

**Power Blocks:  
Unravelling the myriad of unsafe spaces  
for women journalists in South Africa.  
What is the way forward?**

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This is a work in progress, prepared to function in the context of the  
UNESCO WPFC Academic Conference 2020 on the Safety of Journalists.

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## **Abstract**

*As incidents of violence against journalists increase internationally, women journalists in South Africa (SA) who expose corruption are the most targeted group in the country. They face specific gendered and sexualised aggression. These attacks emanate from political parties, the state, communities, online spaces such as social media, but also in the newsroom itself. This unravelling of the multiplicity of attacks against women journalists is important for the safeguarding of journalism and therefore diversity and democracy too. The research in this paper attempts to suggest some ways forward. The article analyses press freedom in South Africa through the lens of women journalists using the theoretical concepts of power and subjection. How does power act, and block, how does a subject form and what agency is exercised? These theoretical issues will be examined vis-à-vis women journalists in SA to make some suggestive findings about their protection. While the data collected so far shows that the intensity of the attacks on women journalists in South Africa have increased and have taken on vicious forms especially in the digitised world, it is not all doom and gloom. The optimistic moment in this research resides in the fact that women are, by and large, resisting their aggressors. They are speaking back to politicians who bully, for example, and importantly, so far, have mainly not turned away from their dedication to journalism. The questions are: where does the power lie for them to work without fear, and what kind of alliances are needed for women journalists to work in safer spaces?*

**Keywords: Sexism, cyber-misogyny, press freedom, women journalists, subjection, power and agency.**

## **Introduction**

This article elucidates the experiences of sexism and cyber-misogyny women journalists in South Africa face through a collection of their comments from a survey, their stories as in case studies, and theoretical conceptual analytical method. The aim is to draw out some theoretical findings about what reflexive turns women journalists make through their subjections and what are some ways forward from the powers which block them.

As background material, the Glass Ceilings research 2018 (Daniels *et al*, 2018) is deployed where women journalists articulated their experiences of sexism. Second, the stories of some high profile women journalists of bullying, online trolling, and cyber-misogyny are outlined and discussed to show how the sexism already experienced in the newsroom is now duplicated and even more violent in the digital spaces. Third, theoretical tools are used to explore this double oppression and to then analyse which way women turn: i.e. inwardly towards themselves, leaving the craft, speaking out, self-censoring?

Threats to digital safety pose a new and evolving risk, especially in relation to online harassment according to UNESCO's World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: 2017/2018 Global Report. The organisation's research showed that journalists, irrespective of gender, are in danger all over the world (Unesco 2018) with murders increasing, threats posed by 'intimidation and harassment, disinformation and smear campaigns, website defacement and technical attacks, as well as arbitrary surveillance'. However, women journalists, in particular, have experienced increasing online abuse, stalking and harassment. 'For women journalists especially, misogynistic cyber harassment has continued to be a significant threat, potentially silencing journalists and hindering media pluralism in terms of gender diversity in media production,' (Unesco 2018). So, as much as social media provides a space for activism (Mutsvairo 2016) the online space is also one for trolling and bullying.

Murders and jailing, internationally notwithstanding, there is also the ideological interpellation of journalists i.e. being labelled 'enemies' of the state, and of the people, for instance, in SA, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) encouraged their members to 'attack' journalists, and 'deal with them decisively' targeting specifically women journalists (*Daily Maverick*, 2019). The broad political context then is that this sexist violence is taking place in a world of growing populism, nationalism, xenophobia where the democratic space is being squeezed out. It is within this political context that it is apparent that it is women who appear to be the main targets by political parties and trolls on social media (Nevil 2019; Posetti 2018, Ordway 2018; Ressa 2019, Ayyub, 2019) as seen in South Africa, Australia, US, the Philippines, India, among some of the countries, mentioned by the cited writers. This article deals with the specificities of the online bullying of high profile women journalists in South Africa against the background of the rampant sexism in the newsroom itself. The irony is that in South Africa as women journalists have made progress in a field that was once male dominated (Daniels, 2014) – both in investigations and in the newsroom leadership spaces too – they are now experiencing trauma in the social media space, a backlash against the gains, previously made.

### ***Theoretical reflections: gender diversity in media***

Women's voices deepen democracy by contributing to the diversity needed for inclusivity and plurality according to local media analysts (Reid 2019; Rodny-Gumede 2014). Julie Reid wrote: 'The value of a diverse spectrum of media, particularly news media content, is widely recognised as integral, and at times regarded as synonymous, with a well-functioning democracy in which an informed citizenry is actively able to participate' (Reid, 2019). Ylva Rodny-Gumede's research showed that sexism still abounds in South Africa, and that despite a constitution built on human rights such as anti-racism and anti-sexism, the data showed us that discriminatory practices, structural inequalities, prejudices, and patriarchy are still prevalent in newsrooms. Rodny-Gumede's work pointed to studies which showed that women's voices are still missing in the public discourse.

Amanda Gouws (2017) argued that women have been experiencing a backlash<sup>1</sup> in all three continents in the global south in the last three years as a consequence of neo liberal capitalism, the overarching global political framework which has not created justice and equality for those on the margins of mainstream politics and economics. This latter then frames the world within which the media operates. The Glass Ceilings 2018 research discussed the progress, as well as the barriers to women's progress in the media, including what can be called a backlash. In feminist theory, American feminist author Susan Faludi described a backlash as a historical trend, generally recurring when it appeared that women have made substantial gains in their efforts to obtain equal rights. It is a counter-assault to halt or reverse the hard-won gains in the quest for equality. British cultural theorist, feminist and commentator Angela McRobbie explained the Faludi backlash as a 'concerted, conservative response to the achievements of feminism'. In South Africa we saw the number of black women editors increase in 2013, and then there was a sudden drop after 2014; this was called a backlash in the *State of the Newsroom South Africa: Disruptions Accelerated* (Daniels, 2014). A backlash in this sense could well be a deliberate and at the same time unconscious action. Women made gains and so men believe they have gained enough, and so they wrestle back for their spaces of privilege. The term backlash is not meant to be theorised here in any detail, but is used in a more suggestive sense that women made gains but there is now a pushback.

### ***Power, subjection, reflexivity, resignifications***

Blending and borrowing Michel Foucault's concepts of power and subjection, with Judith Butler's 'reflexive turning', and Louis Althusser's 'interpellation' (i.e. labelling and

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<sup>1</sup> The term backlash gained popularity in 1991 with Susan Faludi's explanation that after gains in feminism there is a backlash from the traditionalists and establishment against such gains.

shaming), this article uses both the experiences of women in the newsroom to make some theoretical findings on the agencies and reactions of the journalists. In his work, *The Ideological State Apparatuses* (1984), Althusser's central thesis was that all ideology hails, or interpellates, individuals as subjects. Althusser's theorising of labelling and shaming, adapted by Butler, can be applied to the cases of women journalists experiences both in the newsroom and on social media. Butler's theories in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997) contain important theoretical positions on power which are drawn on for this article to understand the attempts to subject, or subjugate, critical women journalist voices in South Africa through the idea of interpellation and, even more importantly, to reflect on what reflexive turns can be made towards the voices of power, or not. Subjects can become attached to subjection or turn their backs against it. An unpredictable turn can show resignifications or, if you like, elucidate detachment from past signifiers. In other words, or to simplify, you can turn towards the voice of power and in this case, stop writing, or write obsequiously, or you can turn away from the voice that's shaming you and pursue your investigations and critical writing. 'Interpellation' means naming, hailing, labelling, calling and subjecting that person to that name, for example: nigger, lesbian, black, white, and racist. Ideological interpellations are demands or social injunctions with the aim of subjecting and making the subject toe the line. The subject becomes the subject by heeding the call, acknowledging the hailing for example, 'enemy of the people' or here specific to women journalists, 'slut', 'pressstitude' (press prostitute), 'fat', 'bitch' among other labels. Resignification entails a move away from past norms which oppress, to detach and look instead to other norms which could signify freedom from oppression.

According to the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF), a glass ceiling is an 'invisible but real barrier that women experience in in the workplace' (IWMF, 2018). Experiences of the glass ceiling<sup>2</sup> include being blocked by sexism, sexist practices, sexual harassment, pregnancy, patriarchal views and prejudices, in hiring and promotions as well as salary disparities with men. A 'backlash' appears to follow gains made.

There are various levels of discrimination of women: in the social at large, meaning political social power structures, which remain patriarchal, in the media companies, where those who own, and sit on boards are in the vast majority male according to the Print and Digital Media Transformation Team's *Report on the Transformation of Print and Digital Media* (2013). Then there are two more levels of sexist violence: in the newsroom, and on social media. These latter two arenas are the focus of this article.

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<sup>2</sup> The term has been translated from English into numerous other languages, e.g., plafond de verre in French, and techo de cristal in Spanish, with research showing that the glass-ceiling phenomenon has been identified and measured in nations of Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, and elsewhere since the 1980s.

This article focusses specifically on the gendered threats against women journalists, and the location is South Africa. Nonetheless, the international context is sketched here, below.

Before this paper examines cyber bullying in South Africa, this analysis looks at broad sexism in the South African media itself. And, importantly, that in addition to the general sexism as though that was not enough, there is now an added threat – cyber bullying.

### ***Method***

A multiplicity of methods was used to do this research to give a comprehensive state of the subjection women journalists are experiencing in the digital age, which includes social media.

In 2018, Sanef's Diversity and Ethics sub-committee<sup>3</sup> conducted a survey to previous glass ceiling research projects (for example one was done in 2006) to ascertain the current status quo of women. This work researched the blockages or 'glass ceilings' in 2018 and made findings against the broad social background of increased violence against women in South African society, in parallel with growing feminist militancy among young feminists as seen in the #TotalShutDown march on 1 August 2018 with the main theme: 'My body - not your crime scene.' In September 2019, there were more marches against femicide and gender based violence.

Firstly, a research project was undertaken by Sanef (headed by myself) in collaboration with Gender Links and the Media Development and Diversity Agency, in 2018, called Glass Ceilings: women in South African media houses, 2018. Here, we asked women journalists, through a survey sent out to as all media companies and newsrooms, to comment on their experiences of sexism in their daily working lives. We received their comments through anonymity.

Secondly, we approached some women who had previously articulated their experiences of sexism, and trolling, and cybermisogyny publically already, to write their stories and send them to us, for publication. A selection, based on a variety of themes, of these stories are used in this research article.

Thirdly, I found the stories of other women who spoke about their experiences, in the media itself, and then compared those stories with what they are doing now (have they succumbed to the subjections and pressure and left the profession, do they continue with their craft in as robust a way, is there some self-censorship? Or a combination of all of these?)

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<sup>3</sup> The author of this research was the chair of the Diversity and Ethics sub-committee at the time of this research in 2018.

Finally, as explained in the abstract, a theoretical analysis is the aim here – to use concepts from political philosophy, to understand how women faced their multiple subjections of sexism and cybermisogyny.

### ***The South African journalism landscape: sexism, glass ceilings***

This research took place at a turbulent time in the South African journalist landscape: increased retrenchments and traumatic job losses which started in 2008 and a decade later continued to proceed apace, a downturn in revenue, sales and circulation in legacy media accompanied by a messy digitisation process (Daniels, 2014). More corruption scandals were being uncovered. It is in this climate that the Glass Ceiling research 2018 took place. Just over one hundred media houses (including online, print, television and radio) participated in the survey, which was conducted by Gender Links and Sanef. Data was provided for a total of 10 054 personnel from media companies in the largest research on past Glass Ceilings research to date in the post-94 period. A key finding was that more women were entering senior roles in the media and the proportion of black women in top media management had increased fivefold. Despite this presence of women in management roles, there was still a patriarchal hierarchy and culture firmly in place as the anecdotes from women in the newsroom revealed. This part elucidates the glass ceiling or blockages, and general sexism that women journalists experience in South Africa; it includes then and now – about a decade ago and today. Some of the key findings from a previous Sanef/Gender Links glass ceiling survey, in 2006/2007 to a comparison of 2018 follows. For ease of reference, this paper says ‘about a decade ago’ or, ‘over a decade ago’.

### ***Sexism, Patriarchal systems, gender pay gap and cyber-misogyny, trolling***

The old boys’ network was alive and well, with men in senior positions making editorial decisions, including in social circles which exclude women, which often blocks the rise of capable women. Patriarchy, as reflected in society at large, is mirrored in the media with gender stereotyping and women being assigned to soft beats. The comments below showed that women journalists were aware that what happened in society at large was reflected in their positions in the media.

While there was more awareness of sexist language, jokes, innuendo and sexual harassment in newsrooms, it still existed and was tolerated in 2018, almost as much as it was over a decade ago. In 2006 women in the newsroom said they experienced

prejudice and being 'patronised'. Much the same commentary persisted in 2018 as shown in the comment below.

*Women are patronised and their opinions do not appear to be taken as seriously as those of men. This can be subtle, like jokes made at their expense when they give their opinions, or teasing. It seems friendly and even affectionate, but it is actually demeaning.'*

There was more assertiveness in flagging salary disparities between women and men journalists with the same experience. Nearly 80% or 157 out of 202 respondents from the newsroom, said they knew that they were paid less than men with the same experience.

Whereas this was not the case about 10 years ago, women journalists were now contending with trolling and cyber bullying. Women journalists said there were extra dangers for female journalists who must tackle not only physical danger but the prevalence of online trolls, and attacks – real and threatened – of a sexual nature.

## **Cyberbullying**

International surveys and research have confirmed that women are the most targeted group for trolling and cyberbullying, and in SA this is a growing problem. The following section shows how women journalists are victims bullying and trolling, often of a sexual nature.

Researcher at the Reuters Institute of Journalism at Oxford, Julie Posetti (2015, 2018) identified cyber misogyny as the latest form of overt discrimination women worldwide. Her research showed that women were more trolled than anyone else. Posetti, who had been studying harassment of journalists in the digital space since 2011, conducted a study of Twitter abuse targeting women journalists in 2017, and found that women journalists and TV news presenters received roughly three times as much abuse as their male counterparts' (Posetti,2018).

Cyber misogyny, expressed via online sexual harassment, stalking and threats of violence, appears to be a psychological as well as a potentially physical risk to safety of women journalists – when death and rape injunctions are thrown into the mix. In addition, cyber-misogyny or hatred of women expressed online is also a threat to the active participation of women in the social or civil society debate. Cyber misogyny, expressed via online sexual harassment through to stalking and threat of violence, is a



genuine psychological – and potentially physical – risk to safety of women journalists. This article examines four women’s experiences of cyber-bullying: Ferial Haffajee, Qaanitah Hunter, Pearlie Joubert and Suna Venter. They were selected on the basis of all the different ‘turns’ that they made in reaction to the attempted subjections in the form of ideological interpellations of power pressing down upon them. This article now turns to some cases of cyberbullying in South Africa.

***Photoshopped and trolled by the click armies*** - Ferial Haffajee’s story of trolling and cyberbullying by the Guptas<sup>4</sup>.

Ferial Haffajee is arguably South Africa’s most high profile black woman editor – and is among a few women in the country to have cracked the glass ceiling – to become editor of major newspapers and online publications. She was editor of the *Mail & Guardian*, *City Press* and then *Huffington Post SA* before it was shut down in 2017. In 2019 she was associate editor of *Daily Maverick*.

In this account, Haffajee described the trauma she experienced at the hands of the Gupta (the corrupt Indian business family that befriended the former president, Jacob Zuma as the Zondo Commission of 2019 explicated) ‘bots’. She was involved in high profile corruption busting stories and for this she was bullied in a form of intimidation presumably to stop her from investigating and writing. Haffajee’s discourse below reveals her feelings of humiliation.

*‘For months, I’ve looked at them when I’m alone. Quickly, like a dirty secret. The images make me wince with their distortions and insults. I snap my phone shut and move to another screen. Or make a cup of tea. Images are powerful and the designers have very specific messages. That I am a whore, a harridan, an animal and a quisling. I feel shame, and fear that my family will see them and not understand their genesis’.*

*‘[...] I thought I knew myself better than the crafters of these images do, and so sometimes I’ve laughed them off when asked about the score of images that have linked me to the hashtag decrying #whitemonopolycapital (white monopoly capital) and which have labelled me variously a presstitute (media prostitute) and a lapdog of the Richemont chairman and South African billionaire Johann Rupert. But upon reflection, the instinct to feel ashamed and to worry about what my less digitally savvy family might think means this kind of trolling works’.*

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<sup>4</sup> The Guptas are an Indian business family who immigrated to South Africa and went into a corrupt relationship with former president Zuma. They left the country before the Zondo commission into State Capture began, in 2018.

*[...] Rupert dropped Bell Pottinger as Richemont's public relations specialist, accusing them of running the campaign on white monopoly capital and making him the poster boy. Bell Pottinger was also working for the Gupta family on a hefty retainer. They are now widely believed to be the masterminds behind efforts to divert attention from the family's capture of the South African state. Although I have never met Rupert and only spoken to him once or twice, the images had me (or a very badly Photoshopped version) in his lap. There is one of Rupert walking a dog with my face plastered on the pooch and another of him milking a bovine with human visage - mine. The attack is patriarchal and gendered: I am the woman as cow and bitch. The contrivers couldn't get more stereotypical if they tried'.*

A year later, Haffajee had not stopped investigating and writing, she had turned her back against the interpellating voices of bullying, power, patriarchy and sexism. Yet, the trauma stress had taken its toll. She wrote in an article in 2019 about the shamings by the EFF every time she wrote a piece which called out their corruption. The piece went viral: *'Twitter and the rest of social media are a rising threat to media freedom and I am part of their roadkill'* in *Daily Maverick* in August, 2019.

*'Every morning, I pick up my phone and check WhatsApp messages. Then, I open my Twitter feed. 'Bitch!' reads a response to something I've posted or written or reported. I block. 'Cunt,' reads another. Block. 'Racist, go back home,' says another.*

*'I will smack you so hard, you won't know your name,' I type. And then block.*

*Online abuse has become so commonplace that taking it in and blocking is part of the daily routine now. Just occasionally, you have to fight back.*

*As I reflected, I realise that when reporting, I walk with a stoop now, bent from the world as if to protect myself. It's not like me. At news events, like EFF media conferences, I make myself small and will ask questions in a way that sounds to me, as I reflect, almost obsequious. It's definitely not like me'.*

Haffajee in these words expressed her vulnerability, and further showed how to some extent she was had to protect herself from the taunts and slander, the hailings and shamings. She was doing this through trying to be nice, and to please – so that they may stop. However, the mere act of writing about such depth of feelings was ultimately an act of resistance. In turn callers to radio stations, and comments in newspapers and online flooded with empathy and compassion. The ideological interpellators or hailers and the shamers had not won.

### ***Pearlie Joubert – left the Sunday Times all male investigative unit***

This is the background to investigative journalist, Pearlie Joubert's story: There were over 35 stories published in the *Sunday Times*<sup>5</sup> found to be 'bogus' and untrue stories, mostly of a 'rogue' unit operating at the South African Revenue Service. The journalists were fired or pushed to leave. In 2016 the newspaper's editor apologised for getting the mainly lead stories of the past 5 years wrong. The journalists appeared to have been deployed by factional political forces in their reporting of the SARS 'rogue' unit, or they genuinely believed one set of sources which fed them information. The 'rogue' unit appears to have been an investigative unit, which all countries all over the world use in order to catch criminals in tax fraud and tax avoidance.

However, not everyone reporting on these issues for the *Sunday Times* was tainted. In January 2015, senior *Sunday Times* journalist Pearlie Joubert resigned and said in an affidavit afterwards that she was not 'willing to be party to practices at the *Sunday Times* which I verily believed to have been unethical and immoral' she told talk show host Kieno Kammies in a podcast interview in October 2018: Joubert, she resigned without a job.

*'I have a job now. It wasn't one event. You must remember that the investigative unit at the Sunday Times was involved in many stories that shaped our history. Many of the stories happened before my time. I arrived there, and didn't choose to be in the investigative unit; as a woman you often gag on the testosterone. The investigative unit was quite macho [...]*

'Toxic, really toxic', replied Kammies. But Joubert corrected:

*'Not really toxic, but very kind of macho. Stories turned out to be rubbish. I was working on the Mark Lifman (underworld tobacco dealer who had a tax bill of R388 million) investigation that SARS did. Then a bizarre set of incidences happened when my colleagues stopped having morning meetings with me, and then I was excluded from the weekly news diary. I was kind of iced out.'*

*'[...]They were speaking to double agent spy Belinda Walters and to a rhino poacher and they published. I was screaming and shouting about the evidence: where is the evidence? I have the tact of a Putco bus. There was no evidence of the brothel...*

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<sup>5</sup> The *Sunday Times* is South Africa's biggest circulating weekly newspaper; in its heyday in 2008 over 500 000 copies but by about a decade later half that circulation.

*Then I got a series of emails saying 'I am a whistle-blower at SARS', but I couldn't share with my colleagues because I couldn't trust them. So I resigned. I was unemployed for a long time. I have a job now. But then, I applied everywhere to get a job, but journalism is like: You don't piss on your own front stoep. Two people got thrown under the bus: Phylicia Oppelt, a woman, I can't say if she is guilty or not - and another, me also a woman. The men (four male investigators) who wrote the stories were all allowed to reinvent themselves.*

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In the extract from the radio show above, Joubert provides some insight into past signifiers of journalism – you don't piss on your stoep – meaning that you don't talk about your kind, your colleagues, you don't call them out. She did, she turned her back on what she was experiencing which was partly sexism, but partly she wanted to stand with the codes of ethics of her profession, she wanted the evidence for stories. She was then isolated and felt shamed by being ignored, and 'iced out' but did not toe the line of her peers in the investigative unit. She turned her back against the voices of authority, or patriarchy, 'full of testosterone', towards her conscience instead. She was subjected to their power, but refused to succumb, she instead screamed 'where's the evidence?', and in the end she felt she had to resign. She practiced misrecognition by refusing to be called into line by her fellow investigators. Borrowing on Althusser theorisations, she refused to become a subject by accepting the terms of the interpellation of the boys investigative club.

### ***Traumatised by body shaming - Qaanitah Hunter suffered mental health issues***

Also from the *Sunday Times*, but in a different case from that of Joubert, 25-year-old Muslim political journalist, Qaanitah Hunter, in June 2019 won the Nat Nakasa award for bravery in journalism in South Africa. It was the first time someone so young had won the award.

The judges commented and hailed her for speaking out about the trauma she had suffered after receiving a gun image (allegedly from the ANC Women's League) on her phone and being 'body shamed' in the messages too. She spoke about an aspect of journalism that to date in South Africa, no one was speaking about - stress, trauma, and the effects of danger and bullying on social media. This time there was a gate that was opening rather than closing when the judges of the journalist bravery awards made special mention that she had openly broached the subject about depression and anxiety that affected her, and other journalists. Hunter opined:

*'Yes, we are brave and we write these stories, but that shouldn't stop us from acknowledging the effect it has on our mental health. It is not often spoken about. People think journalists are machines when reporting on difficult stories. The effect that it has on us is important to discuss.'*

Hunter was publishing lead after lead in the *Sunday Times* and had covered high-profile stories involving politicians and the Gupta leaks. In 2018 she received an image of a gun from the ANC Women's League secretary-general through a text message. This message came after Hunter and fellow journalist Jeff Wicks reported that former president Jacob Zuma and his allies were plotting to unseat President Cyril Ramaphosa following a meeting at the Maharani hotel in Durban. A supporter of the former president Zuma wanted Hunter to stop her investigations and her writing to expose corruption. She turned her back against the interpellating voices of power, while at the same time talking back to power, but also making a self-reflexive turn in talking about mental health issues she was suffering. Sometimes, subjection results in mental health issues which then affects the body and results in the ultimate act of censorship – death.

### ***From Trauma to Death - Suna Venter died of heart break on 29 June, 2017***

Suna Venter was a South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) journalist part of the 'SABC 8' – which won the Nat Nakasa award for bravery in 2016. The 'SABC 8' was a group of journalists at the public broadcaster who refused to succumb to the bullying voice of the COO Hlaudi Motsoeneng who instructed that service delivery protests<sup>6</sup> by communities should not be covered, nor should a Right2Know<sup>7</sup> protest be covered as the coverage of such protests merely lead to more protests. The journalists believed that their professional mandate as journalists was to cover all protests, never to censor, and to let the public make up their minds about what was taking place. They were fired

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<sup>6</sup> A service delivery protest is protest action by community members for a lack of services by the government such as promises of housing, electricity and water for example.

<sup>7</sup> The R2K campaign is a movement started in 2010 in protest against the Protection of State information bill. It campaigns for freedom of access to information as a right for all citizenry.

for their disobedience. The public broadcaster fired the eight for speaking out against censorship. They approached the Constitutional Court to reverse the SABC's decision. They won the Nat Nakasa award for fearless journalism. A year after the stressful events, the body of Venter was found in her flat in Johannesburg (Etheridge, News 24, 2017).

She was 32, and her family told the media that she had been diagnosed with a cardiac condition known as stress cardiomyopathy, also known as 'broken heart syndrome', which causes rapid and severe muscle weakness. The family further explained that they believed her condition was caused by all the stress, and trauma she has experienced over the year before. Some of the bullying, intimidation and harassment Venter experienced over the year before her death, include: being shot in the face with an air pistol when leaving a restaurant – she then had to receive surgery to remove the pellets; receiving death threats on her phone; her car's tyres were slashed and her flat had been broken to on more than one occasion.

She paid the ultimate price for standing up to the authoritarian voice of the COO – death. Venter did not speak much about her trauma and the cases of intimidation were reported mainly after her death. It was the ultimate in subjection or subjugation – a dead end.

### **Reflective conclusions: Unblocking the powers of subjection/Way forward**

Women journalists are being subjected to the worst kinds of sexism, and bullying in the online space, forms of emotional violence and double oppressions they have ever experienced. In the past, it was just in the newsroom, and in the media companies. Now it is still there in these latter spaces, but has moved online too. So the oppressions are double. The experiences of women in South African newsrooms appear to mirror that of the international situation with the threats of rape, murder, and labelling and shaming, it is suggested in this article that these violations are now universals. The cases under scrutiny here suggest the following so far, and further investigation will be required to track this development: in all four cases of the stories of the women journalists' interpellations and bullying, they did not succumb to the subjecting voices of power. All the women who commented in the Glass Ceilings research said they were experiencing sexism and patriarchal blockages in one form or another. They were not defending the dominant institutional order of the newsrooms and they were more outspoken in their comments than before. The detachment from norms of the past was evident in how the women journalists spoke about their trauma.

The exercising of agency must be and can be seen in the resistance of the call out, speak up, speak out, and in the real and on-going performance of the continued investigations, political reporting, and giving interviews to talk about trauma, all of which is now in ample evidence in South Africa's journalism today. The concepts of power, subjection, interpellations (in the sense of labelling, hailing shaming or colloquially bullying of women) and resignifications were deployed to make sense of the misogynistic experiences that women in journalism are facing in South Africa today.

The zeitgeist of the time shows that there is an opportunity now to criticise media companies, and fellow journalists, name, shame and shun sexism, sexist behaviour and online sexualised bullying.

The agency, power, resistance and significations showed here is inspiring but is far from a solution to a dire situation of emotional abuse, threats of sexual violence in South Africa, but also everywhere else in the world, the latter examples include Maria Ressa, Jenna Price, Rana Ayyub, *et al*, briefly were noted in the background section of this article.

Some of the power un-blocks, and ways forward include that awareness must be spread about what online violence is about, pressure must be put on media companies to appoint a point person to deal with cyberbullying, pressure must be put on big media tech companies to take down hate from social media platforms quickly, and funding could be sought from international organisations to assist women journalists in the aftermath of trauma, for counselling for instance.

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