNGER AND OLDER ... WITH THE LATTER TRYING TO HOLD ON TO THE PAST, UNHAPPY AND NOT PREPARED TO EMBRACE NEW SKILLS

role in a democratic society, if at all? One of journalism's main roles in a democracy, besides holding the powerful to account for their actions and spending of tax payers' money, is to provide factual information which is verified, provide a variety of views, and reliable analysis which can be trusted.

That senior, experienced journalists have been the prime target of retrenchments in this country, shows a clear lack of imagination on the industry's part, which could have retained staffers, at least for the purpose of skills development. The impact is easy to see: mistakes in copy and fewer specialisations and mentorships, creating a skills gulf with the newer recruits, and little institutional context for young reporters to grow and develop.

Some argue that a new collaborative energy is needed amongst journalists. Internationally there is shift from competition between journalists to more collaborative initiatives, through partnerships and alliances between newsrooms, and other institutions. News organisations, non-profits and universities are developing new ways

to work with newsrooms to broaden and deepen coverage of special topics, the Menell Media Exchange conference in 2018 heard.

The conference looked at "insights that can be taken from a high-tech culture built around the idea of innovation as collaboration", and it questioned "some traditional categorical thinking like beats in the newsroom". It also looked at ways that interdisciplinarity might encourage more nuanced, accessible and useful stories.

Something of this is evident in South Africa, such as in the recent collaboration between the Daily Maverick, AmaBhungane, and News24 that worked on the leaked Gupta e-mails in 2017 and 2018.²⁰

“ In the first stage of transition to digital we could be said to have added value by being quicker. Then we realised we also had to deliver in the format or platform people wanted, but in doing so it seemed we abandoned some of the basics - in skills and in ethics and taste.

– Survey respondent

Donor-funded journalism which offers the potential for more nuanced and in-depth stories and new synergies in the sector is also leaving its mark, whether through projects such as Bhekisisa,²¹ the M&G's health journalism centre, or social justice initiatives such as the long-standing Health-e News or GroundUp.²²

As one interviewee suggested, the media's "industrial era" may be over – the way forward for good journalism is through innovation, experimentation, and lighter, start-up initiatives. "The industrial era is shrivelling up, but our society still needs good journalism, and it does not have to be made in the same old very costly ways," he said.

"The bottom line is there are jobs that previously existed in media that no longer exist," said Ray Joseph, a well-known media trainer. "There are jobs now that never existed before and there are some jobs now that might not be around in the future; and there will be future jobs that do not exist now. So, journos need to constantly keep abreast of new developments and constantly learn new things, or they will quickly be left behind."

THE COMMUNITY PRINT MEDIA IS SHRINKING TOO

The community print media sector employed about 4,000 journalists ten years ago, but these numbers have also halved, along with the number of community media titles. The Association of Independent Publishers (AIP) membership for community newspapers was 575 in 2008, and is now down to about 200 (2018). Caxton printed a further 150 titles that were not affiliated to AIP, but many of these have shut down.

The community print sector never recovered from the economic downturn in 2008, said Louise Vale, then CEO of the AIP. Vale said: "We had a

nice time in 2006 as the economy was OK. Black-owned newspapers started. There was a lot of excitement. But all this has changed a great deal. If you are an SME you are the first to be hit in an economic recession. They are so much on the borderline anyway. We are seeing community papers closing down, 50% of them in the Eastern Cape – some of them many years old. They are not black-owned only, but also white-owned. Some of the really old newspapers were the *Cradock Courant* and the *Somerset Budget*... 124 years – all gone. They were run by the Van der Walt family, like the Grocotts (who started *Grocott's Mail*, known to be the oldest paper in the country, founded in 1870)."

Vale said that community media in rural areas are particularly affected. Anton van Zyl, owner of two community papers in Makhada (Louis Trichardt), Limpopo, told Vale that 2018, "had been the worst year ever in terms of advertising". "In the economic downturn, there has been a complete lack of implementation [in terms of advertising support] by government, despite talk that this would be addressed, and it gets less and less every single year," Vale said.

She gave an example of South Africa Social Security Agency (SASSA) advertising which was inserted in *Sunday Times* when it should have been placed in community media. Government was not attempting to assist

community radio either, she said.

“Since the last economic recession printing newspapers became extremely expensive,” said Chris Louw, digital editor at Caxton. “At the last MDDA conference we heard that many smaller community organisations have to use the larger organisations to print their newspapers. This often results in huge sums of money in printing costs, let alone to pay staff.”

Louw explained that much of the local advertising community newspapers attracted had now gone to social media: “The market is under serious pressure from an advertising perspective and it’s very hard to attract small local advertisers. Facebook changes things so much. There isn’t a strategic approach on a local level. Remember cars being advertised in hard copy, and classified advertising? All gone to Facebook.”

“There is a lack of control and oversight, and what revenue we had is leaving the market, never to be seen again. So for a small title based in the Eastern Cape, that money has gone. Added to this, a lot of small organisations will run Facebook ads on behalf of their businesses, so Facebook is taking that money. We should be taxing Facebook. Others have done it, why aren’t we?”

Louw made an apposite point that South African journalism has not made any concrete moves to approach Facebook or Google. In November 2018, Facebook gave £4.5 million to fund 80 local newspaper jobs in the UK.²³

IT’S HARD TO ATTRACT SMALL LOCAL ADVERTISERS ... REMEMBER CARS BEING ADVERTISED IN HARD COPY AND CLASSIFIEDS? ALL GONE TO FACEBOOK

END NOTES

1. <http://www.newbeatsblog.com/>. The global results of the News Beats/Job Losses survey will be published in 2019.
2. Daniels, G. (ed) (2014) State of the Newsroom South Africa 2014: Disruptions Accelerated. Wits Journalism Programme, Johannesburg. <http://journalism.co.za/new/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/State-of-the-newsroom-2014.pdf>
3. Finlay, A. (ed). (2016) State of the Newsroom South Africa 2015-2016: Inside/outside. Wits Journalism Programme, Johannesburg. http://journalism.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/State-of-the-Newsroom-report_2015_2016.pdf
4. Finlay, A. (ed). (2017) State of the Newsroom 2017: Fakers & Makers. Wits Journalism Programme, Johannesburg. <http://journalism.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/906-STATE-OF-THE-NEWSROOM-2018-RE-PRINT-V3.pdf>
5. 1200 freelancers would also be affected by the restructuring. SABC media release (29/10/2018) SABC to proceed with Section 189. SABC, Johannesburg. <http://www.sabc.co.za/sabc/sabc-to-proceed-with-section-189/>.
6. Author unknown (2018/11/19) Unions warn SABC: You retrench, we shut you down. politicsweb. <https://www.politicsweb.co.za/news-and-analysis/unions-warn-sabc-you-retrench-we-shut-you-down>
7. Themediaonline, quoting the Media Workers Association of South Africa (Mwasa), listed these as: Alide Dasnois (Cape Times editor); Janet Heard (Cape Times assistant news editor); Martine Barker (managing editor); Dave Chambers (Independent production editor); Makhudu Sefara (The Star editor); Moshoe-shoe Monare (Sunday Independent editor); Philani Mg-waba (The Mercury editor); Donwald Pressly (Business Report Cape bureau chief); Terry Bell (labour columnist); Chris Whitfield (editor in chief for the Cape Times and Cape Argus); Ann Crotty (Business Report journalist); and Sybrand Mostert (Cape Times news editor). Cape Times chief sub and content editor Glenn Bownes was dismissed and the newspaper’s opinions and analysis editor Tony Weaver left after a disciplinary inquiry. Nevill, G. (2015/4/7) Media job blood-letting. themediaonline. <https://themedialonline.co.za/2015/04/media-job-blood-letting/>.
8. Menell Media Exchange (2018) <https://mmx.duke.edu/programme/>
9. These were the South African National Editors Forum (Sanef); Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ); Press Council of SA; South African Communications Assoc (SACOMM); Media Workers Association of SA (MWASA); Media Development

- and Diversity Agency (MDDA); Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI); Save our SABC (SOS); Media Monitoring Africa (MMA); Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA); Association for Independent Publishers (AIP); Broadcast Complaints Commission of SA (BCCSA); PENSA; National Press Club; SA Freelance Association (Safrea); Right-2Know; National Association of Broadcasters; Amabhungane and Wits Journalism.
10. These rates were paid around the early 2000s.
11. The author of the chapter, Glenda Daniels held a leadership position in Sanef as a council member and chair of the Diversity and Ethics subcommittee at the time of writing (November 2018). She is also a member of Safrea.
12. Eight SABC journalists who were fired in 2016 for speaking out against the broadcaster’s decision to censor coverage.
13. Finlay, A. (ed). (2017) State of the Newsroom 2017: Fakers & Makers. Wits Journalism Programme, Johannesburg. <http://journalism.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/906-STATE-OF-THE-NEWSROOM-2018-RE-PRINT-V3.pdf>
14. Ricketson spoke to his unpublished paper: What has been lost in legacy media’s job losses? What can be re-instated in digital newsrooms?
15. Daniels, G. (ed) (2013) State of the Newsroom, South Africa 2013: Disruptions and Transitions. Wits Journalism Programme, Johannesburg. http://journalism.co.za/new/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/State_of_the_newsroom_2013.pdf
16. Daniels, G. (ed) (2014) State of the Newsroom South Africa 2014: Disruptions Accelerated. Wits Journalism Programme, Johannesburg. <http://journalism.co.za/new/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/State-of-the-newsroom-2014.pdf>
17. There was a time when many journalists belonged to the Association of Democratic Journalists (ADJ) or SAUJ.
18. nomajobs.net/
19. One interviewee suggested that a skills database was necessary where journalists could advertise their services and be hired by business or government.
20. Staff reporter (2018/9/14) ‘Gupta leaks’ win top award at Sikuville awards. News24.com. <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/news24-journalists-shine-at-annual-standard-bank-awards-20180914>. See also: Schmitt, C, (2018/1/31). Digging for Dung, unearthing corruption – this SA investigative non-profit could help take down the president. NiemanLab <http://www.niemanlab.org/2018/01/digging-for-dung-unearthing-corruption-this-south-african-investigative-non-profit-could-help-take-down-the-president/>
21. <https://bhkekisisa.org/>
22. <https://www.groundup.org.za>
23. Author unknown. (2018/11/19). Facebook gives 45m to fund 80 local newspaper jobs in UK media. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/nov/19/facebook-gives-45m-to-fund-80-local-newspaper-jobs-in-uk-media>

GETTING BACK TO THE FUTURE

Can the SABC save itself by cutting jobs? The state broadcaster is caught in a bind



Right2Know protests outside the SABC in Cape Town in 2016 *Ashraf Hendricks/GroundUp*

The SABC announcement that mass layoffs were imminent sent shockwaves through the industry. The SABC does not have a clear idea of the capacity of its workforce, including whether or not it has the necessary skills to migrate to digital. Meanwhile its greatest debt remains the need to rebuild public trust

DIMITRI MARTINIS

INTRODUCTION: A TURN-AROUND STRATEGY IN STALL

For many South Africans the last two years will very likely be remembered as the years in which the forces of state capture and the pushback against corruption of state institutions in South Africa, including of the SABC, burst into the public sphere. This occurred thanks in no small measure to a series of coordinated media exposés and the outcome of official inquiries that captured the attention of an entire nation and of many people around the world.

Record audiences tuned into the normally beige and boring parliamentary channel¹ to follow the events in the legislature including those of the inquiry into the SABC² and that of state-owned power utility Eskom and to gawk in disbelief at the peculiar antics of animated politicians during the State of the Nation address last year. Audiences were no less enthralled by the events unfolding at the Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, which kicked off in the latter half of 2018 in Parktown, Johannesburg.

Thanks to the investigative reporting and official inquiries, the extent of the wholesale looting and hollowing out of state-owned enterprises, including the SABC,³ was no longer hidden from public view, as the “silent coup”⁴ was ex-

posed for the first time in all its gory detail.

The new SABC board appointed in late 2017 wasted no time in addressing the trust deficit at the broadcaster, not just amongst the public in general, but among the corporation's millions of loyal radio and TV news audiences. This included re-branding and refreshing their on-air look, and programme and presenter changes.

Along with structural changes in the newsroom, the 24-hour SABC NEWS channel, available exclusively on the DStv satellite pay-TV platform, was given a make-over. A priority focus on SABC News⁵ clearly demonstrated the recognition that news is the SABC's unique selling proposition, unrivalled in terms of geographical coverage and audience reach in all official languages.

As an indication of the board's efforts to regain public trust, a declaration of its stance vis-à-vis the government, as well as an expression of its understanding of public broadcasting, the SABC chairperson described this re-branding as follows:

On 4 June 2018 SABC News re-launched a completely rebranded, values-driven SABC News service, with

the words 'Independent. Impartial' at the core of the new offering. This marked an important moment in distancing the SABC from past perceptions about its news service.

The Board is proud of what the SABC News team has achieved so far in the highly competitive 24-hour television news market. A vibrant, independent and impartial SABC News is the cornerstone of what public broadcasting means to the SABC.⁶

Perhaps as a sign of the genuine independence of the newsroom, Phathiswa Magopeni, the new head of news at the broadcaster, preferred to characterise it in different terms:

It's not even rebranding. It's going back to basics – going back to what we exist to do as SABC News. We know what happened at the SABC in the recent past. The reality is our brand reputation is in trouble. And the first thing that we're trying to fix is to get the public to trust what we do; as credible, and to restore the integrity of SABC News.

It is also to try and regain legitimacy among our peers in the industry. We have to make sure that South Africans get the information they require which is quality and credible information.⁷

Leading up to and during the period under review for this article, a number of journalists and other SABC executives and staff had resigned across all divisions. But from the start of 2018, after the appointment of Chris Maroleng⁸ as permanent chief operating officer and Magopeni as the group executive of news and current affairs,⁹ experienced and respected journalists

were also brought in to anchor prime-time radio and TV slots.

The first of the new crop of journalists included Stephen Grootes, a veteran broadcaster from the Primedia stable, followed by investigative journalist Bongani Bingwa, who previously anchored

M-Net's current affairs show Carte Blanche, and seasoned all-rounder Redi Tlhabi.¹⁰

The new journalists were recruited to strengthen the already depleted but still eminently well-staffed team that included those who had survived the ravages of bureaucracy such as Sakina Kamwendo on radio.

A similar pattern, although less visible, was happening at the SABC's African-language radio stations. Al-

THE WORDS 'INDEPENDENT' AND 'IMPARTIAL' MARKED AN IMPORTANT MOMENT IN DISTANCING THE SABC FROM PAST PERCEPTIONS

Proposed staff reductions in key areas

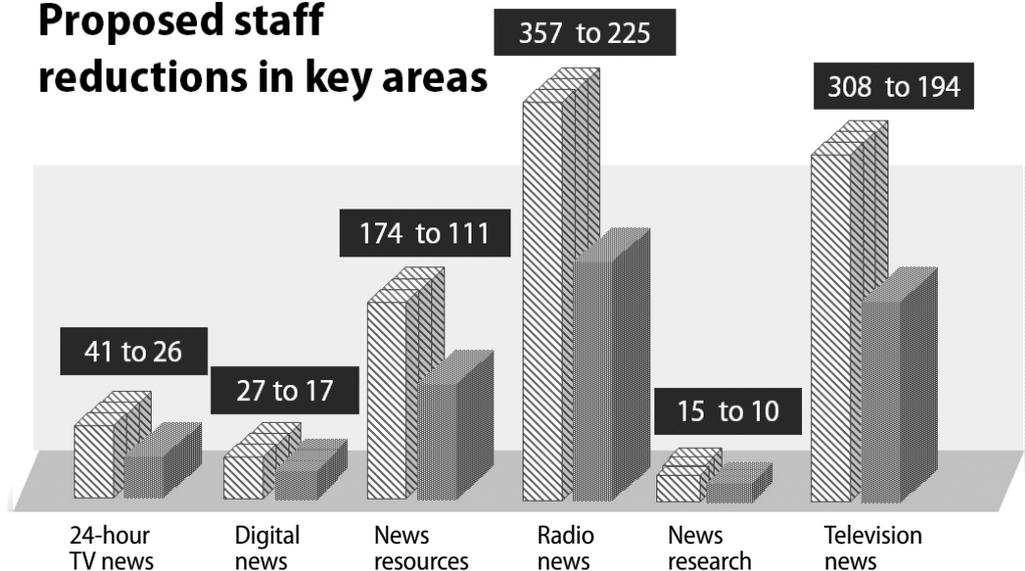


Figure 1. SABC News proposed staff reductions in certain key areas. This excludes departments with only two or three staff. Source: Turnaround plan, September 2018



Activists project a documentary about the Marikana shootings onto the outside wall of the Seapoint SABC building. The SABC had declined to broadcast the documentary. *Ashraf Hendricks/GroundUp*

though this series of events has not been documented, sporadic news reports did reveal that the malaise had spread throughout the corporation.

However, any gains made in public trust were again under threat by the end of the year, when the SABC board found itself rebuked by parliament's highest oversight authority on public finance matters, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa).

The board presentation of its turn-around plan on 7 November 2018 before Scopa was dismissed by the committee, which then sent the SABC board members and executive directors packing before they could complete their presentation.

This political snub by Scopa capped a week of high drama at the public broadcaster. It began with the premature public release of SABC top-executive salaries by the then minister of communications, Nomvula Mokonyane, in reply to a question put by the shadow minister of communications, Phumzile van Damme.¹¹ This was followed by the release of a report of an investigation into sexual misconduct at two SABC radio stations.

A week before this, SABC group chief executive officer Madoda Mxak-

we had announced that the SABC was technically insolvent, and that a massive retrenchment process was to be part of the corporation's turn-around strategy.¹²

This announcement appears to have been the spark that ignited a fury of criticism from civil society organisations, political parties and, as would be expected, the three labour unions active at the SABC.

On 29 October 2018 the SABC issued a notice to all staff informing them of the board's intention to invoke Section 189 of the Labour Relations Act (LRA).¹³ Employee costs were reported to be at an historic high of R3,1-billion and the biggest cost driver accounting for 42% of the SABC's operating expenses.¹⁴

At the same time the board announced that it would be approaching the Labour Court to have irregular appointments and promotions declared invalid.¹⁵

The SABC's turn-around plan set

out the proposed staff cuts for the SABC news division. As Figure 1 (opposite page) shows, of the total 930 staff accounted for, a total of 341 cuts were proposed, with the largest number coming from radio news (132), followed by TV news (114). Radio and TV news currently account for 38% and 35% of the total costs of the division.

EMPLOYEE COSTS WERE AT AN HISTORIC HIGH OF R3,1-BILLION, ACCOUNTING FOR 42% OF THE SABC'S OPERATING EXPENSES ... OUT OF 930 STAFF, 341 WOULD BE CUT

The proposed cuts were estimated to reduce the annual employee costs in the news division from R582 245 520, to R213 016 594 (a cost saving of 37%) or after all legal and compliance costs (severance pay etc.) a true saving of 15,3%. The cuts would

leave the SABC news

division with 589 journalists. The cuts at the biggest employer of journalists in the South African media sector, which were to impact both on its radio and TV newsdesks, sent shockwaves through an industry already reeling from retrenchments across multiple newsrooms over the past five years.

For the three months that followed the announcement of the retrenchments there was a maelstrom of activity achieving nothing as a further four SABC board members resigned, following the earlier resignation of three and the non-acceptance of one member that had been appointed in late 2017.

These resignations left the board inquorate and unable to conduct any significant business, a situation which pertained until new board members were appointed almost four months later.

In this circumstance the group chief executive officer of the SABC stepped into the board's shoes as the accounting authority,¹⁶ in addition to his responsibility as the accounting officer; but with little means to affect any business, his was merely a caretaker of a restless behemoth.

A green shoot of hope came in the form of a further announcement by the SABC in January 2019 that the proposed retrenchments and cutback in freelancers would be halted (now for the second time),¹⁷

and that only once a comprehensive skills audit had been undertaken would the matter of staff reductions, training and redeployment again assume centre stage. This seemed to have lifted a weight off the shoulders of many staff and freelance contract workers, at least for the foreseeable future.

The skills audit would be a follow-up on a flawed skills audit conducted in 2013 – flawed to the extent that a new comprehensive skills audit at the broadcaster was necessary to support the latest turn-around plan presented by the board to parliament

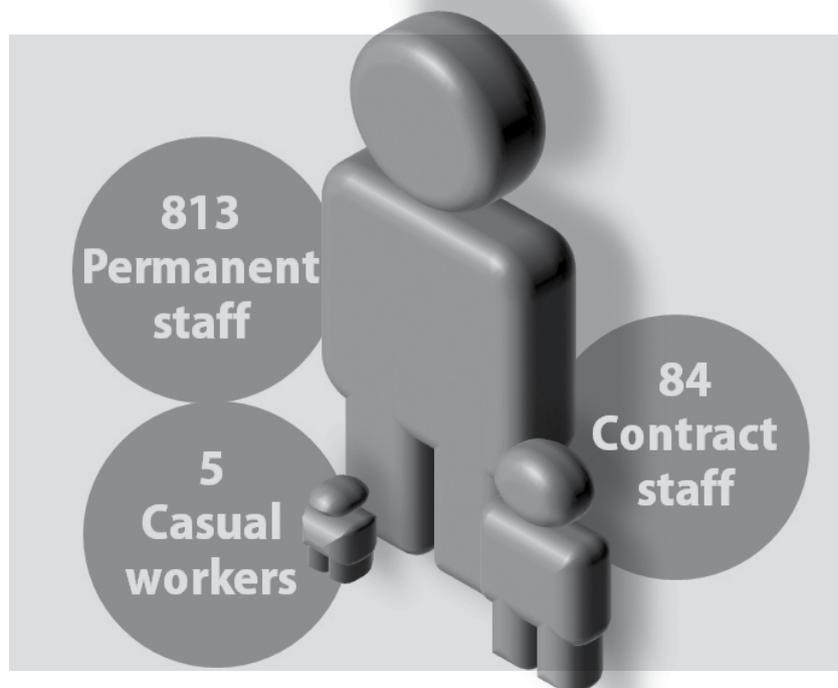


Figure 2. Employment categories of SABC News staff, August 2018. Source: SABC News

in November 2018.

The move to temporarily suspend retrenchments was welcomed by many as an opportunity for all affected stakeholders to engage in an inclusive process to rebuild a flailing institution. There were a number of questions raised by politicians¹⁸ and commentators¹⁹ regarding the capacity of the SABC to continue to deliver on its mandate after the proposed staff reductions.

The delayed digital migration at the broadcaster meant there was mounting pressure on the SABC to account for its digital capacity needs. How would its decision to lay off staff impact on the need for new digital skills so sorely needed at the institution?

Would it still have access to staff with digital skills when those with these skills might have been let go because of the retrenchment policy of “last in, first out”? Or would it ensure that it retained the energy of new recruits equipped with skills of the future, while also valuing those with

years of work experience?²⁰

And would it be able to continue to meet – or exceed, as it currently does when it comes to local content quotas – the extensive licence conditions laid down by the regulator, Icasa?

These questions were not just theoretical. With South Africans then about to go to the polls in May 2019, it was not only the broadcaster's digital future that was at stake: the capacity of the news division to deliver remained top of mind.

PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE ODDS

Despite the corrosive environment and corporate capture at the broadcaster, the SABC news division has continued to provide hundreds of hours of fresh news and current affairs content in all 11 languages across 18 radio stations, four TV channels and a growing number of digital platforms, including YouTube,²¹ Twitter²² and streaming on its digital news portal SABC News Online.²³

The performance of the news division, and specifically its programme output, belies the fact of an organisation in crisis and in danger of complete collapse. The SABC's TV chan-

THE SABC HAS CONTINUED TO PROVIDE HUNDREDS OF HOURS OF NEWS IN ALL 11 LANGUAGES ACROSS 18 RADIO STATIONS AND FOUR TV CHANNELS

nels are consistently ranked among the top five on the DStv satellite pay-TV platform.²⁴

With regard to the TV news audiences, the isiZulu and isiXhosa news bulletins on SABC 1 rank sixth and seventh respectively among the top 20 programmes on the terrestrial platforms in South Africa. The isiZulu news bulletins attracted a monthly average 34% of all adults 15 years and older in 2018 and 21% of these fell into the upper Life Style Measure (LSM) bands.²⁵

In March 2018, much like the rest of the year, four out of the top five most popular shows in South Africa were on SABC channels, and 17 of the top 20 were on SABC channels, followed by e.tv with three. The SABC's isiZulu and isiXhosa TV news bulletins are the only news programmes to feature among the top 20, each with a respectable share of 34% with the e.tv bulletins averaging about 12%.

The Icasa local content quotas –

which were reviewed in 2016 for the first time in 20 years²⁶ – set content quotas for radio and TV for different programme genres. For example, in radio, quotas (in number of minutes per day) apply to news, current affairs, informal knowledge building, education, children, and drama.

Apart from Sundays, and with the exception of one station, all the SABC radio stations far exceed the Icasa quotas, in some cases by more than 20-30%. When it comes to news and current affairs, one is struck by the number of minutes of the actual performance above the Icasa licence conditions for all languages including those of the indigenous San and Khoi speakers on XK-FM.²⁷ This is a clear outcome of regulatory policy developed in the mid-1990s.²⁸

While the SABC performs well in respect of audience share, in the context of the financial difficulties at the broadcaster, it is important to point out that this is not reflected in its

share of advertising revenue. All the SABC's 18 radio stations and four TV channels combined earned the same revenue as Multichoice, and DStv earned 20% more ad revenue than all SABC TV channels in 2016/7.²⁹

CURRENT STAFF COMPLEMENT AT SABC NEWS

Somewhat different data on its current staff complement to that announced during the retrenchment notice at the SABC was provided to us by the broadcaster. No satisfactory explanation was given for the difference in the numbers, which only emphasises the uncertainty around the current organisational staff capacity at the broadcaster and of the need for a new comprehensive skills audit ahead of any retrenchments.

Using this data, the number of employees at SABC News including non-editorial functions as at August 2018 is shown in Figure 2 (top left).

	Black female	Black male	Black total	White female	White male	White total	Grand total
News: Business administration		1	1				1
News: Marketing	2	2	4				4
News: Strategic alignment	1		1				1
News: Research	9	6	15				15
Radio news	181	199	380	30	21	51	431
SABC news 24-hour channel	19	18	37	1		1	38
Television news	158	189	347	27	24	51	398
TV foreign / world desk	1	3	4		1	1	5
TV news special projects	4	4	8	1		1	9
Grand total	375	422	797	59	46	105	902

Table 1: SABC News demographics by occupational group, August 2018. *Source: SABC News*

As can be seen, of the total of 902 staff, 813 are permanent with the remainder contract staff. Staffers are also relatively young: over 70% of staff members are under 45 years old.

Table 1 (previous page) shows the breakdown of staff by race and gender, as well as the occupational group of the overall staff compliment. The news division at the broadcaster clearly has achieved impressive demographic targets over the last 25 years, with an almost 90% black and 50% female staff complement.

There are 181 black female editorial staff in SABC radio news and 158 in SABC TV news.³⁰ As it shows, slightly more staffers work in TV news when including the SABC NEWS 24-hour channel and the foreign desks and special projects.

DIGITAL MIGRATION – IS THE SABC READY?

It is clear that any staff cuts at the broadcaster would have to have the requirements of a new digital environment in mind.

According to a statement issued by the SABC in January 2019, the aim of the new skills audit is “to provide the SABC with a fit-for-purpose structure, with clearly defined span of control, appropriate layers of management and appropriate skills and competencies for roles”.

This is intended to “ensure that the SABC meets its strategic objective of operating optimally and competitively in a digitised environment.”³¹ In this respect the flawed 2013 audit by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) holds some baseline value for the broadcaster and also provides a broad indication that the SABC needs to do some work in clarifying its future digital needs.

In February 2014 the SABC released a prepared version of the original re-

PROJECT CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The primary challenge experienced during the Skills Audit 2013 project centred on access and integrity of information:

- Poor quality and lack of information available in personnel files;
- Lack of job specifications and associated tasks not standardised;
- Core business processes not mapped;
- Unavailability of executive and senior managers to honour scheduled assessment appointments due to busy and tight schedules;
- Lack of and inaccurate job profiles;
- Absence of performance management information;
- 51% sign off on job profiles by managers on technical competencies per job family;
- Response rates of managers to verify competency data impacted on the ability to perform 180-degree surveys.³³

(Source: PWC Report)

port of the controversial skills assessment, much to the chagrin of the then senior executives who were described as lacking, among others, strategic vision and basic management skills in the report. However this was not the reason for the controversy that surrounded the release of the report. Instead it lay in the scope and purpose of its review and assessment, the validity of its findings, and the intention of those who commissioned the audit in the first place.

This all-encompassing and clearly overambitious exercise – which considered skills across all work areas at the broadcaster – was conducted by PwC on behalf of the SABC and at the behest of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Communications (PPC Comms) in 2013.³²

Yet instead of casting light on a gargantuan task to re-position the broadcaster, it cast further doubt on the ability of the executive to manage the corporation. Under the heading “Project Challenges and Limitations” the PwC report states the reasons they could not actually deliver on the objectives of the audit. (See panel above).

The demographics of the respondents to the skills audit were only a re-

flection of those who responded and not of the SABC as a whole. Black (which the report defined as African, coloured and Indian) participants made up 81% of the respondents.

According to the report, one-third of the participants were “millennials”: 32% of participants were younger than 35 years of age, with 12% over 56. Employees over 35 years old made up the majority of participants in the administrative, management and technology categories. While 24% of the participants had a matric certificate as

INSTEAD OF CASTING LIGHT ON A GIANT TASK TO REPOSITION THE BROADCASTER, IT CAST FURTHER DOUBT ON THE ABILITY OF THE EXECUTIVE TO MANAGE THE SABC

their highest qualification, over half of the participants had some sort of formal post-matric qualification, with 47% having been awarded either a certificate or a diploma.

The survey measured the highest levels of proficiency in fi-

nance and human capital services. It identified the most scarce and critical skills as communication, time management, strategic thinking, budgeting, creative writing and scripting, and business management skills, which it called ‘soft skills’. While the survey said these were scarce skills at the broadcaster, participants had gen-



An unexpected and promising success has been the launch of new digital platforms

erally rated their level of proficiency against these skills as high. Capacity development through skills programmes and short courses was necessary to address these skills shortages.

The report saw an increased demand for specific sets of technical skills at the broadcaster:

- *Expert metadata skills, so that metadata can be built into the digital content;*
- *Broadcast/IP network skills;*
- *Re-versioning and repurposing skills;*
- *Digital broadcast architecture and digital equipment skills;*
- *Ingest skills; and*
- *Skills in post-production of digital content.*³⁴

It said participants from both radio and television would benefit from technical training focused on the SABC’s digitisation needs and objec-

tives, despite scoring themselves with a high level of proficiency in this area.

The report concluded that across the entire organisation there was a need for a “hybrid of analogue and digital skills while the SABC gradually phased out analogue content”.

This would “demand multi-skilling”, meaning “individuals who would have to understand both analogue and digital platforms and their impact on content development and workflow”.³⁵ This finding clearly suggests the need for the broadcaster to retain and up-skill experienced staff in any retrenchment process.

The one area where SABC News is showing incredible promise and growth is in digital news. To support this digital strategy at SABC, the single most important project over the medium term (five years) will be the launch of its Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) platform and new channels.

The PwC skills audit called this a

key performance area in putting the broadcaster at the forefront of “audience attraction and retention.”³⁶ But as at end March 2019, the requirements for a successful launch had still not been met.

Apart from gaps in the technology infrastructure – and financial constraints³⁷ – there is serious doubt about the skills profile and capacity of SABC staff, as suggested by the PwC report. Moreover, while digital skills are identified as necessary, the audit emphasised that in many cases the exact skills set could not be determined given that the migration process was incomplete.³⁸

CONCLUSION

This article was written at a time when the SABC board and management were considering not if, but how many staff would have to be retrenched as part of efforts to bring the SABC’s burgeoning and unsustainable wage bill under control.

It is a tall order and the SABC board and management have on numerous occasions over the past year had to deal with the fallout of previous administrations that failed to develop a robust and sustainable funding model for the corporation. This has led to an untenable situation where the SABC is saddled with costs that could have and should have been foreseen, but which are then described as an “unfunded mandate”, resulting in successive negative audits and disclaimers by the auditor-general. These include costs associated with coverage of elections, parliamentary proceedings, state funerals and cultural and sporting events of “national importance”.

The treasury, and rightly so, insisted that no loans, guarantees, bailouts, or any other form of financial assistance would be extended to the SABC without a properly crafted, legally submitted turn-around plan. Likewise, parliament’s portfolio committee on communications insisted on a turn-around plan, with details of the staff profile of the SABC, a skills audit, and

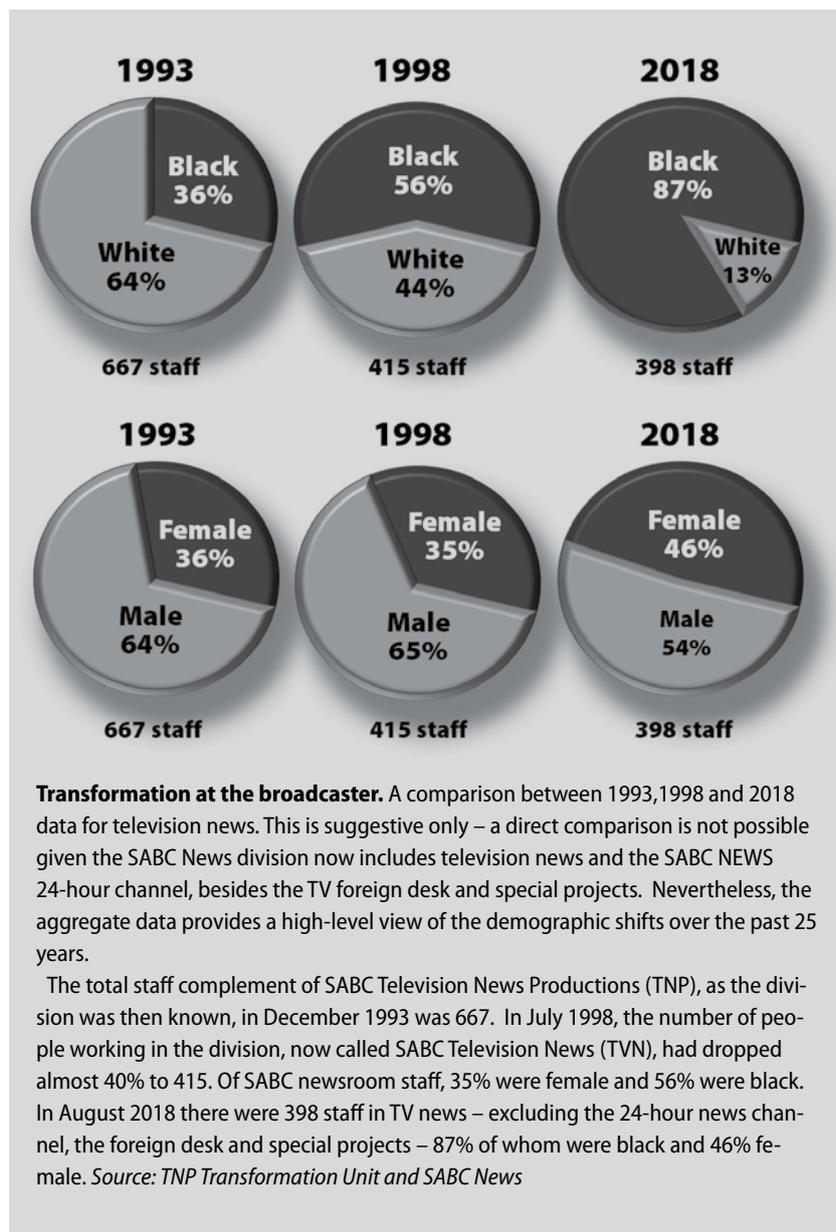
details about future staffing levels.

The jury is still out (in fact the jury has not even sat down to consider the matter!) on how the state capture project with its proficient protagonists, inside and outside the SABC, has contributed to the “collapse”³⁹ of the SABC. However, there is mounting evidence that the successive failures of governance and gross mismanagement lie at the root of the problem. From an editorial perspective, and specifically with regard to the threats to editorial independence, the continuing delay in publishing the SABC’s editorial policies contributes to an atmosphere of uncertainty. This at a time when the country was preparing to go to the polls, with the majority of citizens relying on the SABC as their only source of information.

At least two official inquiries into the affairs of the SABC have pointed to a lack of effective oversight by parliament⁴⁰ and the regulator, and a dereliction of shareholder responsibilities. These allowed the large-scale financial irregularities to seed, and executive over-reach, editorial interference and censorship on a scale not experienced since the grim and grey days of apartheid to go unchecked.

In her final report the public protector found that the “alleged systemic corporate governance failures” at the SABC are symptomatic of “pathological corporate governance deficiencies”⁴¹ at the broadcaster, including failure by the board to provide strategic oversight. The public protector also found that the minister of communications unduly interfered in the affairs of the SABC.

These governance failures and financial woes that could have been prevented were compounded by the absence of a sustainable funding model for the SABC. The development of this model has been on the policy agenda since 1994, and succes-



sive ministers of communication have promised and failed to deliver on this most critical aspect of the SABC’s mandate as a public service broadcaster.

It is against this background that the latest turn-around strategy should be viewed: in the first instance as an attempt to address the governance failures, but second as a move to stabilise the organisation, or in the words of the SABC board, to establish a “fit-for-purpose structure”.

The impacts of corruption are multivalent and, in the case of the SABC, rebuilding a nation’s trust is no easy thing. Crafting the SABC turn-around strategy involved both

a period of intense ethical review of the organisation’s governance and editorial structures and mandates, and a cold-eyed financial review of its crippled balance sheet. Ideally, such a process should be transparent, so that the public trust can be restored along with the reinvigoration of its governance structures and processes. However due to a spate of resignations leaving the SABC board in quorate this was not to be the case.

The decision to go ahead with the skills audit that will inform the processes of re-structuring the SABC has inspired both fleeting hope and lingering fear in equal measure. There is hope among those SABC staffers, sup-

pliers and independent producers directly involved, but also the bemused but generally apathetic public, and the burgeoning army of “social mediators”. There are high expectations among all concerned that by removing the threat of job losses and embarking on a skills audit the SABC board has secured broad participation in the process, and by making commitments to secure the finances of the SABC, the minister of communications, Stella Ndabeni-Abrahams, has removed an element of uncertainty that has kept the organisation, and the industry that supports it, in treacherous limbo for over a decade.

But time is not on the side of the SABC and there are inherent risks in doing the skills audit, even when the finances to do it become available. First, it is going to take at least 14 months to complete a comprehensive skills audit of this scope and there is the fear of further uncertainty while the process unfolds.

Second, there is a danger that once the information from the SABC’s turn-around strategy and skills audit is made publicly available, it could expose the SABC, not least to their competitors.

Although the SABC is required to present its annual corporate plans as a public entity defined in the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA), there will be legitimate reservations on the part of the board and management to disclose in detail sensitive commercial information underpinning their corporate strategy.

The fear that cunning competitors might make use of the commercially useful information in their business plans is not unfounded. This was done in the past, and it falls to the parliamentary portfolio committee on communications to listen to the concerns of the SABC.

Whether or not the needs for digital skills are properly known at the broadcaster is unclear. It is worth noting that a level of uncertainty and even fear was expressed by those who were asked for information for this article.

After making several written requests for detailed information from senior management at the SABC, and being passed from executive to executive, there was little information forthcoming. Part of the reluctance to share information freely might be because of the unstable state of the broadcaster, but data – whether stable or not – should have been readily shared in the public interest.

At a time that the board is hard-pressed to answer questions asked by members of parliament – the current crop of SABC board members has been grilled alive by politicians asking them what they are doing about implementing the public protectors’ remedial action and the recommendations arising

from parliament’s *ad hoc* committee inquiry into the SABC – it is important that a balance between protecting confidentiality and ensuring transparency and accountability is achieved.

The year 2019 will be a defining one for the SABC, and all eyes are on the new minister of communications and her relationship with the board, the new legislation governing the SABC that the department of communications plans to release, and the outcome of the corporate restructuring.

The digital switchover has already determined the way in which news and information programming will be produced and consumed in the coming years, and the SABC will require visionary leadership and passionate, creative and committed staff at this critical juncture to take it out of the

doldrums and onto a path of growth.

END NOTES

- 1 Data for the channel is measured but not reported on by the Broadcast Research Council, but reports to the author have confirmed the growth of the audience numbers (<https://brcsa.org.za/brc-ram-release-presentation-february-2019/>). In the 2017/18 financial year, traffic on the website showed steady growth ending the year at 875 000 page views. The SABC News YouTube channel reached 10-million views in March 2018 from an average monthly performance of five million views. On Twitter, the @sabc-newsonline account broke through the one million followers ceiling, with Facebook likes also growing steadily to around 750 000 by the end of the period under review.
- 2 The final report was adopted by the National Assembly in February 2017 and the SABC was required to report to parliament on progress in implementing the recommendations during 2018 and 2019. The Ad Hoc Committee recommended “the formal dissolution of the Board and the immediate appointment of an Interim Board in terms of section 15A of the Broadcasting Act” (p.73). The final report can be found at: <https://pmg.org.za/page/https://pmg.org.za/tables-committee-report/2898?via=homepage-feature-card>
- 3 See, for example, Office of the Public Protector South Africa (2014) When Governance and Ethics Fail. A report on an investigation into allegations of maladministration, systemic corporate governance deficiencies, abuse of power and the irregular appointment of Mr. Hlaudi Motsoeneng by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). http://pmg-assets.s3-website-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/WHEN_GOVERNANCE_FAILS_REPORT_EXEC_SUMMARY.pdf
- 4 The authors of Betrayal of the Promise: How South Africa is Being Stolen define a “silent coup” as more complex and far reaching than the conception of state capture. They argue that a narrow focus on state capture “obscures the existence of a political project at work”. They caution that a distinction must be drawn between state capture and a silent coup if one is to fully understand the dynamics of a corrosive political project. Swilling, M. et al (2007) Betrayal of the Promise: How South Africa is Being Stolen. State Capacity Research Project. Johannesburg. p.2 <https://pari.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Betrayal-of-the-Promise-25052017.pdf>
- 5 SABC News is used in the article to refer to both the news and current affairs division within the SABC and to the programme content output of SABC as a news organisation. This perspective allows one to focus on both the division alternately referred to as “News and Current Affairs”, and “SABC News” or the “SABC news division” in various official documents including annual reports, corporate strategic plans, and annual performance plans that were consulted for this article. This view of the SABC as a whole rather than just the news division being referred to as the “news organisation” was the basis for the 2004 editorial policies at the SABC and the draft July 2018 policy which designates the

- group chief executive officer, and not the group executive of news and current affairs, as the editor-in-chief as things stand in April 2019. This was a hotly contested position during the public consultation exercise, and will in all likelihood form the subject of ongoing policy reviews on public service media, news, and digital and local content, currently underway at the department of communications. In all instances "SABC NEWS channel" refers to the broadcaster's 24-hour TV news channel.
- 6 SABC (2018) 100 years of living the legacy. SABC Annual Report 2018. Johannesburg. p.15. <http://www.sabc.co.za/sabc/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/SABCAR30Aug2018email-1.pdf>
 - 7 Ibid.
 - 8 At the time of writing the final draft of this article in late April 2019 Chris Maroleng was axed following a disciplinary inquiry. He announced that he was planning to challenge his dismissal.
 - 9 The group chief executive officer, Madoda Mxakwe, and chief financial officer, Yolande van Biljon, were both appointed in July 2018.
 - 10 Staff reporter. (3/10/2018) Redi Tlhabi to host 'Unfiltered' current affairs show for SABC News. Themediaonline. <https://thediaonline.co.za/2018/10/redi-tlhabi-to-host-unfiltered-on-sabc-news/>
 - 11 According to reports, "Van Damme called for an independent body to review all SABC top management salaries and place them at market value". She said this was necessary because "[t]o demonstrate goodwill and unity with staff, top management ought to commit to not only freezing in their own salaries, and not resist any advice to reduce their salaries after the review is undertaken". Nevill, G. (1/10/2018) SABC has 'significantly reduced' salaries of executive management, board. The Media Online. <https://thediaonline.co.za/2018/10/sabc-orders-freeze-on-salaries-filling-positions/>
 - 12 Ngcobo, N. (31/10/2018) SABC technically insolvent: Mxakwe. SABC News. <http://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/sabc-technical-insolvent-mxakwe/>
 - 13 SABC media release (29/10/2018) SABC to proceed with Section 189. SABC, Johannesburg. <http://www.sabc.co.za/sabc/sabc-to-proceed-with-section-189/>. The media release issued by the SABC contained the figures for total staff to be retrenched (981) and not just the staff in the news division. It also said that some 1200 freelancers would lose their work. It is unclear how many of these are journalists. Separately the SABC informed us that it hires about 270 freelancers each month for its news division.
 - 14 SABC board slide presentation (2018) SABC Strategic Roadmap. <https://www.slideshare.net/sabcnews/sabc-roadmap-strategic-roadmap>. See slide 6.
 - 15 SABC media release (29/10/2108) SABC to approach the labour court on irregular appointments and promotions. SABC, Johannesburg <http://www.sabc.co.za/sabc/sabc-to-approach-the-labour-court-on-irregular-appointments-and-promotions/>
 - 16 This uncertain situation and the risk of an organisation the size of the SABC without a board was partially assuaged after the president appointed eight members to the board in April 2019.
 - 17 The process had been halted earlier following the joint consensus-seeking meeting held on 12 October 2018 with organised labour. At this meeting it was agreed that the LRA's Section 189 notice would be put in abeyance until further details as requested by unions were made available.
 - 18 During the last quarter of 2018 the new SABC board members were repeatedly called to account for the failure of the SABC to recover funds misappropriated or stolen and to launch criminal proceedings against those who were involved in malfeasance.
 - 19 Calls came from organised labour, civil society organisations representing human rights, freedom of expression and public interest organisations as well as industry associations representing a spectrum of suppliers of goods and services to the SABC. In addition to the critical issues of censorship they raised concerns over non-payment for content, goods and services delivered
 - 20 A range of digital skills were identified as scarce and critical in the 2013 PWC skills assessment of SABC staff. See below for a fuller account of the skills audit.
 - 21 <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8yH-ul81UUtEMDsoyQyx1g>
 - 22 <https://twitter.com/SABCNewsOnline>
 - 23 <http://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/>
 - 24 The Broadcast Research Council of South Africa. February 2019 Top TV Programs. <https://brcsa.org.za/february-2019-top-tv-programs/>
 - 25 The LSM market segmentation tool is no longer used as a currency by the broadcasting industry. This has been replaced by the Broadcast Research Council's Socio-Economic Measure (SEM) that was phased in over a period of two years from 2016 (see <https://brcsa.org.za/sem-visuals-demographics-october-2017/>).
 - 26 Independent Communications Authority of South Africa. (2016) Regulations on Local Television Content. Government Gazette 39844 of 23 March 2016. <https://www.icasa.org.za/uploads/files/ICA-SA-Regulations-on-Local-Television-Content-Gazette-39844-No345.pdf> The regulations not only prescribe a percentage but also specify the times during which specific television programme genres must be broadcast. This is to ensure that as many people as possible view such programmes if the quotas are to have any effect. Current affairs regulations require the SABC to ensure that a minimum weekly of 65% of its programming consists of South African content. It must also ensure that 80% of its current affairs programming, 50% of its documentary programming, and 50% of its knowledge building programming is South African. All the SABC public broadcast radio stations were also required in the review to increase their local music quotas from 40% to 60% and the Public Commercial Broadcasting Services (PCBS) radio stations from 25% to 35%.
 - 27 These figures were provided by the SABC and have not been verified from other sources such as Icasa monitoring reports which tend to be out of date and limited. They are therefore being taken at face value. However, the Auditor-General in note 31 of the SABC 2018 annual report states that they were unable "to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence to support the reported achievement of the targets listed below. This was due to inadequate technical indicator descriptions and proper performance management systems and processes that predetermined how the achievement would be measured, monitored and reported." SABC (2018) 100 years of living the legacy. Johannesburg. p.15. <http://www.sabc.co.za/sabc/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/SABCAR30Aug2018email-1.pdf>. p.15.
 - 28 The review of the Icasa quotas will form part of the review of broadcasting policy that is currently underway. The minister of communications announced that the policy review would prioritise public broadcasting, and the department of communications convened a colloquium in 2019 to solicit public input. This followed the withdrawal of a policy paper on audio visual content that was supposed to compliment the ICT Policy. No explanation was given for the withdrawal.
 - 29 Nielsen Adex. <https://www.nielsen.com/za/en.html>
 - 30 It was unclear if the numbers of SABC News 24-hour channel were for editorial staff only. Given the relatively small numbers involved, they have been recorded as such.
 - 31 SABC media release (31/1/2019) SABC update on the Section 189 of the LRA process. SABC, Johannesburg. <http://www.sabc.co.za/sabc/sabc-update-on-the-section-189-of-the-lra-process/>
 - 32 The PwC skills assessment was conducted from April-September 2013.
 - 33 PwC (2014) SABC Skills Audit Report. Presented by: Human Capital Services to the Communications Portfolio Committee. Johannesburg. p.5. <http://pmg-assets.s3-website-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/140204sabc.doc>
 - 34 Ibid. pp 42-43
 - 35 Ibid. p.43
 - 36 Ibid. p.4
 - 37 The minister of communications announced in parliament during February 2019 that the department of communications does not have the over R5-billion required to subsidise the roll-out of set-top-boxes.
 - 38 The report is peppered with statements such as "[t]he breadth and depth of the SABC's re-skilling and up-skilling will be determined by the scale of its digital transformation" or "[t]he requirements for the digital archive system have not been established yet and as a result, the exact impact cannot be determined at this stage" and "[i]t is important to finalise the requirements for the SABC's digital archive system as soon as possible, to ascertain the exact impact on workflow and skills needs in this area." p.44
 - 39 Statement by Neo Momudu, then spokesperson of the SABC. Kumalo, J (27/12/2018) *The SABC has completely collapsed*. Daily Sun. <https://www.dailysun.co.za/News/National/sabc-has-completely-collapsed-20181226>
 - 40 The Report of the Ad Hoc Committee was critical of the oversight role of parliament: "The inquiry has revealed how inadequate parliamentary oversight had contributed to the disintegration of governance and accountability at the SABC. The Committee therefore recommends that Members of Parliament should receive adequate training and support to enable them to exercise their oversight responsibility competently." (p.76).
 - 41 Ibid. p.20
 - 42 TNP Implementation of Values and Vision of SABC Board, December 1993
 - 43 TVN Update Week 2 (14/1/1997 – 21/1/1997)
 - 44 Source: HR manager SABC TV News.

VULNERABILITIES AND SILENCES

Are the risks faced by journalists working in South Africa taken seriously by newsrooms?



Student protesters clash with private security during protests over fees at the University of Cape Town (UCT). *Ashraf Hendricks/GroundUp*

There is a growing body of evidence of the mental health risks that journalists face in the course of their everyday work. But in a country that has been described as a “natural laboratory” for the study of trauma, how prepared are South African newsrooms to offer the necessary support to journalists?

ALAN FINLAY

INTRODUCTION

The harassment and intimidation of journalists in South Africa over the past few years – in one case reportedly leading to the death of a female journalist at the SABC – stresses the need to assess the preparedness of newsrooms to offer the necessary support for journalists working in this country. Such a review is in line with global trends, including Unesco’s safety plan with its pilot set of indicators on journalist safety, and the expectations of the Sustainable Development Goals, which emphasise the safety of journalists in achieving sustainability targets.

This article frames the issue of journalist vulnerabilities in the South African context. It includes a sample survey of journalists to get a sense of how protected they feel when making the news.

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

Threats against journalists across the world are said to be on the increase and have raised concern amongst rights organisations. The 2018 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders reports a “growing animosity” towards journalists, encouraged by political leaders. In its survey of 180 coun-

tries, it describes a “climate of hatred” that has become “steadily more visible,” and a pronounced “media phobia” in authoritarian regimes.¹ According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) 1,334 journalists were killed between 1992 and 2018,² where their deaths could be directly attributed to the work they do.³ The annual media freedoms report by Freedom House also finds a growing intensity of attacks on journalists in countries across the globe, with many of these attacks occurring online.⁴

There is now a body of evidence of the mental health risks that journalists face in the course of doing their work. While burnout in the newsroom was already being investigated in the early 1990s,⁵ by the early 2000s a number of studies on traumatic stress disorders in journalists started to emerge.⁶ In one 2002 study of 140 war correspondents, researchers found a 28.6% life prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a 21.4% rate of depression, and a 14.3% rate of substance abuse – similar to disorders experienced by returning soldiers.⁷

Studies have also considered the everyday exposure of journalists to traumas such as violent crime, fatal fires or motor accidents, the impact of reporting on natural disasters or on a refugee crisis, and vicarious trauma or secondary traumatic stress (STS), which can be defined as “the emotions and behaviours that arise from hearing about another person’s trauma.”⁸ They have shown that journalists can experience similar post-traumatic effects when witnessing daily violence to frontline responders such as police officers, emergency paramedics and firefighters.⁹

The effects of vicarious trauma are said to be cumulative – sometimes called the “slow drip effect”¹⁰ – and are “directly related to the amount of exposure to traumatic details and how graphic those details are.”¹¹ The negative psychological effect of an event can be exacerbated by the length of exposure to that event, for example when television reporters are required to stay at the site of an incident to provide ongoing live coverage as a story unfolds.¹² Trauma can also be heightened when a journalist has a personal connection to events being reported on, or know someone involved.¹³

Other symptoms of psychological stress found amongst journalists included compassion fatigue, described as “a collection of psychological symptoms that results from experiencing the aftermath of a tragedy and talking to the victims of tragedy.”¹⁴ Contributors to compassion fatigue include burnout and vicarious trauma. Burnout is common in highly pressurised work environments such as newsrooms, with the repeated exposure to “emotionally charged conditions or interactions with those who are emotionally distressed.”¹⁵ A symptom of burnout includes “an overall loss of concern for those who have been traumatised or depersonalisation and a tendency to interact with them in a mechanical fashion.”¹⁶

Potential exposure to trauma can also be related to one’s gender. Women journalists face specific risks, both in the workplace and in the field. In a global survey of some 1,000 female journalists it was found that almost two-thirds of the survey’s respondents had experienced intimidation, threats or abuse that were the result of their work. Many of these incidents occurred in the workplace, with the perpetrators being workplace colleagues (male bosses, supervisors and co-workers). Most of these incidents were also not reported, despite the negative psychological

Residents from Bo-Kaap protest by attempting to stop a crane from entering the area. Residents said that gentrification of the area is forcing them out. 20 November 2018. *Ashraf Hendricks/GroundUp*



effects the respondents said they experienced.¹⁷

Not all studies show evidence of PTSD in journalists covering traumatic events. For example, a recent study on coverage of the refugee crisis in Europe found that there was significant evidence of what the research termed “moral outrage” – with concerns of the extent to which this impacted on the objectivity of journalists – rather than noticeable occurrences of depression or PTSD amongst those who took part in the study.¹⁸

Studies have also tried to account for individual resilience in order to understand the different reactions of journalists to the same event in a nuanced way – we are different and experience and cope with trauma differently.

Particularly relevant to the purpose of this article, research shows that training, institutional support as well as the availability of counselling can reduce the severity of trauma.¹⁹ In a 2011 survey of 280 television news workers that identified PTSD and compassion fatigue amongst the respondents, issues such as “job commitment, social support, perceived work pressure, and gender” were seen to influence the extent of compassion fatigue.²⁰ However, in a 2004 study it was found that journalists “are afraid to admit any feelings of burnout or distress because, as a rule, social support and counselling are not a part of the typical newsroom.”²¹

GLOBAL RESPONSES TO JOURNALIST SAFETY AND TRAUMA

A number of international organisations have responded to the vulnerability of journalists through interventions such as awareness raising, monitoring, developing safety tools and guides, and training. High-level policy commitments to journalist safety globally are also in place.

Unlike the previous Millennium Development Goals, the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises the safety of journalists as a contributing factor to overall sustainable development under its target 16.10 on public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms. Indicators are “verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months.”²²

In 2012 UNESCO launched its UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity²³ in an effort to create awareness of the threats to journalists both in conflict and non-conflict situations, and to strengthen the systemic response to these. As part of its plan of action it has piloted its Journalist Safety Indicators in five countries.²⁴ The indicators, which are considered descriptive

rather than prescriptive, refer to both the “physical and psychological security” of journalists. Of particular interest in their national-level indicators is the list of quite specific responsibilities of media owners towards the care of journalists. These include written in-house policies on journalist safety, the inclusion of freelance journalists in these safety protocols (research shows that freelance journalists are the most exposed and vulnerable, partly because they do not have the same protections as permanent employees),²⁵ creating safe workplaces, conducting risk assessments, and the right of reporters to refuse assignments. Specific attention should also be given to the risks women

journalists face, as well as the safety of journalists online. The responsibilities of journalist unions are also outlined.

JOURNALISTS ARE
AFRAID TO ADMIT
FEELINGS OF BURNOUT
OR DISTRESS BECAUSE
SOCIAL SUPPORT AND
COUNSELLING ARE
NOT A PART OF THE
TYPICAL NEWSROOM

The International News Safety Institute (INSI) is a member-based organisation that conducts research and training and serves as a forum for its members dedicated to the safety of journalists across the world. It offers training on practical issues such as first aid, planning and preparation, dealing with terrorism and landmines, and hiding one’s identity.²⁶ It also publishes an online set of “advisories” that, besides basic

preparedness, cover issues such as “what to do at checkpoints”, “wearing ballistic vests”, “protecting yourself from teargas”, and covering natural disasters.²⁷ INSI prioritises the safety of women journalists.

Besides campaigning for the safety of journalists worldwide, CPJ has developed a comprehensive repository of practical online resources for journalists.²⁸ These include checklists and advice on basic preparedness for journalists, on assessing risks, and on covering armed conflict, organised crime and corruption, natural disasters, and health epidemics and “mass hazards”.

The Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma – which is based at the Columbia Journalism School in the United States – promotes “ethical and thorough reporting of trauma; compassionate, professional treatment of victims and survivors by journalists; and greater awareness by media organisations of the impact of trauma coverage on both news professionals and news consumers.”²⁹ Amongst other things it offers useful resources on topics such as maintaining boundaries with interviewees (and work colleagues) for women journalists, dealing with online harassment, managing stress and trauma in investigative projects, dealing with the death of work colleagues, and handling traumatic imagery, where it promotes a pragmatic and systematised approach to workflow to minimise the traumatic impact of visual content on journalists.³⁰ It also offers a useful online database of research on journalism and trauma.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

With its high rates of murder, rape,³¹ domestic violence and child abuse,³² and other factors such as a high road death toll that is double the global average³³ – all of which occur against the backdrop of extraordinary poverty and the negative social consequences of stressors such as the HIV/Aids pandemic – trauma remains an endemic part of South African society.³⁴ Trauma experts have somewhat cynically described it as a “‘natural laboratory’ in which to study the impact of traumatic events and their consequences”.³⁵

South African journalists from time to time write about their experiences, even if these are not interpreted through a psychological lens. For example, *The Bang-Bang Club: Snapshots from a Hidden War* (2000) by Greg Marinovich

NEWSROOMS LACKED THE NECESSARY PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT TO MITIGATE THE TRAUMA, WHICH SHE ATTRIBUTED TO A ‘MACHO’ ETHIC IN THE PROFESSION

and João Silva captures the increasing numbness of the four photographers to the violence they witnesses in the townships during the 1990s: “Tragedy and violence certainly make powerful images. It is what we get paid for. But there is a price extracted with every such frame: some of the emotion, the vulnerability, the empathy that makes

us human, is lost every time the shutter is released,”³⁶ the authors write. Recently Ferial Haffajee wrote an account of her online harassment that was part of the so-called #whitemonopolycapital campaign that attacked journalists who were outspoken on state capture, saying how the highly gendered attacks left her feeling shameful and “dirty and endangered”.³⁷

There however appear to have been comparatively fewer studies done on the impact of trauma on South African journalists. Those that have stress the need for newsroom support structures, and the importance of a journalist’s perception of working in a supportive environment. In her 1997 study, Marilyn Shulman interviewed mostly crime reporters in this country who were repeatedly exposed to violence and trauma and found that while biological factors, psycho-social factors, and post-traumatic support were key mediating factors on whether or not journalists developed PTSD, newsrooms lacked the necessary psychological support to mitigate the trauma. She attributed this to a “macho-ethic” in the profession that limited their access to a “structured and regular way of diffusing their

experiences”.³⁸

More recently, in a 2006 study that involved 50 journalists (some also drawn from community media) Marais and Stuart found that perceptions of trauma, temperament and “sense of coherence” – or the extent to which a journalist can make sense of the traumatic experience – impacted on how journalists coped with the trauma they encountered on a daily basis. A key indicator of sense of coherence was “manageability”, which refers to the “individual’s perception of the availability of resources necessary for coping.”³⁹

While a “macho-ethic” might pervade South African newsrooms, it is not the case that the trauma experienced by journalists working in this country has not been recognised. As early as 1989 – at the height of the political violence in the townships – the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation worked with traumatised journalists, and a self-care programme for journalists was initiated by the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism.⁴⁰ Forums and spaces were also created to try understand the psychological experiences journalists faced in this country, including with Reuters in South Africa, and, for example, through roundtable discussions initiated by the Frontline Club in London in 2004.⁴¹

These efforts at acknowledging work-related trauma amongst journalists nevertheless appear to be isolated, and discussions such as those hosted by the Frontline Club show how journalists were expected to tough it out despite the violence they encountered during the 1990s:

I was Bureau Chief for Reuters in South Africa from 1990 – 1994 when some of the most terrible violence took place in the civil war in the townships. We witnessed some terrible horrors in the townships, not only death but also some awful mutilations; the gratuitous violence that was mentioned; the horrible methods of killing ...

Now, a lot of the correspondents at that time and particularly photographers had huge problems with alcohol and drugs, and we buried more than one because of these problems at the time. What I’d be interested in exploring is that at the time we had no word; the word trauma never crossed our lips, we had never heard of PTSD; families were left to get on with it themselves.

Rodney Pinder, Director of the International News Safety Institute (INSI)⁴²

More clearly tracked in South Africa are direct threats on journalists. Regular statements are issued by the South African National Editors’ Forum (Sanef) and media rights organisations on violations of media freedoms in this country, and incidents are often written about in the press. As shown in *State of the Newsroom 2017: Fakers and Makers*,⁴³ a total of 21 statements were issued by Sanef on media freedom issues in that year. Over the past two years⁴⁴ journalists have faced death threats,⁴⁵ harassment by police⁴⁶ and by political parties and groups,⁴⁷ been attacked while



Wits university students clash with police during protests over free education in October 2016. *Ihsaan Haffejee/GroundUp*

reporting on protests,⁴⁸ robbed of their equipment,⁴⁹ and harassed online.⁵⁰

Many of these threats on journalists concerned the exposure of state capture, or related issues, such as attempts to control and censor journalists at the state broadcaster. In one of the most horrific incidents, 32-year-old SABC journalist Suna Venter died reportedly from stress-induced cardiomyopathy – a medical condition also called broken heart syndrome that is the result of intense experiences of emotional stress – following a sustained campaign of intimidation and violent assault.

Venter was one of the so-called SABC 8, a group of journalists dismissed in 2016 after refusing not to report on anti-government protests. According to reports, “her flat was broken into multiple times; the tyres on her car were slashed; she was allegedly assaulted on three separate occasions, shot at, and once even abducted”.⁵¹

Also in 2017 freelance journalist Godknows Nare was shot dead by three Johannesburg Metro Police Department (JMPD) officers. Although it is unclear if the incident was related to his work as a journalist, the policemen were subsequently arrested for his murder and were standing trial in early 2019.⁵²

RELEVANT SOUTH AFRICAN LEGISLATION

Three pieces of legislation are relevant in this context: the Labour Relations Act,⁵³ the Occupational Health and Safety Act,⁵⁴ and the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act (COIDA).⁵⁵

While the Occupational Health and Safety Act provides that an employee has a responsibility to her own safety precautions in the workplace – which can be read as a reasonable responsibility towards being cautious and safety-conscious in the execution of her tasks⁵⁶ – the employer has several responsibilities that include making an employee aware of the risks of her work, providing all necessary precautionary measures and equipment to mitigate those risks, and conducting regular reviews of those risks, such as setting up safety committees that conduct risk assessments. For example, a rookie journalist sent out to cover a protest needs to be briefed on any potential violence that might result, be offered advice on how to reduce chances of harm to herself, and, where necessary, be issued with protective equipment, such as a bulletproof vest, protective headgear or other equipment. Failure to take these precautions exposes employers to penalties that can be severe: up to R100,000 in damages or two years in jail.

COIDA offers clear remedies in the case of injury or damage to an employee’s health in the execution of her duties – most clearly applicable when there is serious

injury to a journalist when reporting on a story. It also covers PTSD that is the result of an “extreme trauma or unusual stressor” that is an “unforeseen incident or an accident”.⁵⁷ That the incident should be “unexpected, sudden and non-routine” may mean that it does not cover the routine trauma that can be a part of everyday journalist work.

The Labour Relations Act is less useful to understand the responsibilities of both employers and employees in this context – although it does obviously allow for journalists to join unions. Union representation can make for increased workplace protections through collective agreements with employers on occupational health and safety.

Finally, a distinction needs to be made between employees, contract employees and freelance journalists. Freelance journalists are not covered by the Acts described above. This makes the vulnerability of freelance journalists an important special-case consideration, as it is elsewhere in the world.⁵⁸

SURVEY OF SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNALISTS

The online survey, which was aimed at journalists only, considers both the physical and psychological vulnerabilities of journalists in the newsroom and in the field, as well as newsroom policies, processes and support structures that are in place to mitigate these vulnerabilities. It consisted of 10 questions: a mix of checkbox options to statements that applied, rating statements on a scale of 1-5 and yes/no answers. It was circulated to students at Wits Journalism (many of whom are working journalists), and via the PEN South Africa and Sanef email lists.⁵⁹ In order to secure anonymity journalists were not asked which newsroom they worked for.

Ten journalists responded to the survey – 7 female and 3 males. Although the number of responses is relatively small, it is nevertheless a useful indicator of journalist

experience and newsroom practices. In comparison, the two studies in South Africa mentioned above surveyed five journalists (Shulman, 1997) and 50 journalists (Marais and Stuart, 2006). Given that it is unlikely that all the respondents were from one or even two newsrooms, it is likely that the survey reflects practices and experiences in three or more newsrooms.

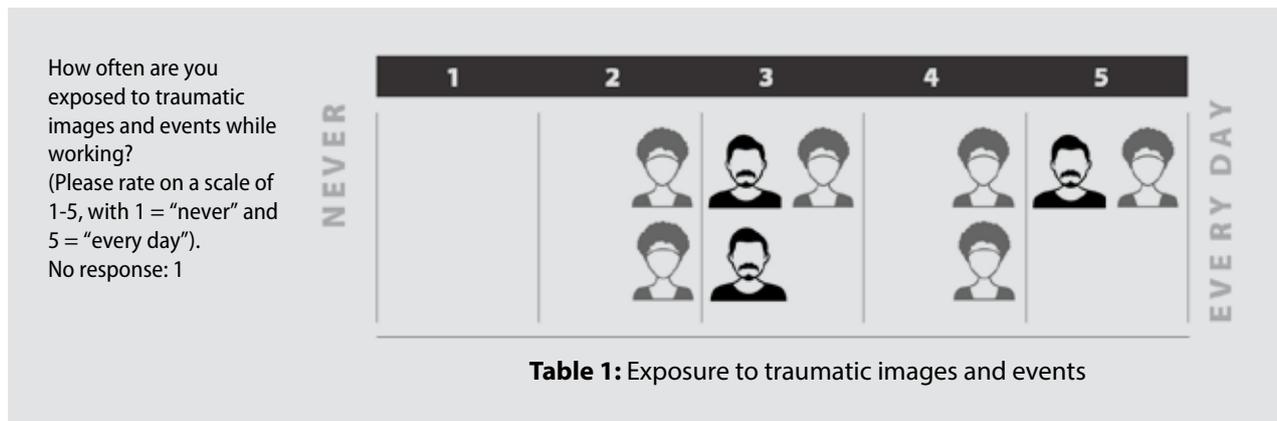
The following is a summary of the survey findings, which are divided into two sections: Journalist vulnerabilities and workplace policies and processes.

Journalist vulnerabilities

Respondents were asked how often they were exposed to traumatic images and events⁶⁰ while working. As can be seen from Table 1 below, the results were mixed, with an average of three on the rating scale of 1-5 the most common. However, the results tend towards the journalists feeling more exposure to traumatic images and events than less, with two respondents (one male, one female) reporting exposure every day, and two female respondents indicating that they were exposed to traumatic images and events almost every day (a rating of four). Overall these results show that the respondents felt there was a high exposure to traumatic images during the course of their work, with only two suggesting less frequent exposure. These results would be expected in a journalistic context in a country like South Africa.

Respondents were asked if they felt they had suffered negative psychological effects such as stress or trauma due to this exposure (See Table 2 at top right). The results suggest that the majority of respondents felt they had suffered negative psychological effects and were aware of this. Eight out of the 10 respondents were either certain of this negative psychological impact on their lives, or close to certain. Only one respondent indicated that there was little evidence of negative psychological effects on her life as a result of the work she does.

Respondents were then asked if they had ever sought professional help for stress and trauma that is the result of the work they do. As can be seen from Table 3, right,



Do you ever feel you have suffered negative psychological effects such as stress or trauma due to the events you witness, images you see, or stories you write about? (Please rate on a scale of 1-5, with 1 = "not at all" and 5 = "yes, definitely"). No response: 1

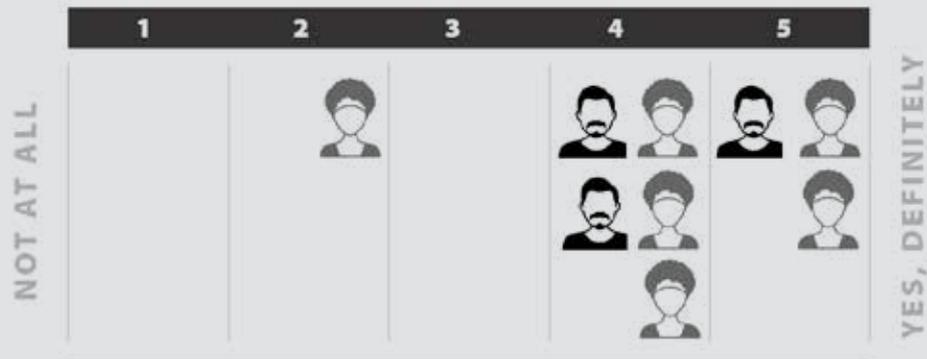


Table 2: Perceptions of negative psychological effects

the majority of respondents said that they had not done so. However, four respondents (one male and three females) said that they had. In line with the previous question, respondents suggest a level of awareness of the impact of their work on their psychological well-being.

A set of questions were presented to respondents covering their sense of working in a respectful and safe workplace environment, and their vulnerability online and on assignment. Although the questions relating to a respectful and safe work environment do not speak directly to the vulnerability of journalists with regards to the work they do, they do speak of context where those vulnerabilities can be meaningfully dealt with – a hostile work environment makes it unlikely that journalists can deal properly with any traumas experienced.

As can be seen from Table 4 below, four out of the 10 respondents said they had suffered online harassment as a result of their work, with more female respondents reporting this harassment (this is in line with global trends around online harassment, which is often gendered). In response to the question on whether they often felt physically vulnerable when on assignment, four respondents



Table 3: Professional help for work-related stress

Have you ever sought professional help for stress or trauma that is the result of the work you do?

said yes, three of them female. This may suggest a greater physical vulnerability amongst women journalists while on assignment.

Three out of the seven female respondents said that they had experienced sexual harassment in their workplace, while four out of seven said they had experienced work-

place bullying. Both of these are noteworthy results, and are high. Six out of the ten respondents also said they were frequently asked to work overtime without forms of compensation. These responses could suggest that many newsrooms can be hostile work environments, where the needs of journalists are often not respected, and where they are violated in different ways by work colleagues.⁶¹

It feels noteworthy that a high number of the female respondents reported experiences that point to a hostile work environment. This cou-

I have suffered online harassment as a result of my work	1 male icon, 3 female icons
I often feel vulnerable on assignment with regards to my physical safety	1 male icon, 4 female icons
I have experienced sexual harassment in the newsroom	3 female icons
I have experienced bullying by my colleagues in the newsroom	4 female icons
I frequently work overtime with no compensation or time off in lieu	1 male icon, 5 female icons
None of the above	1 male icon

Table 4: Stressors experienced by journalists

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being “never” and 5 being “yes, completely” rate the following statement: I feel adequately protected by my employers in the course of fulfilling my work duties.

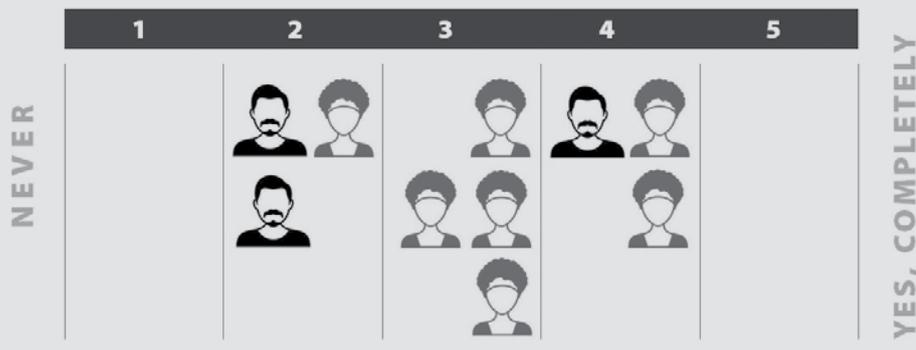


Table 5: Perceptions of feeling adequately protected by employers

pled with a sense of vulnerability both online and while on assignment, could indicate a high level of vulnerability amongst women journalists in the South Africa newsroom generally – an observation that should not distract from the evident vulnerabilities that male journalists can and do experience.⁶² However, this is in line with global observations that consideration needs to be given to the specific vulnerabilities of women journalists.

Finally, as a general question respondents were asked if they feel adequately protected by their employers during the course of fulfilling their work duties. The average score on the scale of 1-5 was three with an equal number of results falling either side of the average. This suggests some ambivalence from the respondents, with the average score of three suggesting a slight tendency towards feeling adequately protected.

Newsroom policies and processes

Respondents were asked about workplace policies and newsroom safety. As the results (Table 6 below) suggest, policies on sexual harassment are taken seriously by most newsrooms where the respondents work. (All three of the

respondents who have experienced sexual harassment in the newsroom said there are policies on sexual harassment in place).

Fewer newsrooms where the respondents work have policies on racial discrimination, while less than half (4) of the respondents to the survey said their newsrooms had a policy on workplace bullying. In contrast to policies on sexual harassment, none of the four respondents who reported being subject to workplace bullying said that their newsrooms had a policy to deal with this.

Perhaps surprisingly, only four respondents said their newsrooms had adequate security in place when they worked alone late at night. More women (3) than men reported a lack of proper security protocols in their newsrooms.

Pre-assignment briefings and safety precautions

Respondents were asked questions about their physical safety while on assignment, and processes offering support in the newsroom such as pre-assignment risk assessments and briefings that might mitigate the risks they face. Seven respondents suggested that no pre-assignment safety

briefings occurred in the newsroom. Eight respondents also indicated that they were not provided with the necessary safety equipment when covering violent protests.

None of the respondents indicated that specific safety advice was given to women journalists before assignment.

Of interest, comparatively more respondents (five out of 10) were briefed on their increased risk on assignment because of the equipment they were carrying, such as cameras or audio equipment.



Table 6: Conditions of work: policies and security



Table 7: Pre-assignment risk assessments

If you are expected to cover violent or dangerous events, such as public protests or natural disasters, does your newsroom ...

Post-assignment support

Respondents suggested that newsrooms were comparatively more responsive to symptoms of trauma than they were to routine preventative measures such as pre-assignment safety briefings. Six out of the 10 respondents said that their newsrooms offered counselling or other forms of support for issues such as trauma, stress, depression, alcoholism or drug use. However, it is important to emphasise that four respondents said they were not offered any support of this kind.

No respondents were offered time off work after covering a very stressful or traumatic story.

Online safety

Only one respondent (a female journalist) had been offered training on how to deal with online harassment (such as training in online security, privacy protocols, and what to do if the journalist is the target of a harasser). However, the same respondent did not report being harassed online

for the work she does. This means that of the four respondents that have been harassed online, no workplace training on safety precautions online was offered.

Joining unions to protect workplace rights

Respondents were also asked if their newsrooms would support them in becoming a member of a union should they want to join. Only four respondents said this was the case, possibly suggesting a negative attitude to unionisation in the newsroom amongst employers.

Recognition of vulnerabilities in the newsroom

Finally, as a general question of perception, respondents were asked if they felt their newsroom recognised that journalism can result in psychological stress and trauma, and took this into account when allocating tasks and briefing journalists covering a story (Table 8). Asked to rate this on a scale of 1-5, most respondents (seven out of 10) scored this a three – tending towards “yes, absolutely”. However,

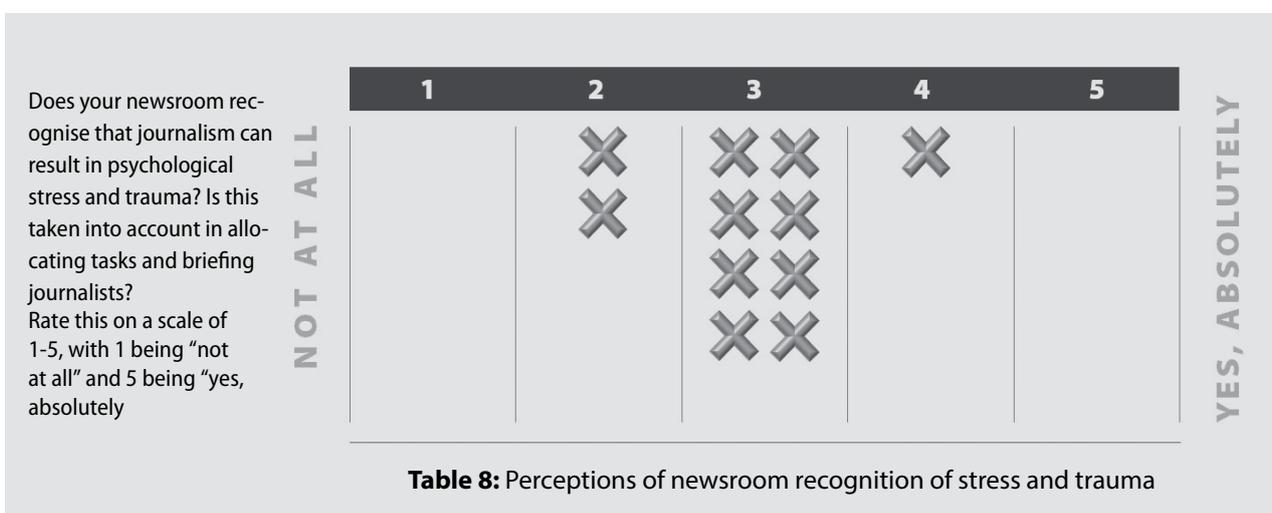


Table 8: Perceptions of newsroom recognition of stress and trauma

two respondents tended towards feeling that their newsrooms did not recognise the psychological impact of their work. Overall the results suggest that respondents are ambivalent as to the extent that their newsrooms recognise the risks they face.

CONCLUSIONS

This article attempts to outline both the physical and psychological risks – or vulnerabilities – that journalists working in South Africa face. The motivation is the recent heightened level of exposure of journalists to attacks and intimidation both online and offline in this country. The endemic violence that is a part of South African society means that journalists are frequently exposed to traumatic situations and events – what psychologists have called “continuous traumatic stress”⁶³ – and particular care should be taken in South African newsrooms to mitigate the negative psychological impact of this exposure. A review of newsrooms processes to support journalists is also in line with global media freedom and development targets.

The survey conducted as part of this article suggests the following:

- **Journalists in South Africa are frequently exposed to traumatic events, which has a negative impact on their psychological well-being.** Most of the re-

spondents to the survey were regularly exposed to traumatic images and events during the course of their work, with two of them encountering traumatic images or events in their work every day. A high number of respondents felt that this exposure had negatively impacted on their psychological well-being. Respondents had also sought professional help for stress and trauma that was directly attributed to the work they do.

- **Newsrooms need stronger preventative safety measures, including pre-assignment risk assessments, the provision of safety equipment and training.** While some workplace policies and practices were in place, newsrooms were still less likely to offer the necessary support to mitigate journalists’ vulnerabilities. Pre-briefing risks assessments were less likely to be the norm, and respondents were only sometimes given the necessary protective equipment when covering violent events such as public protests. While online harassment was reported by respondents – and has received significant attention in

the press following online attacks on journalists exposing state capture – almost none of the respondents had receive training on online security and protection. Newsrooms, however, were somewhat likely to offer support for respondents when the symptoms of trauma occurred⁶⁴ through counselling or other forms of support. This may account for the ambivalence amongst respondents as to the extent to which their employers recognised that their work carried risks and could result in trauma, and the extent to which they felt protected by their employers.

- **Newsrooms can be hostile work environments, increasing the physical and psychological vulnerability of journalists.** It is likely that journalist vulnerabilities are exacerbated by indications that some newsrooms could be hostile spaces, with incidents of sexual harassment, workplace bullying, and poor security to ensure the physical safety of journalists working late at night. Overtime was frequently required, with no time off in lieu. Journalists were also not offered time off after covering a particularly traumatic event or story. All of these are likely to increase the overall vulnerability of journalists, and diminish the newsroom as a place where these vulnerabilities can be expressed, understood and managed.

FEMALE JOURNALISTS
FELT PHYSICALLY
VULNERABLE WHILE
ON ASSIGNMENT, WERE
EXPOSED TO ONLINE
HARASSMENT AND
ALSO FACED
WORKPLACE BULLYING

- **The specific risks that women journalists can face in the workplace, online and on assignment need attention.** The survey suggests a relatively high level of vulnerability amongst women journalists working in South Africa. Female respondents to the survey felt physically vulnerable while on assign-

ment, were exposed to online harassment, and also faced hostile news environments where they had to deal with sexual harassment and workplace bullying – a finding that is in line with global studies on the vulnerabilities of women journalists. Newsrooms also did not brief women journalists on the specific risks they might face while on assignment. Four out of the seven women journalists who responded to the survey did not feel that there were sufficient security arrangements in place in their newsrooms when working late at night.

There appear to be some deficiencies in labour legislation with regards to the profession of journalism. Freelance journalists are not protected by the current labour laws. While PTSD is covered in COIDA’s schedule of injuries, it is treated as an “injury” that is the result of an “accident”, which means PTSD does not appear to be covered if it is a predictable result of one’s work. This suggests that the work of journalism – where trauma can largely be predicted – would fall outside of the Act’s remit. It may also be



Residents protest for services in Witsands in Atlantis near Cape Town, in October. *Ashraf Hendricks/GroundUp*

that some newsrooms are falling foul of labour laws by not providing journalists access to the necessary safety equipment when covering incidents with physical risks such as violent protests, and by not properly briefing journalists on the risks they may face in the field. This may also be the case with the expectation of journalists to regularly work overtime without compensation. That only some newsrooms supported journalists joining a union may suggest a generally poor attitude towards journalists' rights in the workplace.

The sample survey is clearly limited in scope, and the results should be read in this light. But at the very least they point to the need for a wider study to understand the extent to which these results may be true generally in South African news organisations, including in community media. A more nuanced understanding of why journalists responded the way they did is also necessary, as would be processes of data verification that were not possible for this article.

A more in-depth study could also attend to other factors that influence the vulnerability and resilience of journalists working in the South African context such as race, culture, nationality and sexuality. While a number of newsrooms were reported to have policies on racial discrimination, as with a journalist's gender, in South Africa a journalist's race can impact on their vulnerability in the field, especially in the current climate of pitched racial tensions in pub-

lic discourse. South Africa is also a homophobic society, which means that the sexuality of journalists is likely to be a factor that increases their vulnerability on certain assignments. The same is true of whether or not the journalist is a South African citizen, given the high levels of xenophobia found in some communities. Cultural attitudes towards mental illness such as depression⁶⁵ or trauma also matter, as does the "macho-ethic" that is said to pervade newsrooms. These can impact on the extent to which journalists recognise the ill effects of their work on their psychological well-being, the need to take safety precautions in the field, and the level of responsiveness from newsrooms to journalist vulnerabilities.

The survey also did not distinguish between different journalist beats, nor medium – as mentioned earlier, research shows that TV journalists may face specific mental health stresses in their work. It also does not attempt to understand the difference between the vulnerabilities of freelancers compared to their colleagues who draw on the resources of an institution or organisation. Globally freelance journalists are considered especially at risk, a vulnerability that has resulted in campaigns such as the ACOS Alliance's Freelance Journalist Safety Principles.⁶⁶

However, these results, even if limited, are a cause for concern. They suggest that support given to journalists tends to be largely reactive, rather than preventative. The need for preventative measures are however in line with

the expectations of the country's labour laws. These require thought and commitment in their implementation, but – beyond the need for safety equipment – they are relatively inexpensive. They include pre-assignment safety briefings, and protocols and processes for fieldwork and in the newsroom itself, for example when processing graphic images or footage. Research has shown that simply knowing that these processes are in place builds a work context for a journalist exposed to trauma that lessens the impact of that trauma.

As outlined in this article, freely available, detailed and thorough resources and guides have been developed by organisations such as CPJ that could be easily adapted to the South African context. These organisations also offer training.

The 2019 elections in this country gave some organisations an opportunity to raise funds for interventions focused on election coverage, including dealing with journalist safety. Sanef, in collaboration with CPJ, held 10 journalist safety training workshops across the country as part of its national elections programme. The two organisations also prepared a journalist safety elections toolkit.⁶⁷ As part of its initiative, Sanef created an online facility where journalists could log threats, allowing it to offer assistance.

Long-term interventions are also necessary – protocols and practices in the newsroom that ensure the physical and psychological safety of journalists should be the norm, not the exception. This however depends on the extent to which newsrooms are prepared to recognise the risks journalists face, the extent to which journalists themselves recognise and admit their own vulnerabilities, and the readiness and energy of newsrooms to put in place policies and processes to ensure the safety of their employees and to reduce harm.

END NOTES

- 1 Reporters Without Borders. RSF Index 2018: Hatred of journalism threatens democracies. <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-index-2018-hatred-journalism-threatens-democracies>
- 2 Committee to Protect Journalists. https://cpj.org/data/killed/?status=Killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&type%5B%5D=-Journalist&start_year=1992&end_year=2018&group_by=year
- 3 This number increases if you include the deaths of journalists where the motive is unconfirmed, or where all "media workers" are included.
- 4 Freedom House. Attacks on the Record: The State of Global Press Freedom, 2017-2018. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-reports/attacks-record-state-global-press-freedom-2017-2018>
- 5 For example, see Cook, B. B., Banks, S. R., & Turner, R. J. (1993). The Effects of Work Environment on Burnout in the Newsroom. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 14 (3 & 4), 123-136.
- 6 One of the first studies in PTSD amongst journalists was conducted in 1994. See: Freinkel, A., Koopman, C., & Spiegel, D. (1994). Dissociative symptoms in media eyewitnesses of an execution. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 151(9), 1335-1339.
- 7 Committee to Protect Journalists. CPJ Journalist Security Guide: Covering the News in a Dangerous and Changing World (<https://cpj.org/reports/2012/04/stress-reactions.php#2>) quoting Feinstein, A., Owen, J., & Blair, N. (2002). A Hazardous Profession: War, journalists, and psychopathology. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 159, 1570-1575; Dworznik, G. (2011) Factors Contributing to PTSD and Compassion Fatigue in Television News Workers. *International Journal of Business, Humanities and Technology* Vol. 1 No.1; July 2011. Center for Promoting Ideas, Los Angeles.

- 8 Dworznik, G. (2011) Factors Contributing to PTSD and Compassion Fatigue in Television News Workers. *International Journal of Business, Humanities and Technology* Vol. 1 No.1; July 2011. Center for Promoting Ideas, Los Angeles. p23 Examples could also include trauma that results from the repeated viewing of unedited violent images in an editing booth.
- 9 Dworznik, G. (2011) Factors Contributing to PTSD and Compassion Fatigue in Television News Workers. *International Journal of Business, Humanities and Technology* Vol. 1 No.1; July 2011. Center for Promoting Ideas, Los Angeles.
- 10 Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma (2004). Working with Traumatic Imagery. <https://dartcenter.org/content/working-with-traumatic-imagery>
- 11 Dworznik, G. (2011) Factors Contributing to PTSD and Compassion Fatigue in Television News Workers. *International Journal of Business, Humanities and Technology* Vol. 1 No.1; July 2011. Center for Promoting Ideas, Los Angeles. p23
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma (2004). Working with Traumatic Imagery. <https://dartcenter.org/content/working-with-traumatic-imagery>
- 14 For example, interviews with journalists covering HIV/Aids in South Africa the early 2000s suggest a prevalence of compassion fatigue.
- 15 Dworznik, G. (2011) Factors Contributing to PTSD and Compassion Fatigue in Television News Workers. *International Journal of Business, Humanities and Technology* Vol. 1 No.1; July 2011. Center for Promoting Ideas, Los Angeles. p24
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 International News Safety Institute. Survey: violence against women journalists. <https://newssafety.org/research-projects/survey-violence-against-women-journalists/>
- 18 Feinstein, A. Storm, H. (2017) The Emotional Toll on Journalists Covering the Refugee Crisis. International News Safety Institute. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-07/Storm%20and%20Feinstein%20-%20Emotional%20Toll.pdf>
- 19 Dworznik, G. (2011) Factors Contributing to PTSD and Compassion Fatigue in Television News Workers. *International Journal of Business, Humanities and Technology* Vol. 1 No.1; July 2011. Center for Promoting Ideas, Los Angeles. p23
- 20 Ibid. p22
- 21 Ibid. p24
- 22 SDG indicators. United Nations Global SDG Database. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/?indicator=16.10.1>
- 23 UNESCO. UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. <https://en.unesco.org/un-plan-action-safety-journalists>
- 24 UNESCO. Journalist Safety Indicators. <https://en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists/journalists-safety-indicators>. A sixth, Iraq, is expected to be piloted soon.
- 25 Woodyear, L. (2003) In today's world, journalists face greater dangers. *World of Work Magazine*. No.47 June 2003. International Labour Organisation. https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/world-of-work-magazine/articles/WCMS_081327/lang-en/index.htm
- 26 International News Safety Institute. Types of training. <https://newssafety.org/safety/training/types-of-training/>
- 27 For example, the advisory on tear gas includes useful advice on how journalists can protect themselves, and what they can do if they are tear-gassed, as well as several "myths and misconceptions" about homemade methods of protection, such as "Soaking a bandana or cloth in apple cider vinegar and tightly covering your mouth with it" or "Smearing toothpaste under your eyes" (the first does not work, and the chemical results of the second are too unpredictable to be trusted) <https://newssafety.org/safety/advisories/protecting-yourself-from-tear-gas/>
- 28 Committee to Protect Journalists. CPJ Journalist Security Guide. <https://cpj.org/reports/2012/04/journalist-security-guide.php>
- 29 Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma. Mission & History. <https://dartcenter.org/about/mission-history>
- 30 Rees, G. (2017) Handling Traumatic Imagery: Developing a Standard Operating Procedure. Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma. <https://dartcenter.org/resources/handling-traumatic-imagery-developing-standard-operating-procedure>
- 31 With one of the highest murder rates in the world – an average of 56 people are murdered in this country every day, the majority of them men. According to the South African Police, this is a 7% increase from 2017 – prompting the Minister of Police to comment that South Africa "borders on a war zone". Although there was a marginal decrease in the 2017/2018 rape statistics, an average of 110 rapes are recorded by the police each day. On average, 379 robberies with aggravating cir-

- circumstances – where a gun or weapon is used – are recorded daily. Staff reporter (8/09/2018) Here's how South Africa's crime rate compares to actual warzones. *BusinessTech*. <https://businesstech.co.za/news/lifestyle/271997/heres-how-south-africas-crime-rate-compares-to-actual-warzones/>
- 32 In a survey of South African adults, 12% said they had experienced physical abuse by a caregiver as a child. This is said to be several times higher than in the United States. Kaminer, D. Eagle, G. (2010) *Traumatic Stress in South Africa*. Wits University Press, Johannesburg. p21 www.oapen.org/download?type=document&docid=626383
 - 33 At 43 per 100,000 people, South Africa's death rate from road accidents is double the global average. Kaminer, D. Eagle, G. (2010) *Traumatic Stress in South Africa*. Wits University Press, Johannesburg. p22 www.oapen.org/download?type=document&docid=626383
 - 34 In a 2006 study on the exposure of emergency service personnel to critical incidents in the Western Cape, it was found that 88% of them had experienced a critical incident in the past two months – compared to their Swedish counterparts where 61.6% said they had ever experienced a critical incident. A feature that appeared unique to our context is the multiple stressors arising from dealing with fires in informal settlements. Ward, C. Lombard, C. Gwebushe, N. (2006) Critical incident exposure in South African emergency services personnel: prevalence and associated mental health issues. *Emergency Medicine Journal*. 2006 Mar; 23(3): 226–231. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2464423/>
 - 35 Kaminer, D. Eagle, G. (2010) *Traumatic Stress in South Africa*. Wits University Press, Johannesburg. p4 www.oapen.org/download?type=document&docid=626383
 - 36 Marinovich, G. Silva, J. (2000) *The Bang-Bang Club: Snapshots from a Hidden War*. Arrow Books, London. p194
 - 37 Haffajee, F. (6/6/2017) Ferial Haffajee: The Gupta Fake News Factory And Me. *Huffpost*. https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2017/06/05/ferial-haffajee-the-gupta-fake-news-factory-and-me_a_22126282/
 - 38 Shulman, M. (1997) A perspective on journalists' experience of post-traumatic stress disorder: An exploratory study. MA thesis. Rand Afrikaans University, Johannesburg. piiii
 - 39 Marais, A. Stuart, A. (2005) The Role of Temperament in the Development of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Amongst Journalists. *South African Journal of Psychology*. March 1, 2005. Sage Publishing <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/008124630503500106>
 - 40 Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma. (2004) *South Africa: A Frontline Club Transcript*. <https://dartcenter.org/content/south-africa-frontline-club-transcript>
 - 41 Ibid.
 - 42 Ibid.
 - 43 Finlay, A (ed). (2017). *State of the Newsroom 2017: Fakers & Makers*. Wits Journalism, Johannesburg. <http://journalism.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/906-STATE-OF-THE-NEWSROOM-2018-REPRINT-V3.pdf>
 - 44 See *Newsroom in Review* and *Appendix summaries* in Finlay, A. (ed). (2016). *State of the Newsroom South Africa 2015-2016: Inside/outside*. Wits Journalism, Johannesburg. http://journalism.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/State-of-the-Newsroom-report_2015_2016.pdf and Finlay, A (ed). (2017). *State of the Newsroom 2017: Fakers & Makers*. Wits Journalism, Johannesburg. <http://journalism.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/906-STATE-OF-THE-NEWSROOM-2018-REPRINT-V3.pdf>
 - 45 In 2017 death threats were received by investigative journalists Siphosiso Masedo (City Press) and Mzilikazi wa Afrika (Sunday Times). Death threats were reported to be run-of-the-mill for investigative journalists working in South Africa.
 - 46 In 2016 police harassed journalists, forcing them to delete footage and photographs, during a protest in Port Elizabeth. In 2017, Jacques Pauw and Pieter-Louis Myburgh, two investigative journalists who published books exposing state capture in South Africa, were harassed by police. Also in 2017, journalists based at parliament's media offices were hampered from leaving and returning to their offices by riot police. Some photographers were prevented from taking photographs at the 2017 State of the Nation address. In November the SABC was called to condemn the harassment by police of journalist Mike Maringa, who was reporting on the Zimbabwe crisis from outside the Beit Bridge border post.
 - 47 In 2016 Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) leader Julius Malema said he could not guarantee the safety of journalists from the New Age and ANN7 at EFF events. In 2017 the Gupta-linked Black First Land First (BLF) group was brought before court after about 20 of its members descended on the Johannesburg home of Business Day columnist and editor-at-large Peter Bruce, accusing him of racism and selective reporting. The protesters sprayed graffiti on Bruce's garage door, and allegedly manhandled then Business Day editor Tim Cohen. Political commentator Karima Brown was also subject to harassment.
 - 48 In 2016 journalists also came under threat from students, and several were injured, including being pepper sprayed by private security companies during the nationwide #FeesMustFall student protests. Also in 2016 a Daily Sun journalist was attacked while reporting on a protest in Port Elizabeth. In 2017 journalists covering protests in Vuwani in Limpopo were attacked. One cameraperson was assaulted and three vehicles belonging to the SABC were damaged. Meanwhile in Coligny in North West, journalists who were covering violence that erupted in the aftermath of a court decision were attacked and chased away. Photographic equipment belonging to journalists from various media houses was also damaged.
 - 49 In 2016, journalists were robbed of their equipment in Johannesburg and Tshwane, and an SABC contributing editor was mugged outside Milpark Hospital in Johannesburg while on camera. In February 2017 Sanef called on police to investigate reports of violent attacks on SABC journalists which included being robbed of their mobile phones and having their equipment confiscated by demonstrators during protests in Pretoria. Also in February, journalists were attacked by soccer fans during a Sundowns and Orlando Pirates match at Loftus Versfeld Stadium in Pretoria. Daily Sun's Themba Makofane said fans attempted to rob him of his wallet and spare camera during the riot. Another photographer, BackpagePix's Sydney Mahlangu, had his laptop stolen.
 - 50 Editor and journalist Ferial Haffajee (see above) was subjected to online harassment that was part of a covert campaign against journalists reporting on state capture. Twitter "bots" – or fake software-driven Twitter accounts – were used in the sustained campaign of character assassination against her. Broadcast journalists Stephen Grootes, Barry Bateman, and financial journalist Alex Hogg were amongst those also targeted by Twitter bots.
 - 51 Clark, C. (2/8/2017) *Intimidating journalists: The death of Suna Venter*. Al Jazeera. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/08/hounded-death-intimidating-south-africa-reporters-170802080322360.html>
 - 52 Seleka, N. (01/30/2019) The night journalist Godknows Nare was killed: Court hears from neighbour. *News24.com* <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/the-night-journalist-godknows-nare-was-killed-court-hears-from-neighbour-20190130>
 - 53 Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995. <https://www.gov.za/documents/labour-relations-act>
 - 54 Occupational Health and Safety Act of 1993. <https://www.gov.za/documents/occupational-health-and-safety-act>
 - 55 Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act of 1993. <http://www.labour.gov.za/DOL/legislation/acts/compensation-for-occupational-injuries-and-diseases/compensation-for-occupational-injuries-and-diseases-act>
 - 56 See, for example, Mywage.co.za's summary of the Act. <https://mywage.co.za/decent-work/health-and-safety-at-work/health-and-safety>
 - 57 Government Gazette. Vol. 445. 19 July 2002. No 23629. https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/236290.pdf
 - 58 According to Paul Mardon, Deputy General Secretary: Occupational Health and Safety and Sustainable Development at Solidarity.
 - 59 I would like to thank Nick Mulgrew (former M&G online editor, and then working for PEN SA) and Paul Mardon (Solidarity) for initial, orientating discussions on this topic, as well as Sanef and PEN SA for circulating the survey to their membership.
 - 60 No categorisation of what may count as potentially traumatic images and events was given (such as a rape, murder, or fatal car accident) so these are subjective accounts which may vary from person to person.
 - 61 See results below to question on after-hours security in the workplace.
 - 62 For example, in the recent online attacks on journalists reporting on state capture, while it may have influenced the content of the attacks, gender did not seem to be an indicator of who was subject to online harassment and character assassination.
 - 63 Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma. (2004) *South Africa: A Frontline Club Transcript*. <https://dartcenter.org/content/south-africa-frontline-club-transcript>
 - 64 Including for addictive behaviours such as the use of alcohol and drugs, which appear to be departure from many reported experiences during the 1980s and 1990s.
 - 65 See, for example Chentsova-Dutton, Y. Ryder, A. Tsai, J. (2014) *Understanding Depression across Cultural Contexts*. In I. Gotlib & C. Hammen (Eds.). *Handbook of Cultural Psychology*. Oxford University Press. <https://culture-emotion-lab.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj9351/ff-depressionacrossculturesaicydryder.pdf> or The South African Depression and Anxiety Group, *Depression in Black South Africans*. http://sadag.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=645:depression-in-black-south-africans&catid=84&Itemid=120
 - 66 ACOS Alliance. *Freelance Journalist Safety Principles*. <https://www.acosalliance.org/the-principles>
 - 67 Committee to Protect Journalists. (2019) *South Africa elections 2019: Journalist safety kit* <https://cpj.org/2019/02/south-africa-election-journalist-safety-kit.php>

A fresh approach is needed to drive our investigative reporting forward ...

ANTON HARBER



APOGEE: Professor Anton Harber of Wits Journalism hands over the 2017 Taco Kuiper Awards to amaBhungane, Daily Maverick and News24, who collaborated on the GuptaLeaks exposés, a milestone for South African journalism.

In the last 18 months investigative journalism in South Africa soared to great heights, and then sunk to unprecedented depths.

The apogee was the publication of the #GuptaLeaks trove of emails in 2017, which provided the hard evidence of the inside workings of the state capture project in a way that could no longer be denied. The dozens of stories came from both the Sunday Times and their sister newspapers in the Tiso Blackstar group, and the independent investigative unit amaBhungane in alliance with Daily Maverick and News24.

#GuptaLeaks had become “probably the greatest investigative journalism coup in South African history”,

journalist and commentator William Saunderson-Meyer wrote on Politicsweb.¹

The nadir was in 2018 when the *Sunday Times* apologised for three major investigative stories published over the previous eight years, saying that they had made mistakes and allowed themselves to be ‘played’. The newspaper withdrew the stories, and let go two of the reporters. Two others involved had earlier left the paper. Each of these stories targeted public servants who had stood up against state capture.

“This was not just sloppy reporting or journalists that got it wrong,” wrote South Africa’s best-known investigative reporter, Jacques Pauw. “This was

manufactured journalism that was meant to disinform and to ultimately damage our law-enforcement agencies.”²

How was it possible that our news industry – and some of the best of our investigative reporters – could swing so radically and quickly from the brilliant to the despicable? The answer lies in the distinction between the general deterioration of South African newsrooms, the decimation of their capacity for in-depth and investigative work, and the occasional pockets of excellence which continue to produce such work. Most of those pockets are now outside of conventional newsrooms, sustained by donor funding which gives them some immunity

from the way financial and political pressures are ravaging the country's more traditional newsrooms.

Faced with these conflicting indications of the state of our investigative reporting, a longer-term perspective might give insight into where we are now and where we are heading. The records of the Taco Kuiper Award for Investigative Journalism,³ the country's premier journalism award for 14 years, provide some indicative data.

The number of entries for the award started low in 2006, peaked in 2014 and has plummeted in the last two years. The first year of the prize – when it was restricted to print media – brought just 13 entries, and the second 13 again, from 10 publications. Opening it to all media the following year brought 16 entries, and this suddenly shot up in 2009 to 44 entries from 16 outlets. At the 2014 peak, there was an astounding 58 entries. In 2015, it dipped to 43, including for the first time two online news operations. But it was in 2017 that it plummeted to 16 entries and stayed close to that last year.

One must be careful of reading too much into this: the number of entries may be driven by multiple factors, not just how much investigative reporting is going on in the country. In 2017, for example, it is likely that many people did not enter because #GuptaLeaks was such a dominant story that many reporters probably felt it was not even worth trying to go up against it. The Taco Kuiper Award is different from most competitions in that it covers only one category: investigative reporting.

But what is striking is that the number of outlets which considered themselves to be practising award-worthy investigative journalism jumped from a handful in 2006 to a peak of more than 20 in 2014 and then down again to just a few last year. In 2014, entries included 12 from television, four from radio, 37 from newspapers, one from a magazine, one by a freelance writer, one from a blogger, one from



NADIR: *Sunday Times* journalists fall for a cynical attempt to 'play' them with a fake exclusive investigation, and the paper is forced to apologise.

an independent investigative unit and one from an independent film producer. Newspapers and radio entrants even included a couple of community outlets.

Over the years, there have been some organisations that have consistently put in multiple entries – notably the *Sunday Times*, sister newspapers *City Press* and *Rapport* (latterly along with their online arm *News24*), the *Mail & Guardian* and the independent unit *amaBhungane*, after it broke away from the *M&G*.

Other regular entrants have been the *Daily Dispatch*, which has specialised in a different brand of social conditions and service delivery investigation, and M-Net's television programme *Carte Blanche*. These outlets have stood consistently among the winners and runners-up, at their height often pushing the rules on how many entries they can put in each year.

Last year, *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* were totally absent for the first time – neither of them putting in

a single entry – suggesting the decline of investigative work in their troubled newsrooms.

In the first year of the award, the judges noted that there were at least three dedicated investigative units operating in the country, and that was probably more than ever before. This went up to four or five in the intervening years, and there was fierce competition between them. By last year, only one of those was still at work, the donor-funded *amaBhungane*, though the *Daily Maverick* had started a one-person unit called *Scorpio* and *News24* continued to commission some investigative work.

There were still pockets of excellence, but fewer of them.

The subject range of entries has not changed much over the years. The competition has been dominated by the big political and corruption stories, mostly around government accountability. There have been some stories on private sector corruption, some on social conditions and a few on environmental issues – but it has been the big national corruption sto-

ries that have won in most years.

Journalism historian Mark Feldstein⁴ looked at the peaks and troughs of investigative reporting over many years in the US and asked what led to these waves. He suggested a quasi-economic model: the peaks came when there was both supply (stimulated by new technologies and media competition) and demand (a public hungry for exposés in times of turmoil).

The supply came in this country with state capture and a divided ruling party, which led to leaks and a plethora of targets for investigation. And new technology brought the large digital data leak which required teamwork and a high level of skill. There was also high demand in this period because of public anxiety over the implications of state capture.

Now there may be an exhaustion factor. South Africans have been inundated with state capture stories in recent years which are important and valuable, but narrow in range and not always a pleasure to read. The Taco Kuiper judges have regularly bemoaned the way investigative stories were told, complaining that they were often difficult to consume and understand, with the audience getting lost in detail and complexity.

It might be time for a wider range of subjects (and our country is not short of those) and a focus on innovative storytelling to refresh our investigative reporting and give it new momentum.

Harber is the convenor of judges for the Taco Kuiper Awards.

END NOTES

- 1 Saunderson-Meyer, W. (28/7/2017) The #GuptaLeaks are becoming a deluge. Politicsweb. <https://www.politicsweb.co.za/isservice/the-guptaleaks-are-becoming-a-deluge>
- 2 Pauw, J. (2017). The President's Keepers. Johannesburg: Tafelberg.
- 3 <http://journalism.co.za/tacokuiper/>
- 4 Feldstein, M. (2006). A Muckraking Model: Investigative Reporting Cycles in American History. Harvard Journal of Press/Politics 11(2):1

INSIDE ANGLE



Comrades for a day. Political rivals Musi Maimane of the Democratic Alliance and Julius Malema of the Economic Freedom Fighters outside Parliament on the day they brought a motion of no-confidence against President Jacob Zuma. *Ashraf Hendricks, GroundUp*

We still have lots to learn about how the media covered state capture

EMEKA UMEJEI

I analysed media content from four South African news sites¹ reporting on state capture during 2017 – the period immediately after the release of the so-called ‘state capture’² report by the former public protector – and identified three key narratives which I have called ‘White Monopoly Capital’, ‘Resign or Sink SA’, and ‘Zuma Deserted’.

The period I analysed included the revelations of the Gupta-funded disinformation campaign by the UK-based public relations firm Bell Pot-

tinger. My reading suggests a media agenda overwhelmingly in support of the resignation of former President Jacob Zuma, a framing that is not unexpected, and also cued by the growing alienation of Zuma amongst his own ranks as the extent of endemic corruption is exposed.

While the story is at least in part one of political opportunism – of some in the ruling party desperately trying to save their political lives – less evident in the coverage was what one commentator called the need for “more



#GuptaLeaks investigations by Amabhungane and Scorpio appeared week after week on the News24 and Daily Maverick websites

nuance than the false dichotomy of either being captured or being an agent of white monopoly capital”.³ It is also interesting to see how the “economy” is leveraged both as a tool for propaganda and as a political justification for Zuma’s sacking in the unfolding story – a deeper analysis of the media’s coverage over the period is needed to understand the role of its own ideological biases in this dynamic.

The events leading to the release of the State of Capture report⁴ by then Public Protector Thuli Madonsela are legion and diverse. In March 2016, former Deputy Minister of Finance Mcebisi Jonas released a statement where he made startling revelations that the hitherto influential Gupta brothers had offered him a R600,000 bribe to take up the job of minister of finance, a position then held by

Nhlanhla Nene, an offer Jonas claimed to have turned down. Nene was indeed removed in December 2015 and a little known Des van Rooyen was appointed in his stead.

Following Jonas’s revelation, former ANC Member of Parliament Vytjie Mentor posted on her Facebook timeline that the Gupta family had also offered her a position, this time as public enterprises minister before Barbara Hogan was removed in October 2010.

Mentor claimed that she was flown to Johannesburg from Cape Town to meet with the Gupta family at their Saxonwold home and that former President Zuma was present when she visited.⁵ A *Sunday Times* investigation⁶ also revealed that former CEO of Government Communication and Information System Themba Mase-

ko received a call from Zuma asking him to put all government advertising in *The New Age* newspaper, a newly launched broadsheet belonging to the Guptas at the time.

Following these startling revelations, Democratic Alliance (DA) leader Mmusi Maimane called on Madonsela to initiate a probe into the revelations to ascertain whether Zuma had violated the Executive Members’ Ethics Act. This request was followed by other demands including one from the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), whose leader Julius Malema sought a public protector’s inquest.

The probe into the reported violations resulted in the *State of Capture* report that was released by the former public protector in October 2016.⁷ In addition, a trove of emails found by the *Sunday Times* showed that the Guptas had enormous control over some cabinet ministers, state-owned companies and their bosses and boards.⁸

Bell Pottinger was contracted by Oakbay Investments between January 2016 and April 2017 to manage the Guptas’ reputation and corporate communications.

Oakbay was owned by the Gupta brothers. To achieve its mandate, Bell Pottinger devised a media strategy to avoid or reduce criticism of the Guptas and their ties to Zuma which involved creating a narrative based on the idea of ‘economic apartheid’.⁹ This was to be a countervailing narrative to salacious stories emerging from a series of explosive e-mails known as the “Gupta Leaks”.¹⁰

The so-called ‘White Monopoly Capital’ campaign added fuel to the fire by inciting racial tension and stoking divisive politics. The campaign was mediated through two broad platforms: social media and traditional media. Some of these included the *The New Age* newspaper and ANN7, a Gupta-owned TV channel; pro-Gupta websites atulgupta.com and Black Opinion and websites and blogs with names like WMCLeaks, WMCScams,

Dodgy SA Ministers, and Voetsek.¹¹ However, the lifespan of the disinformation campaign was relatively short-lived – it was busted by the vigilant South African media.

Investigations by Daily Maverick's¹² Scorpio investigative unit and by the African Network of Centers for Investigative Reporting (ANCIR)¹³ showed the extent of the campaign. According to a report in Times Live:

[p]articipants in this venture spread 220,431 tweets between July 2016 and July 2017 and authored 4,849 tweets which were retweeted 215,582 times by the automated arm of the campaign. In addition, 3,574 posts were made on Facebook, which attracted 6,713 comments and 28,121 likes. The posts were shared 8,256 times.¹⁴

A subsequent extensive investigation by law firm Herbert Smith Freehills in July 2017 found that Bell Pottinger was guilty of ethical breaches:

[W]e have seen evidence that the BP [Bell Pottinger] account team used other tactics in relation to the economic emancipation campaign which arguably breached the relevant ethical principles, including taking steps which might mislead or undermine journalists who were asking questions in relation to the campaign.¹⁵

The indictment of Bell Pottinger, its campaign in South Africa, and the firm's eventual collapse enjoyed wide traction in both the local and international media.

A total of 95 articles comprising news, feature articles and editorial opinions published between 1 January 2017 and 15 February 2018 were downloaded from the online editions of City Press (28) and *Mail & Guard-*

ian (28) as well as from Times Live (15) and News24 (24).

The time frame was selected to account for the events that preceded the resignation of Zuma on 14 February 2018 and that following the release of the *State of Capture* report at the end of 2016.¹⁶

The articles were categorised according to three key narratives that emerged through my reading. The first narrative, “White Monopoly Capital”, included articles that challenged the *State of Capture* report as a white capitalist agenda aimed at undermining black leadership.

Articles that reflect positions supportive of Zuma and attempted to dilute the notion of state capture or divert attention elsewhere, are also included here.

The second narrative was “Resign of Sink SA”. Articles in this category blamed Zuma for state capture because of his friendship with the Guptas. Zuma is framed as the problem for the South African economy

and his resignation a solution to the country's economic woes.

Articles in the third category, “Zuma Deserted”, focused on the backtracking of some ANC party faithful who had earlier supported Zuma. This category includes articles that show ANC alliance organisations turning on Zuma after Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma lost the ANC presidency race to Cyril Ramaphosa.

Despite 95 articles being collected from the websites, only 13 articles were categorised under the “White Monopoly Capital” theme. Among these, only one explicitly mentioned

the term ‘white monopoly capital’ – a news article in the City Press¹⁷ that quotes the deputy president of Black First Land First (BLF), then a political pressure group that became known for its harassment and intimidation tactics and was reported to be in the pay of the Guptas.

That the only use of the “white monopoly capital” refrain is by a Gupta-funded organisation suggests the extent to which at this point the Gupta propaganda campaign had largely dissipated.

Four of the 13 content items categorised under this theme were published in the *Mail & Guardian*. For example, one article in the *Mail & Guardian* emanated from an interview with Zuma granted to ANN7 in the heat of the state capture exposés.¹⁸

In it Zuma repudiates the *State of Capture* report as a political tool geared towards removing him from office. The report quoted Zuma as saying that the idea of state capture was political propaganda because “none of the three arms of government – the executive, judiciary and legislature – had been captured”.

In another article published in the *Mail & Guardian* on 29 May 2017 titled ‘ANC Calls for judicial commission of inquiry into state capture’,¹⁹ Gwede Mantashe cautioned party members “against falling into the hands of opposition parties and their calls for President Jacob Zuma to resign”. Mantashe, who was the secretary general of the ANC at the time, said that all cases of the “influence of business” since the ANC came to power should be investigated:

If I'm captured by somebody other than the Guptas, I'm not better off than people who are captured by the Guptas. That's why we open in 1994 to say 'let's drill deep and understand the extent of the influence of business on the ANC'. And if we can have a commission that does that for us, the ANC will be a better organisation. (Mail & Guardian, 29 May 2017).

A total of eight articles in this cat-

‘IF I’M CAPTURED BY
SOMEBODY OTHER
THAN THE GUPTAS, I’M
NO BETTER THAN
PEOPLE WHO HAVE
BEEN CAPTURED BY
THE GUPTAS ... LET’S
DRILL DEEP HERE’



The ANC's Gwede Mantashe ... if Jacob Zuma did not resign, the party would have no choice but let him be 'fried by vultures'

egory featured in City Press and on News24 – five in City Press and three on News24. In the news story, '#HandsOffZuma: It is 'economic terrorism' to call for Zuma's early exit' and published in the City Press on 5 February 2018, BLF deputy president Zanele Lwana was quoted as saying that Cyril Ramaphosa was complicit with the "white" agenda aimed at Zuma's early exit.

She said, "Cyril has time and again proved his alliance with white monopoly capital. A case in point is his involvement and subsequent protection of the white business Lonmin instead of the black mine workers. He is a puppet for white business, therefore any call for Zuma's early exit to be replaced by Ramaphosa can be equated to economic terrorism."²⁰

Fifty-three articles were assigned to the "Resign or Sink SA" category. These frame Zuma as the problem for South Africa and his resignation as

the solution. Most of the articles are focused on the impact of the continued stay of Zuma as president on the South African economy and on the need to tackle the crisis of corruption.

The stories in this category are framed in such a way as to insinuate that once Zuma resigns the economy would be rejuvenated. A number of articles simultaneously framed the issue in terms of the survival of the ANC. For example, in a news report published in News24 on 31 December 2017 titled 'Zuma must resign as SA president for ANC unity to happen in 2018 – stalwarts',²¹ it was suggested that Zuma's resignation

would bring about unity in the ANC and the country at large:

A starting point and a clear message to the country would be for our country's president to voluntarily step down in the interests of the country and the African National Congress. If the president really loves the ANC and wants it

to remain in power by 2019 he would assist it by handing over the leadership of the country to the newly elected president of the ANC to better prepare for the 2019 elections (News24, 31 December 2017).²²

The 29 content items assigned to the "Zuma Deserted" category framed Zuma as being deserted by ANC officials that had initially thrown their weight behind him. For instance, in a news article published in the Mail & Guardian on 29 May 2017, Mantashe was quoted as saying that the ANC would support the establishment of a commission of inquiry if it would probe state capture from 1994 to 2016, not just during Zuma's reign.

However, after the party election of Ramaphosa as the ANC president, Mantashe, who had now been elected as chairperson of the ANC, sang a different tune. In a news report published in Times Live on 13 February 2018 titled 'Zuma must resign or be devoured by vultures: Mantashe', Mantashe was quoted as saying that, "If President Jacob Zuma does not resign, the ANC will be left with no choice but to let him be 'fried' by 'vultures' through a vote of no confidence

'CYRIL HAS TIME AND AGAIN PROVED HIS ALLIANCE WITH WHITE MONOPOLY CAPITAL ... ANY CALL FOR ZUMA'S EARLY EXIT TO BE REPLACED BY HIM IS ECONOMIC TERRORISM'

INSIDE ANGLE

in Parliament.”²³

Even Malusi Gigaba, the former minister of home affairs who had been appointed finance minister at the time, and who had earlier referred to calls for Zuma’s resignation as a “white monopoly capital” agenda, backtracked after the ANC recalled Zuma. This was highlighted in a news report in Times Live on 14 February 2018. In the report titled ‘We will vote Zuma out if he doesn’t resign, says Gigaba’ he was quoted as saying that “[i]f President Jacob Zuma does not resign, the ANC will remove him through Parliament”.²⁴ Gigaba also regurgitated the earlier narrative of “Re-sign or Sink SA” in which the ouster of Zuma was considered a viable option for the recovery of the South African economy:

*We all support the view that the president needs to step down – and to step down immediately – to allow the new leadership to manage the transition process. So I’m fully supportive of the measures that are undertaken, particularly because they are going to bring about much-required political certainty and policy certainty that we need to get the South African economy growing beyond the levels at which it’s growing at the present moment (Times Live, 14 February 2018).*²⁵

One opinion piece that I did not categorise because it was a commentary piece on the operations of the media rather than part of the unfolding story, was published in the *Mail & Guardian* on 14 November 2017 and authored by Mohammed Jameel Abdulla, a Daily Vox journalist.

In the opinion piece, the journalist articulated the need to engage critically with the ‘state capture’ narrative rather than dismiss the subtexts. He argued

that it was “inadequate and evasive to claim that any substantial criticism of state capture is to be attributed to Bell Pottinger and ‘paid Twitter’ propaganda”. “We deserve more nuance than the false dichotomy of either being captured or being an agent of white monopoly capital,” he said.

In the reporting on state capture, there are important lessons to be learned about the strengths and weaknesses of South Africa’s media – and it may take time for these lessons to properly emerge. While there was some excellent investigative reporting on the extent of state corruption we should not lose sight that the state capture saga is also evidence of the extent to which

the media remains vulnerable to the uncritical repetition of agendas. Partly this is done through perpetuating concepts without interrogating them – as some have argued, even the notion of “state capture” is limiting and not entirely reflective of what actually was going on, yet this was the concept that framed the endemic corruption that is still being exposed.²⁶

Abdulla elaborated on his point

in this way: “While we should by no means assume the media is impartial, it is nevertheless disappointing that the media is not adequately performing its role in facilitating conversation in times of political polarisation – but rather adding to it by often dismissing complexity in favour of a simple and overly determined single narrative of South Africa’s problems.”

A similar criticism of the media has been made before on its coverage of other issues, such as in the context of the political polarisation over the government’s HIV/Aids policy in the early 2000s.

When it comes to state capture, with so many agendas at play, the simplification of the narrative can be dangerous for media objectivity. For example, it is arguably the media’s tendency to eviscerate nuance that makes it vulnerable to disinformation, propaganda and the agendas of political campaigns in the first place.

It is also interesting how the economy becomes a clear lever in setting up these dichotomies, whether as part of the economic apartheid framing of the Bell Pottinger campaign, or in the

THE STATE CAPTURE SAGA IS EVIDENCE OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE MEDIA REMAINS VULNERABLE TO UNCITICAL REPETITION OF AGENDAS



A social media campaign designed to discredit prominent journalists who had criticised corruption

argument that Zuma should resign to save the South African economy. What is, however, not fully surfaced in the reporting on state capture is how the ideological underpinnings of the media themselves contributed to and helped shape the narratives that emerged. Quite often this can be the most overlooked “agenda” when there is clear evidence of guilty parties, and the narrative is as lacking in nuance as that.

END NOTES

- 1 City Press (<https://city-press.news24.com/>); Mail & Guardian (www.mg.co.za); Times Live (www.timeslive.co.za) and News24 (www.news24.com).
- 2 Although the media refer to the public protector’s report as the “State Capture” report, its title was in fact “State of Capture: Report on an investigation into alleged improper and unethical conduct by the President and other state functionaries relating to alleged improper relationships and involvement of the Gupta family in the removal and appointment of Ministers and Directors of State-Owned Enterprises resulting in improper and possibly corrupt award of state contracts and benefits to the Gupta family’s businesses.” Report No: 6 of 2016/2017
- 3 Abdulla, J. M. (14/11/2017) The President’s Keepers: State capture, white vindication. Mail & Guardian. <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-11-14-00-the-presidents-keepers-state-capture-white-vindication>
- 4 News24. (02/11/2016) Download the full State Capture report. News24. <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/download-the-full-state-of-capture-pdf-20161102>
- 5 Zuma denied having a recollection of the incident Mentor described. She also alleged that the Guptas wanted her to stop South African Airways from flying the Indian route in favour of their own Jet Airways.
- 6 Hunter, Q. and Shoba, S. (29/08/2018) ‘Zuma told me to help the Guptas’ – Themba Maseko. <https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/news/2018-08-29-zuma-told-me-to-help-guptas-themba-maseko/>
- 7 De Wet, P. (10/11/2017) One year on: The state of the state of capture. Mail & Guardian. <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-11-10-00-one-year-on-the-state-of-the-state-of-capture>
- 8 Staff reporter. (28/05/2017) Here they are: The emails that prove the Guptas run South Africa. Sunday Times. <https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/news/2017-05-28-here-they-are-the-emails-that-prove-the-guptas-run-south-africa/>
- 9 Khoza, A. (21/05/2018) SA editors launch defamation claim against Bell Pottinger over ‘WMC’ campaign. Mail & Guardian. <https://mg.co.za/article/2018-05-21-sa-editors-launch-defamation-claim-against-bell-pottinger-over-wmc-campaign>
- 10 Gupta-Leaks.com <http://www.gupta-leaks.com/>
- 11 ANCIR. (04/09/2017) Inside the #GuptaFakeNewsEmpire: How the Gupta campaign weaponised social media. <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-09-04-how-the-gupta-campaign-weaponised-social-media/>
- 12 Daily Maverick. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/>
- 13 ANCIR. <https://investigativecenters.org/>
- 14 ANCIR. (4/09/2017) Inside the #GuptaFakeNewsEmpire: How the Gupta campaign weaponised social media. <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-09-04-how-the-gupta-campaign-weaponised-social-media/>
- 15 Undated. Publication of the findings of the independent Herbert Smith Freehills LLP Review. <https://www.holmesreport.com/docs/default-source/default-document-library/findings-of-herbert-smith-freehills-review.pdf>
- 16 Search terms included “state capture”, “capture of the South African state”, “Gupta’s role in State capture”, “Jacob Zuma and state Capture”, “White monopoly Capital” etc.
- 17 Khumalo, J. (2018/2/5) #HandsOffZuma: It is ‘economic terrorism’ to call for Zuma’s early exit. City Press. <https://city-press.news24.com/News/handsoffzuma-it-is-economic-terrorism-to-call-for-zumas-early-exit-20180205>
- 18 The article, sourced from News24, was re-written by Alex Mitchley, a journalist at the Mail & Guardian and published in the Mail & Guardian on 14 November 2017, titled ‘State capture report a political tool – Zuma’ (<https://mg.co.za/article/2017-11-14-state-capture-report-a-political-tool-zuma>). The same article was also published in News24 on 13 November 2017. Both articles have the same headline and lead which stated that “President Jacob Zuma believes that the public protector’s report on state capture was a political tool meant to be used to deal with certain individuals”.
- 19 Bendile, D. (29/05/2017) ANC calls for judicial commission of inquiry into state capture. Mail & Guardian. <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-05-29-anc-calls-for-judicial-commission-of-inquiry-into-state-capture>
- 20 Khumalo, J. (2018/2/5) #HandsOffZuma: It is ‘economic terrorism’ to call for Zuma’s early exit. City Press. <https://city-press.news24.com/News/handsoffzuma-it-is-economic-terrorism-to-call-for-zumas-early-exit-20180205>
- 21 Serrao, A. (31/12/2017) Zuma must resign as SA president for ANC unity to happen in 2018 – stalwarts. News24. <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/zuma-must-resign-as-sa-president-for-anc-unity-to-happen-in-2018-stalwarts-20171231>
- 22 The quote was attributed to an unnamed group of stalwarts and ANC veterans.
- 23 Mvumvu, Z. (13/02/2018) Zuma must resign or be devoured by vultures: Mantashe. <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2018-02-13-zuma-must-resign-or-be-devoured-by-vultures-mantashe/>
- 24 Savides, M. (14/02/2018) We will vote Zuma out if he doesn’t resign, says Gigaba. Timeslive. <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2018-02-14-we-will-vote-zuma-out-if-he-doesnt-resign-says-gigaba/>
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 For example, in his analysis of the SABC in this issue of the State of the Newsroom, Dimitri Martini points to the argument that “silent coup” might have been more appropriate, and that “a distinction must be drawn between state capture and a silent coup if one is to fully understand the dynamics of a corrosive political project”.

Causing unnecessary public harm

LATIEFA MOBARA AND
JOHAN RETIEF

Of the 533 complaints considered by the Press Council during 2018, neglect in giving subjects of critical reportage a right of reply, which more often than not leads to inaccurate and unfair reporting, remains the most common mistake made by the media.

However, another nasty gremlin, the presentation of an allegation as

fact – or as the press ombud is fond of putting it, turning a question mark into an exclamation mark – has also raised its ugly head.

And, to add insult to injury, this tended to influence more than just the individuals concerned, as the reporting adversely affected society. The unnecessary harm such reporting caused the public was as bad as it comes.

One such example is a story published by a newspaper in early Febru-

ary this year, headlined, ‘Con leaves students homeless – Accommodation scam devastates at least 500 UKZN students’.

The article stated as fact that students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Pietermaritzburg campus had vowed to disrupt academic activities until students who were allegedly victims of a multi-million rand residence placement scandal (students paying for non-existent places to stay)

had been housed. This statement was ascribed to the Student Representative Council, and the story was published against the backdrop of chaos at KwaZulu-Natal universities (which consequently led to the death of a student).

An investigation by the ombud convincingly showed that the students' protests were not about such a scam at all – in fact, that there was not a shred of evidence that such a scam existed in the first place. It was also testified, at an informal hearing held by the ombud, that the reportage had added to the unrest on campus.

In the end, the newspaper apologised for stating as fact the allegation that a scam had formed part of the reasons for the students' protests, and for the headline which screamed out that 500 students had suffered because of it. But the reputational damage this reportage has undeservedly, unnecessarily and unfairly caused the university and its personnel cannot be measured – and neither can its influence on campus be determined.

In another case last year, a local newspaper in Hartbeespoort published content about the approval by the Department of Water and Sanitation of a resort "similar" to African Island, a beach-like development in Hartbeespoort with entertainment for young and old that was not frequented by whites.

The underlying issue was the suggestion that the development would attract only black people in a predominantly white-populated area. It also strongly suggested that the developers, a black couple, were occupying the land illegally, even though they did get the green light from the department to prepare the land in order to later apply for development.

Following the reportage, several acts of vandalism, as well as protests

MAJOR CHANGES AT THE PRESS COUNCIL

The year 2018 saw some major changes at the Press Council. Primary among these were the retirement of a doyen of the media and Executive Director of the Press Council Joe Thloloe, and the resignation of long-serving Press Ombud Johan Retief.

It also saw the implementation of key changes to the Press Code to bring it in line with current debates in the media and to deal with challenges facing the media. A shorter Press Code was adopted and implemented at the beginning of 2019, which was the result of extensive discussions amongst stakeholders.

While there were no material omissions to the code, the Press Council *inter alia* broadened the interpretation of what constituted sexual violence to include sexual harassment and intimidation and also brought clarity on what council meant by hate speech – i.e. sticking to the definition of that term in our country's constitution (which addresses the intent to cause harm, incitement of violence, advocacy of hatred and propaganda for war, and excludes mere hurtful speech).



Retiring veteran ... Joe Thloloe

Stakeholder engagement and outreach workshops remain a main focus for the Press Council in the coming months to promote its self-regulatory processes and media freedom in the country.

The Press Council engaged with the National Council of Provinces to extend the exemption provided to the council's online members in the Film and Publications' Board Amendment Bill so that it would include online video. Council has yet to receive feedback on whether this intervention was successful or not.

Towards the end of 2018, the Press Council issued guidelines for journalists on election coverage. This information formed part of the election training workshops which were organised by the South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef) at the beginning of 2019.

The process for the appointment of a new ombud following the resignation of Johan Retief who had been at the Press Council for almost 10 years, culminated in the appointment of renowned and seasoned journalist Pippa Green in early 2019.

From January to December 2018, the Press Council received 533 complaints, from institutions including parliament, political parties, academics and church leaders. Many of those complaints were successfully resolved by the new Public Advocate, Joe Latakomo. Thirty-one applications for leave to appeal were made during 2018. A breakdown of the complaints is included in the table at right.

occurred – all presumably conducted by members of the white population.

The ombud directed the newspaper to *inter alia* apologise for the undeniable fact that its misleading information had led to vandalism and confrontational behaviour towards the developer, and that it had caused the developers severe trauma as they had become the subject of harassment, verbal abuse, racial slurs, unnecessary negative attention, and even death threats. He ordered the newspaper to use a whole page for its apology,

which included an advertisement clarifying what was intended with the development.

In addition to the apology, the ombud wrote that he was deeply concerned that this matter had had the potential to fuel tension amongst people of different races, which in turn could escalate into violence. This would have been avoided if the newspaper had not turned a question mark (the allegation that the development would attract only black people in a predominantly white area) into an ex-

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
487	461	591	536	499	533

Table 1: Number of complaints received, Jan 2013-December 2018

	Number of complaints	Resolved	Dismissed	Withdrawn	Pending	Adjudication
January	49	12	26	4	0	7
February	27	5	15	1	0	6
March	53	18	22	3	0	10
April	46	4	26	2	0	14
May	47	6	26	2	0	13
June	50	3	26	3	0	17
July	28	6	15	0	0	7
August	33	4	20	0	0	9
September	80	4	67	0	0	9
October	46	8	29	1	0	8
November	43	9	25	3	0	6
December	31	4	21	1	0	5

Table 2: Break down of complaints received in 2018 (January-December)



The Press Council at its AGM in 2018. Joe Thloloe is in the centre, with Latiefa Mobarra to his right and the late Raymond Louw to his left

clamation mark.

The use of a fake Facebook account as a source for an article also came under scrutiny by the press ombud last year, after an online publication had reported that a minister and her spokesperson had tweeted and posted Facebook comments that, as it turned out, they were not responsible for.

The publication had failed to verify the authenticity of the comments. The publication was directed to apologise to the complainants. This last example shows that journalists need to take more care in verifying their informa-

tion sources, especially if the source is social media.

What is concerning is that all of the above examples concern basic journalism skills – affording the right to reply, not turning an allegation into a fact, and checking sources. What is also noteworthy is that the 533 complaints received by the council amounted to more than 44 complaints a month. Although not all of the complaints were with merit, many of them were.

There were more than 100 complaints adjudicated by the press om-

bud during the past year. It is good that we have the Press Council to facilitate the complaints and to help maintain standards in the industry – and the number of complaints received suggests the robustness of self-regulation. But it is clear that newsrooms themselves also need to play their part in maintaining standards with as much energy as they show in chasing the next sensational headline.

• *Latiefa Mobarra is the Executive Director of the Press Council. Johan Retief served as press ombud for almost 10 years. He left at the beginning of 2019.*

APPENDIX 1

Summary of Sanef media statements on media freedom and journalist ethics issues from 2018

<p>THREATS FROM THE STATE</p>	<p>The house of investigative journalist and author Jacques Pauw was raided by the Hawks, the priority crimes directorate. Pauw is the author of the book <i>The President's Keepers</i> which exposes state capture. (March)</p>
	<p>Sunday Tribune journalist Karinda Jagmohan was assaulted by police while covering protests outside Chatsworth. Jagmohan claims she was shoved, screamed and sworn at for filming a police member tackling a protester to the ground. The police wanted to search her bags and delete the footage. (May)</p>
	<p>KwaZulu-Natal journalists were reported to be verbally and physically abused and manhandled by police at crime scenes. (June statement)</p>
	<p>Journalists were injured after police opened fire with rubber bullets during a service delivery protest in Eersterust, Pretoria. Pretoria News reporter Sakhile Ndlazi was hit on the back of his head, while The Citizen photographer Jacques Nelles was shot in the back. Meanwhile The Citizen's Virginia Keppler broke her leg and ankle while running for cover (June).</p>
	<p>A senior magistrate in Pietermaritzburg, Ashin Singh, was accused of a pattern of abuse against The Witness journalists. In the most recent incident court reporter Sharika Regchand was, amongst other things, accosted as she walked out of court and sworn at by the magistrate, who also made lewd accusations and threatening comments about her family. The newspaper was to lodge a complaint against Singh. (August)</p>
	<p>Sanef met with Finance Minister Tito Mboweni after he sent two bizarre tweets threatening war against the media. Without context Mboweni tweeted: "Wars start in different ways. Spears and shields, gun powder, bullets and now through media: printed and electronic (eg trade wars by a super president), and then Social media!! Well, the SA Editors must be Editors!! If needs be, we will be forced into the fight, War!". In a second tweet he added that, "there will be collateral damage." Mboweni later said he felt his rights were seriously violated through unethical and reckless journalism. (November)</p>
	<p>Pretoria-based journalist Frans Sello Machate was assaulted by police. (November)</p>
<p>THREATS FROM POLITICAL GROUPS</p>	<p>Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) leader Julius Malema sent inflammatory tweets on social media about eNCA and its journalists. Journalists at the channel received threats as a result. (March)</p>
	<p>Netwerk24 photographer Adrian de Kock was manhandled and slapped by EFF Deputy President Floyd Shivambu in the parliamentary precinct in Cape Town. Shivambu demanded that De Kock delete a picture he took of him, and together with others he tried to remove the camera from around De Kock's neck. (March)</p>

	EFF's Julius Malema provoked further antipathy against the media by labelling a journalist and co-editor of the Mail & Guardian precursor, the Weekly Mail, Stratcom spies. (April)
	Journalists in KwaZulu-Natal were intimidated by ANC war veterans and supporters at the court trial of former president Jacob Zuma, as well as at political rallies and gatherings. (June statement)
	Journalists in KwaZulu-Natal were said to have received threatening phone calls from unidentified political leaders. (June statement)
	The ANC Women's League attacked Sunday Times journalist Qaanitah Hunter in a media statement after a report on plans by former president Jacob Zuma to oust President Cyril Ramaphosa. The cellphone belonging to the secretary general of the ANC Women's League Meokgo Matuba was used to send a picture of a gun to Hunter's cellphone. (September)
	The EFF banned particular media organisations, such as the Sunday Times from its press conferences. (November statement)
	The EFF and Malema were taken to the Equality Court by Sanef and five journalists following inflammatory remarks by the EFF leader who called on supporters to "deal decisively" with journalists, singling out some by name. The attacks against journalists Ranjeni Munusamy, Pauli van Wyk, Adriaan Basson, Max du Preez, and Barry Bateman, included physical intimidation, verbal threats and attacks online. EFF supporters also called for certain journalists to be killed, and for the home addresses of journalists reporting critically on the EFF to be published. (November/December)
THREATS FROM THE PUBLIC	Journalists in KwaZulu-Natal were attacked by the public in several service delivery protests in the province. (June statement)
THREATS FROM INDIVIDUALS	Private investigator Paul O Sullivan threatened to close down the Sunday Times in his response to questions sent to him privately by a journalist, Poloko Tau. He went further to directly threaten, insult and intimidate the journalist. (September)
	A disgruntled local businessman in the Eastern Cape allegedly threatened to shoot a Herald reporter who had written unflattering articles about him.
ONLINE THREATS (REPORTED)	Journalists in KwaZulu-Natal experienced cyber-attacks and were threatened on social media, forcing them to close their social media accounts. (June statement)
	A picture of a gun was sent to the cellphone of Sunday Times journalist Qaanitah Hunter from a phone belonging to the ANC Women's League secretary general Meokgo Matuba (September)
	The EFF and its supporters attacked journalists on social media. In highly gendered attacks, journalists were called "whores", "witches", "bitches" and "cunts", as well as racists and Nazis. There were calls for the journalists to be raped, killed and for their home addresses to be published online. (November/December)
	Finance Minister Tito Mboweni attacked the media in two bizarre tweets. (November, see above)

EDITORIAL INTERFERENCE	ANC spokesperson Pule Mabe criticised the coverage of a dissident group of ANC and SACP supporters by the public broadcaster. The group were calling for Zuma's removal as president. (February)
	Veteran radio talkshow host Sakina Kamwendo was taken off air midway through her last show as host of SAfm's Forum at Eight programme. Management were said to be unhappy that during the programme she explained the events leading up to the end of the show and her experience of it. (March)
	After the failed listing of Iqbal Survé's Sagarmatha Technologies, journalists and editors were described as being like "Stratcom" agents in a front-page article published by Independent Media-owned newspapers. The front-page articles were widely seen as part of on-going use of the Independent Media titles by Survé to further his personal and business agendas. (April)
	A Sunday Times apology for a series of investigative reports published since 2011 that were subsequently discredited resulted in renewed calls for a Media Appeals Tribunal to replace the current self-regulatory model. (October)
	Sanef expressed concern over a meeting between the Hawks and Sunday Times editor Bongani Siqoko ahead of the paper's apology for the discredited reports. (October)
JOURNALISM ETHICS	Sunday Times deputy editor Jan-Jan Joubert was fired after he was found guilty of gross misconduct for not declaring a conflict of interest involving the Democratic Alliance (DA), and sharing confidential information about the EFF with the DA. (March)
	Allegations surfaced that some journalists were receiving bribes from newsmakers to stop them from publishing certain stories. (October)
	Freelance journalist and author Jacques Pauw published the home address of EFF leader Julius Malema on Twitter. This followed the publication of an exposé by Eyewitness News on the alleged funding of Malema's house by a private businessman. Pauw later deleted the tweet. (December)
OTHER	Three Johannesburg metro police constables were arrested in connection with the murder of journalist Godknows Nare. It was unclear whether his murder was linked to his work as a journalist. (January)
	Journalists and photographers from the Daily Sun, the SABC and several other media agencies assigned to cover the Mahila Mahikeng Cultural Jazz Festival in North West province were physically manhandled and forcibly removed from the event by service providers while doing their jobs as accredited and official media. (December)
	The National Lotteries Commission (NLC) was accused of asking the State Security Agency to investigate journalists on the issue of breaches to its information systems following media reports on corruption at the commission. It later denied this. (December)

APPENDIX 2

Demographics of editors of South African newspapers

South African newspapers	Editors	Race	Gender
Beeld	Barnard Beukman	White	Male
Business Day	Lukanyo Mnyanda	Black	Male
Business Report	Adri Senekal De Wet	White	Female
Business Times	Ron Derby	Black	Male
Cape Argus	Aziz Hartley	Coloured	Male
Cape Times	Aneez Salie	Indian	Female
City Press	Mondli Makhanya	Black	Male
Daily Dispatch	Sibusiso Ngalwa	Black	Male
Daily News	Zoubair Ayoob	Indian	Male
Daily Sun	Nahima Ahmed	Black	Female
Daily Voice	Tariq Halim	Indian	Male
Diamond Fields Advertiser	Johan du Plessis	White	Male
Die Burger	Willem Jordaan	White	Male
Ilanga	Sazi Majola	Black	Male
Ilanga LangeSonto	Bheki Ndlovana	Black	Male
Independent on Saturday	Mazwi Xaba	Black	Male
Isolezwe	Slindile Khanyile	Black	Female
Isolezwe ngeSonto	Sandile Mdadane	Black	Male
Mail & Guardian	Khadija Patel	Indian	Female
The Post	Acting editor: Yogas Nair	Indian	Female
Pretoria News	Val Boje	White	Female
Rapport	Waldimar Pelser	White	Male
Saturday Star	Kashiefa Ajam	Coloured	Female
Soccer Laduma	Vuyani Joni	Black	Male
Son and Son op Sondag	Neil Scott	Coloured	Male
Sowetan	S'thembiso Msomi	Black	Male
Sunday Independent	Zingisa Mkhuma	Black	Female
Sunday Sun	Prince Chauke	Black	Male
Sunday Times	Bongani Siqoko	Black	Male
Sunday Tribune	Aakash Bramdeo	Indian	Male
Sunday World	Mapula Nkosi	Black	Female
The Citizen	Trevor Stevens	White	Male
The Herald & Weekend Post	Nwabisa Makunga	Black	Female

The Mercury	Yogas Nair	Indian	Female
The Star	Japhet Ncube	Black	Male
The Witness	Yves Vanderhaegen	White	Male
Volksblad	Gert Coetzee	White	Male
Weekend Argus Saturday	Acting editor: Jade Otto	Coloured	Female
Weekend Argus Sunday	Acting editor: Melanie Peters	Coloured	Female

Table 1: Race and gender: Editors of South African newspapers

Black		18
Coloured		5
Indian		6
White		9
Female		13
Male		25

Table 2: Summary of demographics of editors of South African newspapers

WITS JOURNALISM

10th Floor, University Corner
Cnr Jorissen and Bertha streets
Braamfontein
University of the Witwatersrand
Johannesburg, South Africa
Private Bag X3, Wits 2050

Tel: 011 717 4028

Fax: 011 717 4081

www.journalism.co.za

ISBN: 978-0-6399766-6-2



UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

WITS
Journalism



WITS Journalism

An annual survey of the state of the media in South Africa, produced by the Journalism Department of the University of the Witwatersrand