

**Judges remarks for the 15<sup>th</sup> Taco Kuiper Award for Investigative  
Journalism  
15 April 2021**

Delivered by Anton Harber, convener of judges

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We are here to recognise the best of South African investigative journalism in a hostile situation. Operating under a pandemic, which is in every way inimical to the practice of journalism, journalists were at the same time buffeted by the toughest financial conditions, which led to a barrage of retrenchments and closures. In the cycle of renewal that the news media world is going through, we have hit the nadir, and started – I hope and believe - the climb to rebuild a new news media.

What is most extraordinary is that in this time, investigative journalists continued their work and proved again how resilient they are and how important and valuable their work is. As we watched the greedy turn the pandemic into profit, we expected to get a bunch of entries dealing with Covid-19 corruption. What we found was that journalists continue to tackle a wide range of social, political, economic and environmental issues and hold accountable those who wield power. The decimation of our newsrooms has taken its toll, though, and I will talk more about where we saw evidence of this.

This is our 15<sup>th</sup> annual award and it is a great honour and pleasure to recognize, reward and encourage the critical work of investigative journalists. My regret is that we can only name one winner and one runner-up, as there is much excellent and brave work that deserves recognition.

We received 18 entries this year, from 12 different outlets, fewer than last year and down from the post-GuptaLeaks peak – the impact, I expect, of the pandemic. A trend we noted last year has continued: the bulk of entries were published first online. This year we had more – and better - television entries than before, but still – alas – no radio entries. We must continually lament that our most popular medium is not doing much in-depth investigative work. Two of our entries were books, following a pattern in which more investigative work is taking this form. Some entries, of course, were multimedia and we welcome the developments we see in outlets producing their work in many forms.

Subject matters were diverse: there was corruption and failed service delivery, as you might expect, but there were also entries which delved into environmental issues, medical malpractice, internet abuse, prison conditions, farm labour, sexual abuse and small town politics. There was some notably innovative work, using sophisticated digital data and techniques.

So there was much to be positive about, but the judges did note how many entries suffered from poor editing, both in print, online and in television. I am saddened to say that the shrinking of editing and quality controls in our news outlets shows in the product, with some stories being labelled by the judges as missed opportunities: good material that had not been hammered into the powerful stories we might have hoped for. I hope owners and editors are aware that every editor and sub-editor they retrench leads to a weakening of the production process, and it shows in the quality of the output. Of course, these are general remarks and there were exceptions.

We had some entries that showed good reporting and writing, but were not really made for an award that seeks the best exemplar of investigative reporting. To clarify what we are looking for, we have written a fuller set of judging criteria and will be publishing this on our website. Please take a look at it.

The judges had a discussion, as we often have, on the use of re-enactments in television reporting. This is a complex issue, and we decided that we would invite all the television producers to a general discussion on this matter to try and ensure we are on the same page on this issue.

A special thanks to the judges, who really put a lot of time and effort into the careful analysis of each entry, ensuring we were rigorous and exhaustive in our considerations. They really take their task seriously and we thank them for that. The first round of judging was done by Thabo Leshilo, an editor of many years' experience, and myself. We took it down to the shortlist of nine.

These were then studied by the second panel, made up of senior editor and lecturer Lizeka Mda, former Appeal Court Justice Tom Cloete, CBS producer Sara Carter, and again Thabo Leshilo and myself.

Let's get down to business. This year we did a shortlist of 9, then a short shortlist of four, before identifying the top two and separating them into a winner and a runner-up.

Our shortlist, in alphabetic order of the first author:

**1. Bongani Fuzile and Sino Majangaza of the Daily Dispatch for Terminal Health Care**

This was the kind of story we have come to associate with this East London newspaper, which consistently punches above its weight in exposing local service delivery problems. This time it was an examination of the shocking dysfunction of the province's health services. They hit it lucky with their timing: they started their investigation in December 2019 and when they published in the early days of the pandemic, the issues were most pressing and the story was picked up by the international

media. To their credit, they stood up to severe intimidation from hospital managements and forced the national government to intervene.

## **2. Jabulile Mbatha of eNCA for two stories, Liquor License Fraud and ZZ2 Abuse**

This newcomer is in her first year of journalism and has made her mark with her persistence and determination in nailing down stories that hold people to account. In her liquor licence story, she bravely door-stopped the police officer who was selling fake licences and wouldn't let him get away with it. She also tackled poor labour conditions at the ZZ2 fruit farms. Her work was rich and thorough and she is a talent to be watched.

## **3. Jean le Roux of the Digital Forensic Research Laboratory for Disinformation in Disguise.**

Jean's specialty is forensic digging into who lies behind fake websites and fake social media personalities, exposing the anonymous purveyors of disinformation and online racism. By following the digital breadcrumbs, as he puts it, he was able to show that the real person behind one account that spewed racial hatred was an EFF councilor in Limpopo, another was a dismissed SANDF infantryman. It was impressive digital digging and as a result, accounts were suspended and the Human Rights Commission is investigating. Jean was the target of harassment and death threats.

## **4. Jeff Wicks and Kyle Cowan of News24 for Killing Kinnear**

This was another case of the use of cutting edge digital forensic work, this time using software to track down a key figure in the assassination of the section commander of Cape Town's anti-gang unit, Charl Kinnear. These reporters showed how a private investigator had used illegal Location Based Services to track Kinnear and many others and how police had failed to stop this or protect him, and cellphone companies allowed it to

happen. With powerful interactive graphics they showed how often and who else had been pinged and tracked. It took tremendous skill and demonstrated the power of new digital tools, for good and bad. It led to the arrest of the private investigator and some of the service providers turning off their Location-Based Systems that enabled the accused to do what he did.

**5. Micah Reddy of amaBhungane for Ivor Ichikowitz, the Hollow Man.**

Micah's three-part series dug deep into one of the country's best-known and most shady arms dealers who poses as a benign and patriotic industrialist. They used the collapse of one of the companies in his sprawling global empire to show how he operated it like a "Ponzi scheme", hiding much of his activities behind off-shore tax and secrecy havens. This was an important and difficult story, pieced together with great care.

**6. The News24 team for Exodus: Uncovering a cult in KZN. The team consisted of Nokuthula Manyathi, Paul Herman, Tammy Peterson, Sharlene Rood, Deon Wiggett, Azarrah Karrim and Aljoscha Kohlstock**

This was an epic multimedia story exposing accusations of sexual assault, abuse and money-laundering at the well-known KZN mission operation, kwaSizaBantu. The story had major implications, leading to multiple internal, external and ongoing investigations and many retailers withdrawing their bottled water from their shelves.

**7. Sam Sole of amaBhungane for Earth Crimes**

It was refreshing to see one of the old hands of corruption investigations bringing their skills to an environmental story. This four-parter looked into

a giant mineral processing project in Limpopo ran by a man with a dubious reputation and which will have huge environmental implications.

#### **8. Stefaans Brummer of amaBhungane for Locorruption**

Building on the #GuptaLeaks story, a previous winner of this award, Stefaans took a close look into one particular deal, the Transnet purchase of locomotives. He revealed the massive scale of plunder by the Guptas and those around them. This this led to the recovery of as much R2,8-billion in frozen accounts.

#### **9. Tarryn Crossman of Carte Blanche for Midwife Killer**

This was a small story of large consequence: a senior and well-known midwife using harmful drugs to induce labour without the patient's consent, leading to problematic births and even deaths. The story was impressively told, with the midwife's own daughter busting her and a skillful and exposing interview with the midwife by Derick Watts. Tarryn went so far as to set up a Whatsapp group of affected mothers, making one think this story is not over. Extraordinarily, the midwife is still practicing.

So, nine fascinating stories, covering a wide range of topics, from the national to the local, the big to the small, from our most experienced journalists to fresh newcomers, holding all sorts of people to account for all sorts of wrongdoing. I ask you to think about what our world would be like if these subjects were not subjected to this kind of scrutiny. All of the shortlisted entrants deserve big congratulations.

I can tell you that it was hard this year to get down to a shortlist of four, weighing the power of television against the detail of print, the impact of the

national against the power of the local, comparing the work of veterans to those of newcomers.

It came down to this list of four, again in alphabetical order:

- 1. Bongani Fuzile and Sino Majangaza of the Daily Dispatch for Terminal Health Care**
- 2. Jean le Roux of the Digital Forensic Research Laboratory for Disinformation in Disguise.**
- 3. Jeff Wicks and Kyle Cowan of News24 for Killing Kinnear**
- 4. Tarryn Crossman of Carte Blanche for Midwife Killer**

So, one of these gets R200 000 and the other gets R100 000. Which is it?

As I announce the winner, we are going to unmute everyone's mike, so feel free to express your appreciation for the runner up and winner.

Well, after long online-deliberation, the winners of this year's Taco Kuiper Award for Investigative Journalism, who take home R200 000 are:

**News24's Jeff Wicks and Kyle Cowan for Killing Kinnear**

That means, of course, that the runner-up, who takes R100 000 is:

**Tarryn Crossman of Carte Blanche for Midwife Killer**