

## **Judges remarks for the 13<sup>th</sup> Taco Kuiper Award for Investigative Journalism**

Delivered by Anton Harber, convener of judges  
Award ceremony, 16 March 2018, at the Wits Club, Johannesburg

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For the last few years, it seemed that we were facing an impervious culture of impunity as many state institutions of accountability faltered and corruption appeared to be undermining our democracy and destroying our economy. But investigative journalists beavered away, piecing together the elements of what grew into a remarkable story that indicated not just corruption but a systematic attempt to control the machinery of state for personal gain, what has become known as state capture. For some time it was a back-and-forth of allegation and counter-allegation, charge and denial, but in the last few months things turned around and all this work came to fruition. We now appear to have started – and I say only started – the process of forcing accountability and transparency on those who were responsible – and today we can celebrate that journalists were central to this apparent turnaround. We have much to celebrate and honour this year, for I know of only a few times in the history of a nation when journalists have played such a clear and crucial role in bringing a country back from the brink. Journalists were not alone in this, working side-by-side with civil society and the judiciary in particular, but never has it been clearer how important a free press, skilled investigative reporters and the support of brave editors is to our democracy, our economy and the people who live in it.

I think we can all raise our glasses and toast investigative journalists and the role they have played in this country in these times. And we must also toast those editors who have given their support and backing to those reporters who have tackled these issues, and without whom little would have happened.

But we are not here to celebrate just the big and high-profile political stories. You will see from our judging that we have a special appreciation for investigation into all sorts of areas, such as the environment, social issues and corporate malfeasance, often happening in corners of the country which get less attention. It is the range and depth of investigative work we are here to honour, and this year we can do so with pride.

Interestingly, we received fewer entries this year than we have in recent times, a total of 26. The judges attributed this to the dominance of the big national story, which might have discouraged others from competing, and to journalists combining their talents rather than competing with other publications on the same story. But what we lacked in quantity was easily made up in quality, as any of the top half-dozen entries might have been a contender in another year.

We were disappointed, however, by the television and radio entries: we had only five television and three radio entries.

The range of topics was refreshing, including stories about Cape Town organized crime, consumer and safety issues, farm labour conditions, youth alcohol abuse, the national lottery, meat sellers who faked sell-by dates, pauper burials and why former mineworkers were not getting their payouts for health claims.

The judges noted that the editing, display and illustration of many entries had improved. In previous years, we had noted that some good entries were damaged by poor editing and storytelling, but this year we noted strong graphics, great readability and much more attention to telling the story in an easy-to-consume way.

It is interesting to see how many entries were collaborative – not just teams of people working together, but teams that cut cross outlets and media. This is an

international pattern, as the scale and complexity of these stories are often too much for one journalist or even one newsroom to handle, and this year we were gratified to see how journalists from different newsrooms worked together, helped, promoted and even protected each other.

But it was not easy. This year also saw a rise in the intimidation and harassment of journalists in this country, including violent attacks on reporters at work, threats to those covering contentious issues and the weaponisation of social media to undermine the work of journalists. Thuggish protestors threatened editor Peter Bruce in his home, and disrupted a public meeting called by the amaBhungane investigative unit. Fake news perpetrators targeted journalists, and for the first time that I know of journalists took out a restraining order against organisations and individuals that were responsible for some of this activity. Veteran muckraker Jacques Pauw was pursued by the authorities who wanted to stop him publishing and get his sources.

But investigative journalists did not just continue to do their work, a number did brilliant work that had profound impact. Some were based on lucky leaks, but many showed enterprise and a good use of technology. What was notable was how much work had gone into the best entries, sometimes over a decade of dogged digging.

There were also a few stories and news outlets during the year which have been accused of promoting or supporting state capture. This drives home the need for vigilance and the utmost professionalism to ensure we build trust and credibility and that we serve the public interest – and not narrow, personal or factional interests.

As usual we have two panels to assess entries for the award. The first, which sifts through all the entries and draws up the shortlist, consisted this year of

experienced journalists Prof Mathatha Tsedu, Prof Franz Kruger and Lizeka Mda, all from Wits Journalism.

They produced a shortlist of 10 contenders and this then went to our second panel, consisting of the well-known writer and former editor Justice Malala, international journalist Sara Carter, Tom Cloete, former judge of the Supreme Court of Appeal, representing the Valley Trust, and myself.

So let's get down to the 10 entries which made our shortlist, all of which are examples of excellence in investigative reporting. In no particular order:

**1. Hennie van Vuuren for his book Apartheid Guns and Money**

This was a formidable piece of research that took five years to uncover those who had profited from apartheid. "A compendious collection of the collaborators," as one of our judges put it. It is not often we recognize work in this competition that relates to the past, and it is a credit to the depth, thoroughness and importance of this work that we have placed it on our shortlist. It was well written and made use of excellent graphics. It is a book of permanent value, well and carefully cross-referenced.

**2. Joy Summers of Carte Blanche for Ben Ngubane and the Zululand Quarries**

This was a solid and comprehensive exposé of Ngubane's dishonest dealings in his personal business life, showing him not only apparently faking share certificates but doing it badly. We all know Ngubane's infamy in relation to Eskom, but if you want to understand the man, you need to watch this piece. Summers did well in making this work for television, which was not an easy task.

**3. Jacques Pauw's book The President's Keepers**

Veteran Pauw came out of retirement to take us along with him on a racey journey to piece together who, as his subtitle put it, was keeping President Zuma in power and out of prison. He painted a powerful and comprehensive picture, making sense of what we had been seeing and hearing, and adding some extraordinary new revelations. This was a one-person job, done at considerable personal risk. The book became a best-seller and had massive impact that we will be feeling for some time.

As an aside, Pauw's trip to Russia which kicks off the book was supported by a Taco Kuiper Grant, and I suspect our patron would have smiled to himself if he heard that he was buying vodka for Pauw's sources in dingy Moscow bars.

#### **4. Jan Cronjé for Indian IT Guru Linked to Fake Websites, published by News24**

Cronjé, a freelancer at the time, spent two months unmasking who lay behind a series of fake news sites, making use of cutting edge technology and working with online security researchers to do ground-breaking work. By tracing these sites to one Indian web design and reputation management company, he showed how valuable these tools have become for journalists. To top his contribution, Cronje has made the tool he developed available for future use by other journalists, ensuring his contribution is also of permanent value. As Cronje put it: "With fake news becoming ever-more prevalent, journalists will be forced to become more like scientists, showing not only the results of their investigations, but also walking the reader through how they arrived at their conclusions."

#### **5. The 8-person TisoBlackstar team for the Gupta Emails.**

This team did very good work in just a few days to publish the essence of the huge tranche of emails that landed on their desks. Their headline, "Here's proof, Mr President" and the graphic and powerful presentation of the scale and depth of state capture was a turning point for the country. They followed through with

a series of other important stories over the following weeks. It was excellent and memorable team work.

## **6. The 19-person collaboration of AmaBhungane/Daily Maverick/News24 on #GuptaLeaks**

This unusual collaboration between three very different outlets brought together amaBhungane's investigative skills and experience, Daily Maverick's editing and online presentation skills and News24's reach and impact – a formidable combination indeed. They pieced together disparate pieces of information buried in a massive trove of emails to definitely prove the case of state capture and find new links and evidence of how systemic this corruption was. It took highly skilled, meticulous and dedicated work to do this, and present it in a user-friendly way. This story, together with other work by this team and others, has had remarkable, long-term and still unfolding impact on the politics of the country.

## **7. Sarah Wild for Gauteng's Unidentified Dead**

This was a memorable piece of enterprise journalism, highlighting what Wild calls "a silent crisis": what happens to the one in 10 of Gauteng's dead who are never identified? Her three-part series involved three years of investigation that combined analysis of autopsy data and watching babies' bodies being loaded into unmarked graves. It was an excellent use of data and scientific information to provide an important human story. This entry has already won a major international prize for science journalism, and we are proud to have made it possible through a TK grant.

## **8. Sikonathi Mantshansa's Anatomy of a Captured State, for the Financial Mail**

Mantshantsha broke a number of stories to chronicle the capture of Eskom, including giving us the hidden Denton Report. Matshantsha has been unrelenting and brave in his pursuit of this important story.

**9. AmaBhungane, this time the three-person team of Susan Comrie, Stefaans Brummer and Sam Sole, for the McKinsey Dossier.**

The second AmaB entry to be shortlisted is a series of exposes on the R1,6-bn that Eskom paid to McKinsey and Trillian, detailing how they planned to rifle the parastatal's tills on the back of a one-sided and flawed contract. The team pieced together this information to rock not just Eskom but international firm McKinsey and this has had major local and international impact.

**10. The Daily Dispatch's Bongani Fuzile for We Found Them**

The Dispatch has developed a knack for unusual entries that involve a great deal of hard work on local public interest stories which have a huge impact on the most marginalised people. This time they went in search of ex-miners who had not collected R40-bn in pension money and who the brokers, Teba, said they could not find. Of course, Fuzile found them and told their stories, and the paper printed all their names to help them access their money. It was original and enterprising work.

There you have it: nine print entries, one online, one television. Five which dealt with some element of the state capture story, but also some unusual and very different stories.

Knocking this down to three for our short short list took us considerable time and debate, and tested some old friendships, as there really is a range of extraordinary work there. What do we value most, we had to ask ourselves: is it handling a good leak from a well-placed source and a timeous release; is it

dogged, persistent, long-term work; is it maximum impact on peoples' lives; or is it the enterprise of creating unexpected stories from very little?

Before I get to the short, short list, the judges have asked me to make three special mentions for work that really stood out and deserves recognition:

- 1. Jan Cronje for his cutting-edge work on who was responsible for the fake news sites.**
- 2. Sarah Wild for her enterprise and originality in identifying and examining the problem of the unidentified dead.**
- 3. The Daily Dispatch for work that would have changed thousands of lives of those often overlooked by our media.**

Those three can collect their special mention certificates before they leave.

After considerable debate, we narrowed it down to three contenders. In no particular order, these are:

- 1. Jacque Pauw's the President's Keepers**
- 2. The AmaBhungane/ Daily Maverick and News24 team on #GuptaLeaks**
- 3. Hennie van Vuuren's Apartheid Guns and Money**

These are three remarkable pieces of work. Unusually, there are two books among them, which surprised us. Interestingly, each of these three were backed by philanthropic funders rather than commercial newsrooms – which says a great deal about the changes taking place in our industry.

I am going to start with the winner and then the runner-up.

This year, the winner of the country biggest journalism prize of R200 000 is

**AmaBhungane/ Daily Maverick and News24 for #GuptaLeaks**

In deciding the runner-up, we were left with two brilliant and important books, one about the present and one about the past. We decided that the R100 000 runner-up prize will be shared between

**Jacques Pauw and Hennie van Vuuren.**