

TITLE

Investigative journalism and whistleblowers: the ethical handling of sources in the “Inkathagate” and “Vlakplaas” newspaper exposes’.

By Mahendra Raghunath

Student No: 406149

A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of the University of Witwatersrand’s Masters by Coursework and Research Report in Journalism studies.

Johannesburg, February 2017

ABSTRACT

Journalists are often presented with leaked information from whistleblowers. Having the information and writing the story, as well as handling a source that may or may not want to be anonymous, gives rise to ethical dilemmas on the part of the journalist. This was certainly true for journalists reporting on the political violence in South Africa during the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Journalists operate under codes of practice that are set by various media organisations and must ensure that in using whistleblower information to write their stories, “they must avoid breaches of ethics, fairness, factual accuracy and contextual accuracy” (Houston, B. et al., 2002: 538). And most importantly, journalists are ethically bound to protect their sources. This research looks at the interaction between journalists and their sources of information in two major stories that involved the use of whistleblowers. It discusses and compares the issue of “source handling”, in the following two South African stories which used information leaked by whistleblowers:

- a. the 1991 “Inkathagate” story, which was broken by the *Weekly Mail* newspaper;
- b. “Vlakplaas” hit squad story, initially involving the *Weekly Mail* (20 October 1989) and then *Vrye Weekblad* (November 1989).

This study also brings into focus the issue of strengthening journalistic ethics in the South African context. It contends that the “Inkathagate” and “Vlakplaas” stories were dependent on the verification of the information, as well as the ethical handling of the whistleblowers. This study raises questions about the motivations of the whistleblowers, their relationships with the journalists, as well as the critical role of the public’s “right to know”, or “public interest”.

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Masters of Arts by Coursework and Research Report in the Department of Journalism, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

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2. INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, media practitioners are grappling with the problem of strengthening ethics in journalism. Journalistic ethics has increasingly come under threat especially in the digital age. There is a very real concern about raising the bar on ethical journalistic practices, towards finding ways to encourage journalists to adopt better ethical standards and practices. The profession of journalism can certainly benefit from enhancing public respect for it, and giving journalists more reason for placing confidence in each other's integrity. This is exemplified in the following statement from his keynote address at the FAIR Pan African Investigative Journalism summit, where Gerard Guedegbe stated: "Media everywhere should define its own space, one that is empowered and self-sufficient, and able to face the world on its own terms, and there is no reason why African media should be an exception" (2009: 56).

In a post-1994 democratic South Africa, media practitioners have been debating the issue of strengthening journalistic ethics in an evolving media landscape. In 1998, the South African Human Rights Commission (HRC) held an inquiry into alleged racism in the media. This media inquiry "supported the perception that the South African media cannot be trusted and should be monitored" (Retief, 2002: ix). Retief pointed to several reasons that could be "advanced for this state of affairs: a blatant indifference concerning the importance of practising journalism in a responsible way; sheer ignorance; the lack of codes of ethics in certain media circles; even where codes of ethics are in existence, they are not always used to good effect; a lack of literature focussing on journalism in South Africa" (Retief, 2002: ix). The final report of the HRC highlighted the need for "an ongoing debate on the role and responsibility of the media in South African society" (Wasserman, 2002: 137).

In 2002 the South African National Editors Forum did a skills audit of journalism in South Africa, and what was discovered was a frighteningly low standard of general journalism: "One of the biggest problems facing the media industry is the juniorisation of the journalistic skills base. This comes at a time when the South African story is becoming more and more complicated. We have to get our house in order in a very quick way in this sense" (SANEF Final Report 2002: Cover). It is the contention of this study that the problem of poor journalistic standards can be addressed through encouraging journalists to adopt better ethical practices.

As the country moved from a once strictly authoritarian Apartheid-legislated and governed media through to a democratic political dispensation, the next two decades saw the media playing a vital role in nation-building whilst simultaneously serving as a watchdog for any wrongdoing on the part of the State, Government, and its officials. For example, instances of corruption, maladministration, and tender fraud have been particularly highlighted by South African media. The South African media has been incisive in exposing wrongdoing on the part of government officials, and big business that may have been involved.

2.1. Whistleblowers as key sources of information

It is important for us to understand the distinction between a journalist's "source" and a "whistleblower". Journalists depend to a large extent on members of the public (sources) for the supply of information that may be of interest to the general public. In most cases, these sources are quite content to be quoted in the media. But occasionally, citizens come forward with information of a secret or highly sensitive nature. They believe such information - relating for example to corruption,

misgovernment or the activities of organised criminals – should be made known to the general public, to expose wrongdoing or to stimulate public debate on the subject. For fear of reprisals, these sources may then wish to remain anonymous, and are therefore regarded as confidential sources that may not be named in the publication of a story.

A whistleblower, according to the Oxford Dictionary, is “a person who informs on a person or organization engaged in an illicit activity”. Whistleblowers and the act of whistleblowing have been making headlines as well as impacting on public policy for centuries. This is exemplified in the following statement by Calland and Dehn:

“whistleblowing is about basic issues which lie at the heart of human activity. It covers loyalty and the questioning of dubious practices. It concerns communication and silence. It is about practising what one preaches and about leadership. It focuses on responsibility towards others and the accountability of those in charge. It is where public and private interests meet” (2004: 200).

Whistleblowers are useful sources for journalists. Investigative journalist Gavin MacFadyen, speaking about the role of whistleblowers in journalism, clarifies the distinction between the two: “Whistleblowing remains one of the most important sources of major exposes’ and the cultivation and protection of whistleblowers is a central preoccupation for investigative journalists. Different from “sources’ who may have personal or family connections to a story, whistleblowers are almost always employees and inside” (MacFadyen, G., in de Burgh, H. et al: 140).

The aim of this report is to examine the extent to which journalistic ethics played a part in two major South African stories that involved whistleblowers: the 1991 “Inkathagate” story and the 1989 “Vlakplaas” story. Both whistleblowers had been

employees: Brian Morrow was a policeman who discovered that the South African Police was funding a political party, the Inkatha Freedom Party; and Dirk Coetzee was a Security Policeman who blew the whistle on the covert activities of a Specialised Unit from within the South African Security Forces. Both stories had tremendous impact on the course of history in South Africa into the 1990s, as well as on the role and identity of the media in an evolving and contested landscape. I interviewed the key role-players in both stories: the journalists who broke the stories and the whistleblowers who provided the information, in an attempt to ascertain:

1. the manner in which the journalists interacted with their sources;
2. the socio-political context in South Africa at the time that the stories broke;
3. the media landscape at the time, especially the role of the alternative press in South Africa in the late 80s and into the 90s;
4. the difficulty that journalists had in verifying information at that time;
5. the parameters of ethical journalism that were in existence at the time;
6. whether there were any breaches of ethical conduct by the journalists/publications;
7. the extent of protection given to the sources by the journalist;
8. the legislative framework under which the respective journalists were operating at the time;
9. And, whether these expose's changed journalism in South Africa with regards to sources/whistleblowers.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1. Main Question

- What informs the ethical decision-making of journalists when they are presented with confidential information from leaked sources, such as whistleblowers?

This question shall be answered with specific reference to the ethical issues that arose in the handling of confidential sources in the following two major South African stories: “Inkathagate” (1991) and “Vlakplaas” (1989).

3.2. Secondary questions

These secondary questions were posed to ascertain the background and context for the actions taken by the whistleblowers and the journalists involved:

1. How did the journalists conduct themselves in their interaction with their sources, and what do we weigh that conduct against?
2. Are there lessons to be learnt from these case studies, or areas neglected in the present day Press Code?
3. Have these stories changed journalism in South Africa with regards to sources/ whistleblowers?
4. What made these journalists more ethical in their profession or practices, *vis-a-vis* the mainstream media of the day?
5. What is it that differentiates the notion of “public interest” as opposed to “what the public might be interested in”?

4. RATIONALE

This study examines the ethical issues faced by the journalists concerned in the two case studies: the “Inkathagate” and “Vlakplaas” stories. This study outlines the media landscape, in terms of ownership and legislation, looks at the politics of the time, as well as the alternative press in South Africa in the late 1980s and into the 1990s. It locates the “Vlakplaas” and “Inkathagate” stories within the critical role of information at the time, the difficulty of verifying information, as well as the role of spies and whistleblowers. It provides a critical analysis of normative theory in this context, as well as the changing role of the mainstream media at the time, as articulated by Tomaselli (2003): “While the changing social context resulted in a contestation of the normative ideals set for the post-apartheid media, the media itself also underwent change in a number of areas, including changes in the political economy of the media, the emergence of new information and communication technologies and the reconceptualisation of audiences” (cited in Wasserman, 2005: 49).

Journalistic codes of ethics have evolved over time, and are dependent on the environment or context in which journalists operate. It is the contextual uniqueness of the two South African case studies - “Inkathagate” and “Vlakplaas” stories – that does help to shed light on some of the ethical issues faced by journalists in the 1980s.

There are many ethical issues that arise in relation to whistleblowing and journalism. What does a journalist do when confronted with inside information about a particular issue from a leaked source? And how does the journalist handle the source, as well as the information? In his book on journalistic ethics, *Black white and Grey: Ethics in*

South African Journalism, Franz Kruger states, “The relationship with sources is one of three important relationships journalists have, the others being with their audiences and their employers. What do we owe them in return, these people who trust us with their stories?” Kruger suggests three ways: “firstly, we should deal with them *honestly*.... secondly; we should show them *consideration*... (and avoid doing harm).... finally, we should maintain a professional *distance*” (Kruger, 2004: 174-175). These three elements of source-handling, as described by Kruger, will be discussed in more detail in the theoretical framework section.

It is in the ethical handling of whistleblowers and their information that journalists have to follow journalistic codes of practice. These codes of practice have been devised by media organisations in order to ensure that journalists abide by ethical behaviour in order to produce their stories. The South African Press code has evolved over time, and shall be discussed in more detail in the Theoretical Framework chapter.

5: CONTEXT AND HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

5.1. Introduction

Across the globe, there have been several famous stories that have stemmed from information leaked by whistleblowers. As Anton Harber stated in his column in *Business Day* (8 August 2003), “The scandals of Watergate, Muldergate and Inkathagate would never have burst into the open , bringing down presidents and ministers, if it wasn’t for a lonely, hidden Deep Throat” (Harber, 2003). The “Deep Throat” Harber refers to is the generic whistleblower responsible for some of the biggest stories of the past century. In the United States of America, “Deep Throat”

was also the name given to the whistleblower in the Watergate scandal, the anonymous insider “who was revealed after his death as W. Mark Felt, a senior FBI official. The 1970-71 Watergate scandal forced the resignation of US President Richard Nixon and the jailing of Nixon’s key White House staff.” The *Washington Post* reporters Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward were able to “keep the identity of Felt secret for 30 years. Their story became the basis of a motion picture, *All the Presidents Men*.” (MacFadyen, G., in de Burgh, H. et al, 2008: 140).

5.2. WikiLeaks

Let us look at a source-story that gripped the attention of the world: what became known as the WikiLeaks saga. Using classified and secret information, news leaks, and documents from anonymous sources, Wikileaks exposed many stories which became front page news. ‘WikiLeaks was founded in 2007 by Julian Assange, a brilliant and mercurial Australian former computer hacker. Assange believed that information, even classified or dangerous information, should be available to everyone. It was in that spirit that he had already given the *Guardian*, *New York Times*, and *Spiegel* official US frontline records from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In an agreement forged originally by Assange and the *Guardian*, the three had simultaneously published the so-called War Logs in July and October 2010’ (Lundgen, 2011: 1).

Assange believed in the free movement of information. Whilst he registered the domain name WikiLeaks.org in 1999, Assange only began to use it actively in 2006, when he transformed the website into a safe and secure location for whistleblowers. Assange wanted specifically those whistleblowers that had secret documents for

sharing in a public or online platform like WikiLeaks. 'Assange was the one to start a relationship with the *Guardian*. As early as 2007, recalls Editor Rusbridger, he received regular emails from WikiLeaks "editor-in--chief" Assange, sometimes with a good story to tell' (Lundgen, 2011: 2). That ongoing relationship led to the publishing agreement between Assange and the *Guardian*, and later involved a host of media houses across the globe. The Guardian set up a special unit of investigative journalists to process and redact the huge amounts of information that Assange had made available to them.

One of the significant events during this period was the arrest of US Army Private Bradley Manning on May 26 2010. Manning was charged with illegally downloading hundreds of thousands of classified US documents, on suspicion that he may have passed on the documents to WikiLeaks. This led to Assange's periodic disappearances from the public eye and from contact with his media partners. Assange also reneged on the original agreement he had established with the *Guardian*. Behind their backs, he reached out to other media organisations to maximise the impact of the leaked documents. Assange was also arrested and charged with rape in Stockholm by two Swedish women, which eventually became 'sexual harassment' charges. These charges were to haunt him for the next few years, and eventually led to Assange seeking refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, for more than two years in order to evade extradition to Sweden. He has reportedly said that the main reason he sought sanctuary in the Ecuadorian embassy was the very real fear that he might be shipped off to face persecution the USA, especially after Manning's arrest.

The next major big batch of WikiLeaks revelations was the publishing of the US State Department diplomatic cables in November 2010 in redacted format.

Redaction is a process of editing the cables so no one would suffer death or retaliation. But in September 2011, it became public knowledge that a huge archive of unredacted U.S. State Department cables had been available on the internet for months, and that a decryption key was available to those who knew how to obtain it. Naturally, the content of the cables was highly sensitive, and contained unguarded comments, praises and critiques and revelations about the diplomatic mission's host country. "There were also legal worries. The cables were classified and revealed, for example, the damaging news that Saudi Arabia had encouraged the US to bomb Iran; that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal could be threatened; that the US State Department had asked its diplomats to spy on United Nations personnel; or that the government of Yemen had offered to cover for US raids on Muslim radicals in Yemen. Britain had an Official Secrets Act that was frequently invoked to prevent publication of sensitive materials. The US had an Espionage Act. Either government might yet intervene" (Lundgen, 2011: 2).

Wikileaks has become one of the biggest source-stories in history. It has opened up a battery of ethical issues for all journalists and media houses in their interaction with sources, anonymous or otherwise. The *Guardian* and its journalists were concerned: were they in control of the process or were they being manipulated by Assange to publish the classified information, with dishonourable intentions? The ethical principle of truth-telling, with its need for accuracy and fairness may have also been compromised. There was always the possibility that more people could be harmed or killed as a result of the revelations, which is a distinct ethical concern. Although there was a consideration that publishing was in the public interest, there was also the

possibility of misleading the public; and that in seeking to 'hold the powerful accountable' there lay the possibility of causing harm to national security and damaging international diplomacy.

5.3. A South African Perspective

South Africa too has a rich vein of investigative journalism, exposing corruption, nefarious business practices, and excesses of power. One such example is the 1978 "Muldergate" or "Infogate" expose' in the *Rand Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Express* by Mervyn Rees, Chris Day and Kitt Katzin. The scandal toppled the country's Prime Minister BJ Vorster, as well as the National Party's candidate who was pipped to succeed him, Dr. Connie Mulder. In 1973 Vorster had agreed to Mulder's plan to move about R64-million from the defence budget for a series of propaganda projects. The plans included bribes of international news agencies and the purchase of the *Washington Star* newspaper. Vorster had also known about a secret slush fund to set up *The Citizen*, an English language newspaper that was favourable to the National Party government. As Hadland states, "The story of how a group of investigative reporters unravelled the complex plot involving secret military slush funds, cabinet ministers, and an extraordinary and costly propagandistic drive to improve apartheid South Africa's global image ranks right up there in South African journalism's hall of fame" (2005: 11).

5.3.1. South Africa, 1980s and 1990s

The 1980's in South Africa was characterised by severe state repression and violent resistance from liberation movements. "By 1980 the apartheid state was

experiencing a severe crisis of legitimacy. Externally the wars with its neighbouring states were draining its resources. Internally student protests and industrial action, along with the ANC's armed struggle and the rise of the black consciousness movement during the 1970s, posed a significant threat to state domination" (Dugard, 2003: 23). A declining gold price, coupled with a protracted depression from the mid-1970s, led to massive unemployment and an escalation of an economic and political crisis. Under State President PW Botha, the government had become militarised, and created a "Total Strategy" to counter what Botha called the "Total Onslaught" that he felt was afflicting the country. 'Security legislation, namely the *Internal Security Act* 74 of 1982, the *Public Safety Act* 3 of 1953 and the *Criminal Procedure Act* 51 of 1977, was used to detain, interrogate and intimidate the state's opponents. Between 1980 and 1986 approximately 43950 people were detained. In June 1984 the *Protection of Information Act* 84 of 1982 was invoked to prevent the press from publicising certain detentions, and figures about detentions released by the police were always hopelessly conservative" (Dugard, 2003: 25).

It was a period marked with formal repression by the apartheid state: 'During this period the South African government made full use of its barrage of security legislation in order to effect a clampdown on civil disobedience. As a pre-cursor, a partial state of emergency was declared in July 1985 and the Congress of South African Students (Cosas) was banned in August of the same year. To consolidate the initiative, a full state of emergency was imposed in June 1986, to be renewed each year until June 1990' (Dugard, 2003: 39).

The full State of Emergency was imposed countrywide: "On 12 June 1986 – four days before the 10th Anniversary of the Soweto Uprising – the government declared a country-wide State of Emergency. The crackdown differed from the 1985

Emergency in that it covered the entire national space and was more rigorous: political funerals were restricted, curfews were imposed, certain indoor gatherings were banned and news crews with television cameras were banned from filming in areas where there was political unrest. This in essence prevented both national and international news coverage of police brutality and the government's faltering attempts to contain the wave of social unrest. An estimated 26,000 people were detained between June 1986 and June 1987."

(<http://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/state-emergency-south-africa-1960-and-1980s>)

The state security apparatus was also guilty of fomenting violence in the black townships, across the country. The police, army and covert security units were colluding with parties and organisations (such as Inkatha) that were in direct opposition to the broad liberation movement (led by the UDF and ANC). Vigilante groups and hit-squads were supplied with weapons to kill supporters and officials of liberation groups aligned to the ANC.

What was becoming increasingly clear is that South Africa in the late 1980s was embroiled in a low intensity war:

"Low-intensity war, usually called low-intensity conflict (LIC), has a long history, born of colonial oppression and wars of conquest and liberation. In South Africa, LIC was practised by the apartheid regime in the 1980s and early 1990s as a tool in its struggle against mass resistance and liberation movements. Although it differs from context to context, LIC is characterised by the use of covert action and non-conventional methods of warfare that serve to spread fear, insecurity and internal divisions among target populations. For

its practitioners, LIC has the benefit of being cost effective and less internationally visible than conventional war' (Dugard 2003: 1).

The 1989 Vlakplaas story brought the international spotlight to bear on South Africa's covert war to remove all voices of opposition. By July 1991, at the time of the "Inkathagate" story, change was in the air in South Africa. Nelson Mandela had been released in February 1990. There was a negotiation process under way, between the ANC and National Party government. But still the De Klerk government was attempting to influence the course of events, by strengthening the reach of Inkatha, a Zulu ethnic party with roots in the province of KwaZulu Natal, and ambitions of reaching a wider national voting base:

'In July 1991 the *Mail & Guardian* provided the first conclusive evidence of the De Klerk government's support for the IFP. The expose revealed over R250 000 of funding from the SAP for IFP rallies, in order to show everyone that Buthelezi has a strong base. In the aftermath of the Inkathagate debacle, the Minister of Law and Order, Adriaan Vlok, was relieved of his post, and the Minister of Defence, Magnus Malan, was moved to the political backwaters of the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs. Subsequently the *Mail & Guardian* and other newspapers exposed a wider government web of support for the IFP, which involved gun-running and military training.' (Dugard 2003: 50).

5.3.2. Reporting in South Africa: 1980s

The 1980's saw a marked rise in the "alternative press", or alternative publications that were clearly set up as the voices of the oppressed majority in South Africa. As a

result of alternative reporting gaining traction during this period, the media in South Africa was operating in an extremely harsh and dangerous environment. “This simply meant severe restrictions on the media, successive states of emergency and giving the security establishment a free hand to disrupt and destroy opponents without worrying too much about the law. Death squads, dirty tricks, torture, bannings, detention without trial and disinformation campaigns became the order of the day” (Du Preez & Pauw, in Pilger, 2005: 195).

The imposition of the States of Emergency from 1985 onwards placed even more severe restrictions on news reporting. The areas where political unrest was at its highest were off limits to the press. There was no freedom of the press and what the public had the 'right to know' was completely formulated and controlled by those in power. The press, particularly the alternative press, which included papers such as *The Weekly Mail* and *Vrye Weekblad*, were suppressed and pressurised, as were the more mainstream editors who dared to criticise the government. These alternative newspapers struggled to survive. Operating under repeated harassment, *Vrye Weekblad* lasted only a few years. There were media restrictions and bannings during this period: “This led to the banning of mostly alternative newspapers for periods ranging from one to nine months. Titles that were banned included *South*, *New Nation*, *Weekly Mail*, *Grassroots* and *New Era*” (Oosthuizen, 2002: 86).

In order to expose the extent of state repression in the country, some South African “alternative” newspapers used information derived from leaked sources or whistleblowers from within the organs of the Apartheid state. This was due to the mainstream media (including the public broadcaster the SABC) largely ignoring the severe crisis of repression that had gripped the country. This statement is supported by the finding of the 1997 Truth and Reconciliation Commission inquiry, which

stated: “With the notable exception of certain individuals, the mainstream newspapers and the SABC failed to report adequately on gross human rights violations. In so doing, they helped sustain and prolong the existence of apartheid’ (TRC Report, 1998: 189). This statement is supported by the fact that when the *Vrye Weekblad* broke the story about “Vlakplaas” in 1989, the mainstream media in South Africa largely ignored the story. However, Dirk Coetzee’s revelations about hit squads and Vlakplaas received widespread coverage in newspapers across the globe, as well as on other alternative newspapers in South Africa.

A watershed announcement by then State President F.W. de Klerk, on 2 February 1990, signalled the change that was to come:

- Political organisations such as the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) were unbanned;
- That political prisoners will be released;
- And those media emergency regulations were abolished.

De Klerk’s announcement “had far-reaching implications for the media:

- formerly prohibited organisations were free to publish their ideas, even in their own media;
- formerly prohibited persons could be quoted freely in the media; and
- Coverage could again be given to unrest in the country.” (Oosthuizen, 2002: 45)

A significant effect of this announcement was that the mainstream media began to cover issues and events that they had traditionally ignored, and which had previously been the sole preserve of the alternative media in South Africa. There was a blurring of the parameters, which ultimately led to the demise of the alternative press. There was also the issue of international funding drying up for the alternative press, which further hastened their demise.

1.3.1. Case Study One: “Vlakplaas”

Another major South African story was the 1989 Vlakplaas expose’ which had serious implications for the country’s history. This story provides an important case study in source-handling by journalists, as well as the importance of carrying out a thorough investigation on the facts presented. Corroboration of the source’s story was vital. The whistleblower was Captain Dirk Coetzee, who had been the commander in charge of the South African Police’s secret elite unit, called Section C1. The unit was stationed at Vlakplaas, a farm outside of Pretoria. Section C1’s methods included assassination, kidnapping, poisoning and execution of anti-apartheid activists. Coetzee had ordered the deaths of many ANC activists, including Griffiths Mxenge, a human rights lawyer, who was stabbed 40 times at Umlazi Stadium in Durban, and Sizwe Kondile, a young law graduate from the Eastern Cape, who was interrogated and beaten then handed over to Coetzee who had him shot and his body burned.

But Coetzee’s career at Vlakplaas was short-lived. A series of embarrassing events, including a botched kidnapping in Swaziland which he was involved in, as well as Coetzee’s abrasive personality and disrespect for his superiors, ultimately led to his

discharge from the police force in 1984. An embittered Coetzee had earlier decided to spill the beans about Vlakplaas. He met investigative journalists Martin Welz and Jacques Pauw in 1985. They initially thought Coetzee's story about his (and Vlakplaas') nefarious activities were fantasies, tales spun by a rogue policeman, which could not be easily verified or corroborated. But his story did strike a chord with the journalists:

“‘I was in the heart of the whore,’ Coetzee said. His words later became the title of my first book. When I asked him what he meant, he said it was his own phrase to describe how deeply entrenched he had been in the inner workings of the security police” (Pauw, 2006: 19).

After several interactions with the former Vlakplaas commander, Pauw and Welz gradually recognised that there was some credibility in Coetzee's revelations. But it was a single-source story, and therefore needed to be verified by another source, or through investigations. The difficulty was that the journalists had no corroborating evidence. Four years after Pauw had first met Coetzee, the corroborating evidence emerged through a prisoner on death row.

In the *Weekly Mail* of 20 October 1989, Almond Nofemela a policeman from the notorious Vlakplaas unit, revealed details about the political assassinations he was involved in. A week before he was due to hang for murder, Nofemela confessed to the murders of nine more people, who were killed on the orders of his police captain, Dirk Coetzee. Nofemela's life was saved on the grounds that he knew of crimes that required further investigation. His lawyer gave the story to the *Weekly Mail*. After investigations by journalist Ivor Powell, *Weekly Mail* broke the story. The Nofemela story provided the corroboration that the *Vrye Weekblad* needed to expose

Coetzee's life story. "Coetzee had mentioned Almond Nofemela as one of his death squad operatives, and their accounts converged in nearly all respects" (Pauw, 1991: 162). *Vrye Weekblad* had arranged for Coetzee to flee the country and meet the ANC in exile. On the 5 November 1989, Coetzee flew out with Pauw, first to Mauritius, where he revealed the details of Vlakplaas in its entirety. Pauw then took Coetzee to London, where they met with the ANC in exile, and sought protection from the banned and liberation organisation.

On the 17th November 1989, Pauw's story about Vlakplaas broke on the front page of *Vrye Weekblad*. "That edition was one of the most beautiful things I'd ever cast my eyes upon. The front page showed a photograph of Dirk Coetzee and the startling headline: '*Bloedspoor van die SAP*' (Bloody trail of the SAP). The sub-headline enticed readers to 'Meet Captain Dirk Johannes Coetzee, commander of an SA Police death squad. He tells exclusively the full and gruesome story of political assassinations, poisoned cocktails, foreign bomb blasts and letter bombs.'" (Pauw, 2006: 35).

The timing of this story was crucial in South Africa's history. It exposed the existence of the South African government's hit squads that were systematically eliminating opponents of the apartheid regime. Up until then, many people had guessed that the hit squads had existed, but they had no proof of this. The story exposed the sheer brutality that the apartheid regime was capable of, and showed that the regime was intending to hold onto power at all costs: "We also exposed Eugene de Kock as the current head of Vlakplaas. We said he'd been there for six years, was implicated in many more 'eliminations' than Coetzee, and might be killing so-called enemies of the apartheid state at that very moment. We gave details of eleven people he had

already 'taken out', though it later emerged that he had actually killed more than ten times as many" (Pauw, 2006: 35).

Coetzee lived in exile for three years. He returned to South Africa in 1993, and in May 1997 was tried and found guilty for his role in the murder of Griffiths Mxenge. But he had applied to the Truth Commission for amnesty and in August 1997 he was granted amnesty for Mxenge's murder. At the TRC hearing in Durban, Coetzee was asked what he felt about what he had done to the Mxenge family. He said he felt "humiliation, embarrassment and the hopelessness of a pathetic, 'I am sorry for what I have done' ... What else can I offer them? A pathetic nothing, so in all honesty I don't expect the Mxenge family to forgive me, because I don't know how I ever in my life would be able to forgive a man like Dirk Coetzee if he'd done to me what I've done to them" (Edelstein, 2002).

1.3.2. Case Study two: "Inkathagate"

The 1991 Inkathagate expose' was made possible by the whistleblower Brian Morrow. Morrow was a disillusioned security policeman working in Durban, having been assigned to spy on white people who did not support apartheid. When he discovered top secret files that proved that the police force was funding the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), Morrow smuggled the documents out of the office and built up a serious cache of incriminating documents. Morrow fled to England with the documents, got in touch with journalist David Beresford from the *Guardian* Newspaper, and revealed the documents to him. Beresford then called Anton Harber, editor of the Weekly mail, and told him about the whistleblower. The UK journalist faxed 10 pages of Morrow's documents to Harber, who investigated the

documents with Eddie Koch. *The Guardian* and the *Weekly Mail* simultaneously broke the corruption scandal dubbed “Inkathagate”, on 19 July 1991.

A significant consequence of the Inkathagate expose’ was that it ultimately led to the downfall of Cabinet Minister Adriaan Vlok in the apartheid government. It stemmed from a live television interview on the SABC current affairs programme ‘Agenda”, in which both Vlok and Harber appeared:

“It is a small thing forgotten by all except me and my immediate family, I suspect, but I had a part to play in the downfall of cabinet minister Adriaan Vlok (now facing murder charges). Those around in the early 1990s might remember that I confronted him with evidence of Inkathagate on live television one Sunday night. He was demoted a few days later” (Harber, 2007).

Arising from the Morrow revelations, *Weekly Mail* managed to uncover more incriminating evidence. The apartheid government had also funded the IFP’s United Workers’ Union of South Africa (UWUSA) to the tune of R1.5-million. And six months later, the newspaper revealed the existence of a ‘Third Force’: these were IFP hit squads run by the South African Defence Force (SADF) aimed at undermining the ANC and promoting the IFP (*Weekly Mail*, 24 January 1992).

6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

6.2. Normative theory

The main theoretical framework that underpins this study is that of the *normative theories of media*, which deal with “ideas of how media *ought* to or are *expected* to operate” (McQuail, 1987: 109). Normative theory informs the role and purpose of the

journalist in society. 'The overall purpose of normative theory is to develop a yardstick against which media performance, accountability and quality could be measured and, if needed, controlled. A second purpose of normative theory is to assess the freedom of media systems under specific political regimes. Fundamental in normative theory (as conceptualised in the West) is the right to freedom of expression as prerequisite for democracy and thus the role of the media in democracy. Central questions in normative theory include the following:

- How and what do the media publish and circulate as matters of public concern?
- How do the media cover different perspectives in a society?
- What is perceived to be in the public's interest, and why?
- How is public interest defined?
- What are the social responsibilities of the media?
- How should the media be organised legally and financially in order to realise its potential as a carrier of public values?' (Fourie, 2011: 27).

It is the contention of this study that both the "Vlakplaas" and "Inkathagate" case studies are seminal moments in South African media history, and this study looks at how both stories fulfil the normative function of the media.

6.1. Libertarian Press Theory

Libertarian Press theory or the Free Press Theory is one of the Normative Theories of mass communication, and is the main theoretical framework that underpins this study. It was largely founded on the emphasis on democracy and

personal freedom that emerged from the enlightenment era (Fourie 2001:271). The libertarian theory emphasizes the uncensored access of knowledge to the public, where the media is given absolute freedom to publish anything at any time and acts as a watchdog. It promotes the fact that people are able to discern between truth and lies, between good and evil, and the press are vital in this search. Fourie states: "the press is seen as a source of information ... informing people about government ... and enabling them to monitor their government and form their own ideas about policy. The press should be free from government control and government influence" (2001:271). Oosthuizen (2002: 40-41) states that among other things this media theory upholds the role of the media as watchdog with respect to the government's conduct. It also supports the idea that "editorial attacks on governments or political parties are acceptable, since the news media is expected to be the public's watchdog" (Oosthuizen, 2002: 40).

The press, in this theory, is seen as the fourth estate, which is there to keep a watchful eye on the government and guard the freedom of the people. It is where the press have been "encouraged to act as a fourth estate along with the legislative, executive and judicial authorities in the governing process" (Fourie 2001:271).

The libertarian theory is just the opposite of the Authoritarian theory of mass media where information is controlled by the state or the authorities. In libertarian theory, media is supposed to be privately owned.

Some of the strengths of the Libertarian Theory are: that media can give true information without any control; there is no censorship; all individuals can express their opinions and thoughts in the media openly; the theory encourages healthy competition among the thoughts and ideas; every work will be transparent to all; it

checks the government and the state authorities and also prevents corruption; it functions with democracy.

Some of the weaknesses of the Libertarian Theory are that the media might not always act responsibly; that journalists might not always have good intentions and ethics; people cannot always make rational judgments; there could be conflicting notions of the concept of freedom for different types of people; that the media can misuse its power and harm other people's privacy and dignity; that media might defame, cause sedition, libel or slander, be immodest, publish obscenity and cause trouble; and that the media might challenge the security of the state.

The two case studies are located within the tradition of the "alternative Press" in South Africa, whose reporting was in keeping with the Libertarian concept of "uncensored access of knowledge to the public".

6.4. Journalistic ethics

This study looks at the issue of Journalistic ethics, to examine the conduct of the journalists concerned in terms of source-handling. According to the Oxford Dictionary Online, ethics are "moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or the conducting of an activity". The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines ethics as: "rules of behaviour based on ideas about what is morally good and bad; an area of study that deals with ideas about what is good and bad behaviour; a branch of philosophy dealing with what is morally right or wrong." The concept of ethics has its roots in Greek philosophy, which divided the world of knowledge into three parts: aesthetics, epistemology and ethics. "Ethics encompassed the study of what is good

for individuals and society. In this regard, the philosophers focussed on individual virtues such as courage and justice, and societal virtues such as freedom” (Oosthuizen 2002: 10-11). Ethics has to do with the society’s notions of right and wrong: “In every society, there are basic standards or expectations of what constitutes *acceptable behaviour or proper conduct*” (Oosthuizen, 2002: 10). Ethics permeates every field of human endeavour, and each industry that has evolved over time in the world, has a codified set of ethics that defines what is acceptable in that industry or not. For example, there are codes of business ethics, medical ethics and journalistic ethics, to name a few. “The earliest reference to a code of ethics for journalists appeared in the 1840s, and the first known example of press criticism that made explicit reference to journalistic ethics was published in 1889. The first formal code of ethics did not appear until 1911” (Iggers, 1999: 58).

Hence, journalistic codes of ethics have also evolved over time, and provide useful tools for this study. Despite some lapses, “the history of journalism ethics reflects the march of moral progress: a gradually increasing awareness by journalists of their professional responsibilities and a parallel development of the institutional framework for assuring a high standard of journalistic conduct. This progress can be seen in the growing professionalism of the workforce (increasing autonomy) and in the development of formal standards of journalistic conduct (increasing accountability)” (Iggers, 1999: 57).

Journalism ethics and standards comprise principles of ethics and of good practice as applicable to the specific challenges faced by professional journalists. This subset of media ethics is widely known to journalists as their professional “code of ethics” or the “canons of journalism”. Most of these codes share common elements, including the principles of *truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness, and public*

accountability. I have used the concept of journalistic ethics to examine the interaction between the respective journalists and their sources of information, in the two stories. These principles have been tested in investigating the journalists' conduct in handling their sources, in both case studies.

Retief (2002: 44-45), put together the following brief codes of ethics from all the ethical codes he studied, called the "Ten Commandments for Ethical Journalism" (quoted in Claassen 2005; 138):

'Preamble: The media shall be free because the public has a right to be informed.

You shall therefore:

1. Be *accurate*, both in text and context (and correct mistakes promptly).
2. Be *truthful*, only using deceptive methods in matters of public importance if there is no other way of uncovering the facts.
3. Be *fair*, presenting all relevant facts in a balanced way.
4. Be *duly impartial*, in reporting the news and when commenting on it.
5. *Protect confidential sources*, unless it is of overriding public interest to do otherwise.
6. Be *free from obligation* from any interest group.
7. *Respect the privacy of individuals*, unless it is overridden by legitimate public interest.
8. *Not intrude into private grief and distress*, unless such intrusion is overridden by a legitimate public interest.
9. Refrain from any kind of *stereotyping*.
10. Be *socially responsible* in referring to matters of indecency, obscenity, violence, brutality, blasphemy and sex.'

In terms of source-handling by journalists, Kruger states that ‘firstly we should deal with them *honestly*. We need to be open with them about who we are, and our intentions... secondly, we should show them *consideration*... a fundamental principle of journalism ethics is to avoid doing harm. The source and the subject of our report (and it’s as well to remember that they are often not the same) are mostly directly at risk of harm. There can be damage to their reputation, to their relationships, even to their lives. Consideration does not mean that the source’s concerns override everything else. But they can be taken seriously. We should think about what’s at stake for the source, and the kinds of risks they take. Finally, we should maintain a professional *distance*. There’s nothing wrong with “cultivating sources” - building a relationship of trust in order to encourage people talking to us. But we should not allow a closeness to develop that undermines our professional judgement. We need to maintain a healthy scepticism, no matter how much we like the person we are dealing with’ (Kruger, 2004: 174-5). This study examines these three ethical elements, viz. *honesty*, *consideration* and *professional distance*, in the two case studies.

In addition, arising from Black, Steele and Barney’s handbook, “*Doing ethics in journalism*” (1995: 17), Kruger also summarises the following “guiding principles for the journalist:

a. *Seek truth and report it as fully as possible*

- Inform yourself continuously so you can inform, engage, and educate the public in clear and compelling ways on significant issues.
- Be honest, fair, and courageous in gathering, reporting, and interpreting accurate information.

- Give voice to the voiceless.
- Hold the powerful accountable.

b. Act independently

- Guard vigorously the essential stewardship role that a free press plays in an open society.
- Seek out and disseminate competing perspectives without being unduly influenced by those who would use their power or position counter to the public interest.
- Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise your integrity and damage your credibility.
- Recognise that good ethical decisions require individual responsibility and collaborative efforts.

c. Minimise harm

- Be compassionate for those affected by your actions.
- Treat source, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect, not merely as means to your journalistic ends.
- Recognise that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort, but balance those negatives by choosing alternatives that maximise your goal of truth-telling.” (Kruger, 2007: 14)

This study has also investigated the use of the ethical norms of ‘seeking truth’, ‘acting independently’ and ‘minimising of harm’ in the journalists’ conduct in the two case studies. This study looks at the behaviour of journalists and the extent to which they applied ethics in reporting on these two stories.

6.5. The South African Press code

The South African Press code has also been through an historically evolutionary process. Currently, the South African Press code has this to say regarding the handling of “confidential and anonymous sources:

- The press has an obligation to protect confidential sources of information - the protection of sources is a basic principle in a democratic and free society.
- The press shall avoid the use of anonymous sources unless there is no other way to handle a story. Care should be taken to corroborate the information.
- The press shall not publish information that constitutes a breach of confidence unless a legitimate public interest dictates otherwise.” (Press Council of South Africa, *Review*, 2011: 87).

These fundamental ethical issues in source-handling as outlined in the Press Code, such as the extent of protection afforded to each source in the case studies, the issue of corroboration of the facts in the , and role played by ‘a legitimate public interest’ will be interrogated in the findings section of this report.

Various South African media groups have their own set of ethical codes. What is common among them is the notion of the freedom of the press, and independence from government. The ethical code of the South African National Editors’ Forum (SANEF) states that one of its objectives is to “defend media freedom through all available institutions” (Retief. 2002: 240). The ethical code of the (now defunct) South African Union of Journalists (SAUJ) states that a journalist “shall at all times defend the principle of freedom of the press and other media in relation to the collection of information and the expression of comment and criticism” (Retief. 2002: 240). The Freedom of Expression institute (FXI) strives to “fight for and defend the

freedom of expression”... and to “oppose any limitations imposed on the freedoms aforementioned, be they at the instance of the state or civil society” ((Retief. 2002: 241).

By 2014, there had been vigorous debates around the function and role of the South African Press Code, both during and after apartheid. The history of press oppression and resistance to it under apartheid has been widely written about (Oosthuizen, 2001 a: 176; Rodny-Gumede, 2011: 155). Rodny-Gumede in particular looks at ethics and political bias in the current South African news media: ‘There has been increased pressure on journalists to conform to the ideas of the government and powerful elites around what role the media should play. This often involves abandoning the idea of journalism as a public service, and instead creates pressure for the media to report according to the national interest (as defined by government and government policies)’(Rodny-Gumede, 2011: 159). Given this notion of serving the country’s “national interest”, and the issue of conformity in reporting, it is vital that journalists are fully cognisant of the ethics involved in their profession. Wasserman (2002: 137) underscores this point, by looking at the issue of ethical decision-making as a basic journalistic skill.

It must be noted that when the Vlakplaas story broke in 1989, the country was still under a repressive State of Emergency, which brought in draconian Emergency regulations and restrictions, severely hampering journalists and their reporting. But in 1991, at the time when the Inkathagate scandal was revealed, the State of Emergency had been lifted, which meant that there were fewer restrictions on reporting.

It is also important to note that sometimes journalists are also guilty of breaching their own prescribed ethical codes, for whatever reasons, and for these breaches there are repercussions. This investigation also searched for any breaches of ethical conduct on the part of the respective journalists in the two case studies.

6.6. Whistleblowing legislation

Depending on the country in which they reside, whistleblowers also enjoy some legal protection. For example, in the United Kingdom, “the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1988 (PIDA) affords a modest degree of formal protection, but excludes the security services or the military from its remit” (MacFadyen, G., in de Burgh, H. et al: 142). This would mean that a whistleblower in the armed forces or the country’s security establishment would have no legal protection.

South Africa’s whistle-blowing legislation was formalised in 2001. The legislation known as the Protected Disclosures Act no 26 of 2000 was designed to deter and detect wrongdoing in the workplace, acting as an early-warning mechanism to prevent impropriety and corruption within the public sector. Essentially the law harnesses a common interest between responsible individuals who raise concerns they may have in the workplace with organisations and managers, who are accountable and prepared to respond to the *bona fide* concerns of their employees. Employees now have access to toll-free whistle-blowing telephone lines, in which they can anonymously report on any impropriety in their workplace. But this legislation came about more than a decade *after* the two case studies I have looked at.

It must be borne in mind that both case studies were broken during varying degrees of repressive apartheid legislation (States of Emergency that were imposed after

1985), and that both sources (Coetzee and Morrow) did not have any legal protection (whistleblower laws, or otherwise) available to them at the time. Although the worst was over in terms of repressive legislation in South Africa by 1990, both Morrow and Coetzee still had reason to fear for their lives. Both of them could have been killed in South Africa, by state security agents. They were both regarded as traitors by the Apartheid regime and its shadowy agents. There was at least one attempt on Coetzee's life, through a parcel bomb which claimed the life of lawyer Bheki Mlangeni.

7. METHODOLOGY

7.1. Literature Review

A reading and analysis of the actual articles (primary sources) published on the Vlakplaas and Inkathagate cases in the relevant newspapers, *The Weekly Mail* and *Vrye Weekblad* was done, for purposes of accuracy and context. There was also intensive reading of several other relevant articles (press clippings) published during the late 1980s and early 1990s by these two respective newspapers. This was done to ascertain the scale of reporting by these two alternative newspapers *The Weekly Mail* and *Vrye Weekblad* at the time, as well as a survey of the topics covered by them. It was also relevant to study other press clippings of the time, articles from other mainstream newspapers, such as *The Sunday Times*, to determine the scope of reporting on the two cases, or lack thereof.

There is a wealth of secondary source material including articles, opinion pieces, and analytical pieces. Among them is John Pilger's book, *Tell me no lies: Investigative*

Journalism that changed the World (2005), which contains an insightful series of articles on investigative journalism from around the globe. For the purposes of this study, the most relevant chapter in Pilger's book was the one containing the reflections by Max du Preez and Jacques Pauw "Exposing Apartheid's Death Squads" (191-213), which details the birth and demise of the *Vrye Weekblad*, highlighting some of their investigative pieces on death squads, Vlakplaas, Section C1, interactions with Dirk Coetzee and other Apartheid killers, as well as some historical and political context to the case studies. Jacques Pauw's books: *In the Heart of the Whore: the story of Apartheid's Death Squads* (1991), *Into the Heart of Darkness: The Story of Apartheid's Killers*, (1997); and *Dances with Devils: A Journalist's Search for Truth*, (2007), provided vital first-hand accounts of his encounters with an wide array of killers and shadowy figures in South Africa and beyond. They also provided valuable information on the South African political and media landscape of the time.

Books, articles and collections on the birth and evolution of the *Weekly Mail* newspaper, such as Shaun De Waal's (Ed.) *25 years of the Mail and Guardian* (2010), which shows how the newspaper reflected and reported upon a changing South African landscape from the 1980s onwards, provided useful historical context for this study. The *Weekly Mail* was instrumental in breaking the Inkathagate story, and also broke the Nofemela story which provided the verification which the *Vrye Weekblad* needed, in order to publish the Vlakplaas/Coetzee story.

Lawrence Piper's (Ed) book, *To Serve and Protect: The Brian Morrow Story* (2010), provides a detailed account of Brian Morrow's journey of discovery and flight, his trials and tribulations, to reveal the Inkathagate story. Several other articles and

newspaper interviews on Brian Morrow also provided useful insights to formulate questions for the interview with Morrow.

For the theoretical background, books and articles on Normative Media Theory, and Journalistic Ethics were invaluable. Franz Kruger's *Black, White and Grey: Ethics in South African Journalism*, delivered the core ethical arguments encapsulated in this study. Hadland's (Ed) *Changing the Fourth Estate: Essays on South African Journalism* delivered a wide ranging series of South African case studies in investigative journalism, and ethics.

The changing media landscape in South Africa during the 1980s, 1990s and into a post 1994 democratic country precipitated much academic debate and dialogue on the role of the media, media theory, normative theories of media, the concept of public interest, media ethics, sources and their handling (Wasserman, 2002; De Beer and Wasserman, 2005; Fourie 2005; Oosthuizen, 2002).

7.2. Interviewees

In-depth interviews (one-on-one) were conducted with four relevant participants, in the context of these stories, in order to provide an understanding of what they did and why they did it. I chose the four interviewees because of their direct involvement in both case studies. Anton Harber was the *Weekly Mail* editor when "Inkathagate" broke; whistleblower Brian Morrow revealed the documents that broke "Inkathagate". And whistleblower Dirk Coetzee revealed the details of "Vlakplaas" to (then *Vrye Weekblad* journalist) Jacques Pauw.

7.2.1. Jacques Pauw

Jacques Pauw was a founder member of the anti-apartheid Afrikaans newspaper *Vrye Weekblad*, where he exposed the existence of the Vlakplaas unit and other police death squads in the 1980s. He has won awards in South Africa, the United States, Africa and Europe, including the CNN African Journalist of the Year Award, the Award for Outstanding International Investigative Reporting, the Young African Leadership Award and the Nat Nakasa award for bravery and integrity in journalism. He has produced documentaries on wars and conflicts in Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sierra Leone, Algeria, Sudan and Liberia. Pauw the author of four books: three of non-fiction and one of fiction. He is a journalist at Media24's investigative unit and lives in Cape Town.

7.2.2. Dirk Coetzee

Captain Dirk Coetzee had been the founder and Commander in charge of the South African Police's secret elite unit, Section C1. Coetzee set up C1 in August 1980, and it was stationed at Vlakplaas, a farm outside Pretoria. He was involved in several political assassinations. But a year later, due to a few embarrassing incidents, Coetzee fell from grace, and was transferred from the Security branch to a desk job in the police force. Intent on revenge against his former masters, Coetzee told several newspapers, and even Members of Parliament, about the existence of the Vlakplaas death squad. But nobody did anything about it. He also spoke to Jacques Pauw, who was a young reporter at an Afrikaans Sunday newspaper, which

supported the apartheid government. Pauw cultivated Coetzee as a source, and held onto this information for about four years. When Pauw was at the *Vrye Weekblad* with Max du Preez, they spoke to the ANC and arranged for a safe passage out of the country for Coetzee. The Nofemela story broke, and then *Vrye Weekblad* did the Vlakplaas story.

7.2.3. Anton Harber

Anton Harber was a co-founder and editor of *The Weekly Mail*, and was prosecuted many times under the States of Emergency in the 1980s. Harber was editor of the *Weekly Mail* when death row prisoner and former security policeman Butana Almond Nofemela confessed to being a member of a police death squad that was based in a farm called Vlakplaas. Nofemela's lawyer alerted the *Weekly Mail* about this story, and Harber ran the story on the front page on 20 October 1989. Nofemela's account gave Jacques Pauw and *Vrye Weekblad* the corroboration it needed to publish the Dirk Coetzee "Vlakplaas" story. Harber was also instrumental in breaking the "Inkathagate" story in 1991.

7.2.4. Brian Morrow

Brian Morrow was a Security Branch police officer in Durban. His role was to spy on white people who didn't support apartheid. Morrow discovered some files at the police station that proved the South African police force was funding the Zulu political party Inkatha (IFP), to fuel black-on black violence. In 1991, Morrow fled to the United Kingdom as a political exile, with his wife. He took with him 60 pages of stolen

documents, and then got in touch with journalist David Beresford of the UK's *The Guardian* newspaper. Beresford faxed 10 pages of Morrow's stolen documents to Anton Harber who investigated the documents with journalist Eddie Koch. The two newspapers broke the corruption scandal dubbed "Inkathagate", on 19th July 1991, revealing that the South African police was funding the IFP through a bank account (*Weekly Mail*, 19 July 1991).

Brian Morrow was not granted amnesty for his role in this expose', because he had breached the Officials Secrets Act. He says he cannot return to South Africa because he fears for his life, as he believes that remnants from the old security Branch may take his life. Morrow lives with his family in Brisbane, Australia. I had great difficulty establishing contact with Morrow, in order to interview him for this research. I eventually tracked him down using social network sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook, on the internet. I sent him a batch of questions via email, and then did a telephonic interview with him using Skype.

8. FINDINGS & CONCLUSION

8.1. Introduction

Both the "Vlakplaas" and "Inkathagate" cases presented the journalists with ethical and practical challenges. The central issue in this study is: what are the ethical issues faced by journalists, when presented with confidential information from leaked sources, such as whistleblowers? More specifically, how did the journalists conduct themselves in their interaction with the sources? Did they do so according to ethical guidelines and to what extent were their actions framed by the normative Libertarian

theory of the media? How critical was the public's "right to know" or "public interest" in these two stories? Of importance too, is what motivated these whistleblowers to leak the information?

From an ethical perspective, we would have to ask whether the journalists' actions were in line with the general principles of journalistic ethics: *truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness, and public accountability*. In terms of source-handling, we shall test the journalists' conduct against the principles of *honesty, consideration, and professional distance* as stipulated by Kruger (2004:174-5). We shall test whether there were any ethical lapses in the interaction.

These questions shall be looked at in greater detail in this section. The interviews have shed some light on the conduct of the journalists with their sources.

8.2. Interviews

Interviews were conducted with each of the four main protagonists in the two stories: the two journalists (Harber and Pauw) as well as their two respective sources (Brian Morrow, and Dirk Coetzee).

8.2.1. Dirk Coetzee

Coetzee was a diabetic with advanced renal failure, and was quite an embittered soul when we met in June 2012, at a coffee shop in Pretoria. The coffee shop was busy and a noisy place in which to conduct an audio-recorded interview, so I suggested to Coetzee that we go to my car and find a quiet spot in the parking area.

I began by asking Coetzee about the journalists whom he had interacted with, and how he had come to meet Jacques Pauw:-

Coetzee: “Martin Welz was the first journalist I met, a senior journalist. Jacques Pauw was his kind of understudy. Martin is a knowledgeable, well respected journalist now with *Noseweek*. Martin approached me on some corruption story regarding the National Party government. A story about Fanie Botha, the then Minister of Home Affairs... And then I mentioned to Martin about Vlakplaas and all. My career with the police force was over by then. I had a long fight with the corrupt security police authorities... corrupt as you can be... General Johan Coetzee and Basie Smit... all of them...in the security setup.... January 1984 was my discharge date. Medical grounds...Sugar diabetes for 33 years as I sit here... Insulin dependent.”

Coetzee then spoke about the Afrikaner “Broederbond” or Brotherhood, a powerful secret society that permeated all levels of the South African apartheid government and its security establishment, and ruled with an iron fist:

Coetzee: “At that time, I could see that in order to make progress in the police, it wasn’t about the quality of your work but about being part of the ‘Brotherhood’. That is how you progress in the force beyond a certain rank. I moved from Constable to Lieutenant in 5 years...and which was exceptional at the time... without a degree, etc.”

Having been dismissed from duty in 1984, Coetzee said that he began to approach a few journalists in order to expose the death squads and the existence of the

Vlakplaas killing machine. Coetzee revealed that he had quite a struggle to convince reporters to take his revelations about Vlakplaas seriously.

Coetzee: “When I started to talk to journalists about Vlakplaas and the goings on there, everyone thought I was a ‘bullshitter’. The only way I could expose the truth, was through the newspapers... and what a struggle it was... I went to the journalists to expose these stories (about Vlakplaas).... they did not come to me.”

Mahendra (MR): ***“What was your impression of Jacques Pauw?”***

Coetzee: “Jacques is a ‘cloak and dagger’ (type), he likes to for example, say if someone stabbed a guy, then it’s not a stab wound, but ‘the knife was turned in him’, you know always add his own style into it... he likes blood and guts... and so on...”

I turned Coetzee’s attention to the interaction between himself and Pauw.

MR: ***“Where did the meetings between you and Pauw take place? What venues did you use?”***

Coetzee: “We met... later on ...Max du Preez and Jacques Pauw, and Andre’ Zaaiman who worked for IDASA...we met among other places, on Van Zyl Slabbert’s smallholding near Kyalami racetrack. Van Zyl Slabbert was overseas at the time, studying. Martin (Welz) was not a drinker, at all, so we never met at a pub. He was respectable and respected. Not like Jacques, who just wanted a story. Jacques loved his liquor, just like me. So we met at pubs, etc. They all think that if they make you drunk, you’ll

spill the beans more easily. Jacques was fond of buying a lunch and so on.”

MR: *“So how did you end up leaving the country in 1989, 5th November, Guy Fawkes Day...?”*

Coetzee: “Jacques wanted to do the interview in the country. I said to him, ‘You must be joking, my mate. You just want a story and then after that, where do I end up? As a dead man? No ways, let’s do it out of the country.’”

Due to the concern for the safety of the source, Pauw and Du Preez then had to seek alternative plans, and find a way to get Coetzee out of the country.

Coetzee: “Jacques had contact with Andre Zaaiman, a war resister, who worked for Idasa. Zaaiman then flew the documents (short notes) in the Dutch diplomatic bag to Botswana, up to Zambia, where he picked it up (he left the country with no documents on him), and had meetings with Jacob Zuma there. Zuma didn’t want to accept at that time that they will listen to my story, and said then that they will think about it.”

MR: *“Were you discouraged by this? That maybe the ANC will reject your revelations and still take revenge against you?”*

Coetzee: “I said ‘No ways...You’re going to help me... that will be the condition. I cannot come back, you know how the security set up is ... it will leak...whether it’s from the ANC side or the South African side...and I will be a target’. I said ‘just get me to settle somewhere, where I can start my life, in a country that won’t extradite me to SA’, and everyone said the only

place is England. So I said 'Let's do it... to nail the security police you have to do something extraordinary.'"

I turned to the question of intent: what was Coetzee hoping to get out of the revelations? It may have been possible that Coetzee chose to be a whistleblower in order to seek revenge against the South African security police. Also, far from having good intentions in such exposing wrongdoings, Coetzee may have been more interested in self-preservation, because the security establishment had been keeping him under surveillance.

MR: ***"Was that your intention? Were you wishing to 'nail the security police' or secure your future by going to the ANC, or both?"***

Coetzee: "They (the South African security police) never expected me to leave the country, go to the ANC, sort of apologise for what I did and get my back up against the wall, where I'm not chased around the world by the ANC and the SA security police and the Ulster loyalists' connections which they did in the end. Billy Wright was the Ulsterman who had to 'take me out' which means he was contracted to kill me. Billy Wright had close contacts with Eugene de Kock in SA. Because I knew how they operated, I stayed 3 months in one place and then moved...you can always detect foreign dangers, and I reacted, and moved... because I had my two kids with me..."

An important ethical consideration is how much it cost Pauw and the *Vrye Weekblad* to get Coetzee out of South Africa.

MR: ***"How did Jacques fly you out, and who paid for it?"***

Coetzee: “The ANC paid for the whole operation, I think R50 000 at that time...

Zuma and them paid. Jacques paid fuck all...he just rose to fame...sitting on his fuckin’ backside...doing fuck all every six seconds... just wants the story... spill the beans... and add some gruesome action...”

It was important to ask Coetzee about his state of mind at the time; about what type of reception he might have imagined he would receive at the hands of the ANC in exile.

MR: *“How did you feel, sitting on that plane...going to meet the ANC in exile...what was your level of anxiety?”*

Coetzee: “I was extremely wrecked... because I didn’t know what I was going to meet on the other side... My toenails removed? Hanging from my feet? Torture? What? I don’t know...but you’ve got to be unorthodox... completely unorthodox...because these arseholes in the police never thought I’d do THAT...!

So I flew out on the 5th, and then we had to stop in Durban to pick up more passengers, Yessus! My blood was pumping! On our way to Mauritius!! And when we took off from Durban, Jacques and I opened the champagne..! We landed in Mauritius, stayed for 5 or 6 days, where I spent talking to Jacques on tape, giving him all the stories, doing the interview, etc.”

I then asked Coetzee about that “moment of no return”, when he arrived in London, and met with the ANC in exile.

Coetzee: “Then I flew via Bahrain to London, Andre Zaaiman fetched me from Heathrow, and then he took me to a hotel in London. Zuma then arrived that morning at 10. I was knackered; my blood sugar was bugged... Jacob Zuma and JJ Njele, a guy that spoke fluent Afrikaans...and Zuma was just listening... assessing and so on... they also had their spies in Vlakplaas, etc. And you don’t play games when you have your back against the wall....you never underestimate the opposition’s knowledge... they brought over Billy Masethla... Zuma’s a listener...a gentleman.

Zuma came back a second day, and said to me Andre was waiting for me in the foyer... I went down, and Andre said “Pack up let’s go... they believe your story...you’re talking the truth”. They moved me to another hotel, and then flew me out on the 13th of November to Harare in Zimbabwe, where I met more ANC chaps, and then taken to Bulawayo... when the news broke on 16th November 89, I was in Bulawayo...taken up by Joyce Rankin...I was there until 2 Feb...Zuma came over and I made a meal, etc. We flew onto Harare.”

MR: ***“Was there anything that you told Jacques (or anyone else) after that, which could have saved someone’s life? What about the lawyer... Bheki Mlangeni, who received a parcel...?”***

Coetzee: “Oh yes, Bheki Mlangeni, in JHB... Eugene de Kock tried to ‘take me out’ (meaning kill me) and then sent me a carefully wrapped parcel, in thick brown paper (the type that you wrap Russian grenades in)....everything typed on it...stickers and so on... when Ntu, an ANC guy said to me ‘there’s a parcel for you at the post office’ ...I said ‘No parcel comes to me

from the post office, for fuck's sake!!' So I did not take the parcel... it had to go Return to Sender, which was Bheki Mlangeni.... I told the ANC guys, Daniel Oliphant and Stanley Brown...to warn Bheki...

They did not listen to me...

I told Jacques to warn Bheki, when he flew up for the Louis van Neethling trial when I testified in front of a commission in London, but he did not warn Bheki... I said 'I told Stanley Brown, I told Daniel Oliphant, and they did not listen...Bheki is going to die... it must be some bomb...! It was mailed on 10 May 1990 from Joubert Park Post office.' No-one believed me... the parcel went back... and 3 months after that...Bheki opened that parcel. It was a walkman, and he put the headphones on, and walked to his room, switched it on, and it blew up. Bheki's death is now seen as a death in the struggle... but that's ridiculous... it could have been avoided...!"

MR: ***"So how did you come back to South Africa?"***

Coetzee: "Around June 1993, I tried to convince the ANC that the dust has settled, and it was time to go back to SA... they said 'NO! It's too dangerous!' So I bought a one-way ticket from Alitalia...and flew back on 4 July 1993."

MR: ***"Did you meet Jacques Pauw and Max du Preez?"***

Coetzee: "Yes, I met Max at the *Vrye Weekblad*'s closing party, but it was clear that he had finished with me, and was not interested."

MR: ***"How would you describe your relationship with Jacques Pauw?"***

Coetzee: “There’s no relationship. He’s just a guy hunting a story, for his own interest. He just feathers his own nest... furthers his own interest... an orthodox planner for his own interest.”

8.2.2. Jacques Pauw

The interview with Jacques Pauw was done telephonically. I began by asking him about what triggered the publishing of the Coetzee story.

Pauw: “Well....we started *Vrye Weekblad* in October 1988, and the first few months were absolute madness, because we had no money and it was really a battle and Max was charged time and time again under security legislation... then on the 1st of May 1989, David Webster was assassinated...and after that...I went to Max and said to him we have to go and speak to Coetzee again and see what we could do. Then I went back to Coetzee and started speaking to him on the 1st of May 1989.....Then Anton Lubowski, SWAPO leader was assassinated on 12th September 1989. So we started plotting a way to publish the Coetzee story.”

Given the fact that there was State of Emergency imposed at the time on the country, and which impacted on news reporting, I asked Pauw about some of the hurdles he encountered in getting the story published.

Pauw: “The problem was ‘how do we get Coetzee to agree to us publishing the story?’... That was number one. Number two... ‘How do we safeguard him?’ Number three, ‘how do we publish the story within the State of Emergency?’ We thought at the time that both Webster and Lubowski

were killed by Vlakplaas, but it was only later, that we discovered that it was carried out by the CCB... these two killings triggered the need to publish Coetzee's story..."

MR: ***"What were you going through at the time..? What was your level of anxiety? Weren't you scared?"***

JP: "It was scary... I don't think I slept at all at times...there were times when minibuses with what we supposed were Askaris, parked in front of our houses...and Max and I would phone each other through the night...just to check on each other's safety.... and also to keep our sanity...."

MR: ***"Did you feel morally and ethically justified to tell the Dirk Coetzee story, and publish it in a newspaper"***

JP: "According to the rules of the State of Emergency, we couldn't even publish the story... because at the time we couldn't publish any story that jeopardised state security, without presenting it to the state for approval...remember how they censored the *Weekly Mail* at the time...the newspaper had black strips all over the story...with scratched out articles...it was completely abnormal society...and you know we were young and we were cowboys, and it was an alternative newspaper and ethically and morally we had absolutely no qualms about the story... There were a lot of ethical and moral dilemmas that one wouldn't even think about in a normal society... but we were living under a state of emergency..."

An important question was whether Pauw believed in Coetzee's revelations.

MR: ***“Do you honestly believe that Coetzee told you the truth? Did you ever have any doubts?”***

JP: “If you look back today at what Coetzee had said to me in 1989...every single thing he said was the truth...there wasn’t a single thing that he lied about.”

Coetzee had been discharged in 1984, and had begun talking to journalists (including Pauw) about Vlakplaas not long thereafter. So it was pertinent then to ask Pauw, why it took him a few years to actually publish the story.

MR: ***“Coetzee had been talking to you for a number of years, making his revelations about hit squads... yet you delayed publishing the story... why was that? Was it because it was essentially a single source story...?”***

JP: “Single source story? ...No, we would have published Coetzee’s allegations, and we went and did lots of work on it... but it was the revelations of Almond Nofemela on death row on 20 Oct 1989, through the Lawyers for Human Rights, which gave the story confirmation. Coetzee and I had left the country a few days later. And that was a confirmation, (because) Nofemela was another source. Coetzee had told us about four operatives who had killed Griffiths Mxenge... when I came back from Mauritius, I looked up a guy called David Spyker Chikalanga, and he confirmed it as well...so by the time we published in November 1989, we had Coetzee, Chikalanga and Nofemela.”

MR: ***“What would you say was the broader implications for the Coetzee story, what were the consequences for the country?”***

JP: “Well the wider effect of the story...was that it forced the National Party government to rein in their security forces, and to get down to the negotiating table.”

Looking at the interaction between Pauw and Coetzee, the question then arose as to whether there was any relationship between the journalist and his source.

MR: ***“Do you count Coetzee as a friend?”***

JP: “No...No... we were sort of like drawn together because of circumstances... I’ve lived with him in Zambia, and England and Zimbabwe, where I spent lots of time with him... we spent lots of time together. The last time I saw him was probably 1996...I haven’t seen him since. You know...I was also friendly with people like Ferdi Barnard for instance... he confessed to the murder of David Webster to me, and I testified against him... you know, I was even friendly towards Eugene de Kock in the end.. I used to visit him in Pretoria Central prison and I used to take him Nando’s Chicken and whatever... you know, that’s journalism, isn’t it? Sometimes we get into bed with very strange people...”

An interesting issue is that of hindsight, which often surfaces in a journalist’s life. Years after having published a story that had such repercussions for the country’s history, a journalist such as Pauw may have been dogged by questions of having “done things differently”.

MR: ***“What would you have done differently today?”***

JP: “I was very young and very inexperienced. If I had known that the state was going to launch such a discreditation campaign against Coetzee, I would have armed him with a tape recorder and I would have sent him back to go and speak to his former comrades and get them on tape... you know...”

8.2.3. Brian Morrow

The interview with Brian Morrow, the anonymous whistleblower in the “Inkathagate” expose’, was conducted via Skype. Morrow was, and still is, located in Brisbane, Australia.

I began by asking Morrow about his upbringing.

MR: *“Could you describe what your life was like, growing up in Durban, in Apartheid South Africa, as part of the privileged ruling class?”*

Morrow: “Growing up was awesome. I had great parents in a great area. Won’t bore you with too much detail but we pretty much lived the upper middle class dream. Parents worked extremely hard building up their business. I had two ‘servants’ during this time and remain friends with both of them: Idah and Andrena. I also played a lot of soccer with the ‘garden boys’ in the local park. Probably set the tone for my non-racial view of things. I also went overseas every year with my dad from the age of 11/12 and spent a month in the UK. Exposure to ‘normal’ life, TV, news etc, probably also set the wheels in motion politically.”

MR: *“What made you join the Police force? You have said in other articles, that it was to avoid conscription into the army. But the army stint would have been two years only, whereas the police force was a (lifetime) career. What do you say?”*

BM: “I know this aspect always comes across as strange but I was never going to go to the army. Just wasn’t an option. I felt that I could serve in the Police as a ‘force for good’ and see how it turned out but I could never serve in the army as an agent of apartheid. Things obviously never turned out as planned.”

I then posed the question about the state of the nation at the time when he joined the police force.

MR: *“You joined the police force in 1986. There were then a series of States of Emergency declared, and state repression was at its height. How would you describe what was going on in the country at that time? What was your take on the state of the nation?”*

BM: “Tough question - I can say for sure that no-one in the police felt that we would have a black president by 1994! It was pretty hectic but up until 1990 there was no hint within the force that the government was going to ‘lose’. This changed in 1990 when the white members of the branch were informed that things couldn’t carry on as they were and we needed to get used to the idea that changes would be made. Emphasis was given to the global isolation we were experiencing and the impact of economic sanctions. Not a happy bunch I can tell you. Prior to that though the line was that the ‘enemy’ could be defeated and a total onslaught mentality

was in place. Coming into it all in 1987 was an eye opener for me!

Torture, corruption etc. Not the happiest times in my life.”

MR: *“The Durban Security Branch rounded up several political activists in that region, and systematically tortured them, to gather information and to break their spirits. You speak of hearing frightening screams at the station. Were you involved in any of this? What were your observations then, about this?”*

BM: “I can honestly say I was never involved in torture of anyone. Simply couldn’t do it. Again a very tough time and if I had stayed with the same section I would certainly have left the country/ done something about it. As it was I was only there for a while and ‘knew’ what was going on. I went through a number of scenarios to ‘expose’ the practice but came up with very little. Much of the torture involved tactics that didn’t leave physical evidence such as the ‘tubing’ and the ‘helicopter’. Police procedure said I should report it to my superior but he was the one overseeing the whole unit (Major Louwrens - whom the ANC later said was a ‘good guy’... yeah right!) In addition Brigadier Steyn (in charge of the SB while I was there from 87 -91) used to have regular contact with Louwrens about the ‘torture’ and techniques used. I used to hear the screams at the base they used in the Point Road area but I made sure that I kept my visits few and far between. I was transferred to white organisations on my return from the UK (honeymoon) and they/we didn’t practice ‘physical’ torture for the 4 years I was there.”

MR: ***“And then you stumbled upon these documents in the office... how did you know which to choose? What was going through your mind when you picked up the first one?”***

BM: “I had been looking for a while and found a few interesting titbits but I just ‘stumbled’ upon the Inkatha connection whilst doing some ‘searching’. I knew straight away it was gold and made it my prime focus. Everyone knew of the allegations of course but the government used to have fun ‘baiting’ people saying, ‘Show us evidence. We are impartial.’ Well now I could prove they were not and the collusion went further than anyone could imagine. Now I had to make sure I could gather as much dirt as possible before exposing their scheme. I still believe that it is overlooked by the media/ history that De Klerk had no intention of giving up power. His plan was to cobble together a coalition against the ANC in an attempt to control a one man one vote scenario.”

MR: ***“So you smuggled them out of the police station...stuffed into your boots... you could have been caught... how scared were you, knowing what they (the authorities) would do to you?”***

BM: “It’s not as open and shut as one would think. You are pretty stupid when you are young and I probably didn’t think everything through as clearly as I should have. Also the machismo of the time and the ‘role’ I was playing probably also played a part. I knew the consequences would be fatal but tried to focus on the positive. Not sure I was the best spy ever but they didn’t catch me so I suppose I wasn’t too bad. There were a couple of close calls. I was aware, but fairly careful.”

MR: ***“Where did you hide the documents? Did you take them to your home? Did you have a secret hideout?”***

BM: “At home down the bottom of the garden in a container. I would smuggle them out in my boots as early as possible in the day and then head off home. We had few rules and procedures to follow so it was a fairly simple process.”

MR: ***“And when did you go through (peruse) the stolen documents to determine how incriminating they could be?”***

BM: “At the office. I only took documents I knew were good. There was not a Wikileaks aspect to this. Once in a while I would take something connected to another illegal activity but my focus was Inkatha and UWUSA (The Trade Union arm). There were whole cabinets of documents that I presume were all shredded when the government changed but I only focused on what I considered to be the biggest issue.”

MR: ***“Your colleagues then became suspicious of you. The station commanders discovered that some documents were missing, and searches were carried out at the building exits. Mysterious notes, purporting to be from ANC supporters, were posted on your car windscreen. What was your level of anxiety then?”***

BM: “It was very high. I was living in Umbilo, Durban. I found a threatening letter in my letterbox. I was pretty scared, especially for my wife’s safety. I stayed at my parents-in law’s house. I handed the letter to my boss at HQ, to see if there was any reaction I could get from him.”

I then asked Morrow about what prompted him to leave the country in 1990, and leak the documents overseas:

MR: ***“So in 1990, you reached a turning point... what triggered this move?”***

BM: “The fact that I was always looking over my shoulder. The note was a trigger point. And De Klerk was in power, saying the police was impartial....I said ‘You’re not impartial, I’m going to bugger you up.’”

It was also important to find out why Morrow did not find a home in the anti-apartheid structures in South Africa or even overseas.

MR: ***“Why did you not think of joining the underground resistance movement yourself? Even when you went to the UK? The ANC was there too.”***

BM: “I felt that since I had been in the police force, I knew how penetrated they (the ANC) were. I knew that I might be compromised. After all I had been stealing documents from 1988, about 4 years. I was afraid for my own safety.”

MR: ***“So you went to London with the documents in your suitcase, and phoned the journalist David Beresford, of the Guardian. Can you describe what happened then...? What was your interaction with Beresford like?”***

BM: “Well I contacted a few people. *The Times* (London) weren’t interested. It took ages before I met Beresford. Twice. In Soho. Red T shirt. A bit

‘untrusting’. I used a pseudonym ‘Andy’. Beresford then spoke to Anton Harber of the *Weekly Mail* in South Africa.”

MR: *“You gave Beresford the documents, and made him agree to the condition that he never asked you for your identity. Why did he trust you enough to believe in you, an anonymous source and whistleblower?”*

BM: “We met face to face. And he didn’t believe me straight away. The documents were in Afrikaans. There was a leap of faith. ‘Top Secret’ was stamped on the cover of documents.”

A key question arose, as to whether Morrow received payment from the newspapers for the documents.

MR: *“Did he offer you any money? Did he seek to protect you in any way?”*

BM: “I never asked for any money, and he never offered.”

And the question arose as to how the documents and the story could be verified, either through another source, or through further investigations by the journalists.

MR: *“The documents, some marked “Top Secret”, proved that the South African Inkatha political party (and a Trade Union linked to it) was being funded by the police through secret bank accounts. Who made*

the link (by uncovering the name of the bank accounts), was it Beresford or his South African colleagues? How was this done?"

BM: "I gave them a cheque that I had found. And they followed up. I presume it was Anton and his colleagues in South Africa who did more digging."

The UK's *Guardian* and the *Weekly Mail* in South Africa broke the Inkathagate story simultaneously, on 19 July 1991. I asked Morrow about how he felt at that moment:

MR: ***"How did you feel as you read the story? What was going through your mind at that time?"***

BM: "My wife never quite believed me, in the sense of how massive it was. All the banner headlines, everywhere we went in London. I felt pretty good. I didn't have much time to relish or enjoy the moment."

But due to his Inkathagate revelations, Morrow faced prosecution in South Africa, for having breached the Official Secrets Act. This prevented him from returning to South Africa permanently.

MR: ***"Trapped in exile, you tried several times to get indemnity from prosecution in South Africa, because of the breach of the Official Secrets Act. What was this process like?"***

BM: "It was very frustrating... I tried very hard... if you look at the facts... after 1994... I tried a lot to get indemnity from prosecution... but the ANC just gave me a cold shoulder."

Eventually, in 1995, Morrow went back to David Beresford to reveal his identity to him and the world.

Mr: ***“Were you trying to bring pressure on the South Africans to give you indemnity? And what was the outcome?”***

BM: “Beresford did try to apply some sort of pressure himself... but the process was extremely clogged, and it led us nowhere.”

Interestingly, Morrow also worked with the British security services MI5 and MI6.

MR: ***“What was that experience like?”***

BM: “It was very interesting...they were very professional... my role was to provide information as to the true state of affairs in South Africa...The British government was shocked about Inkathagate...I helped them find people to recruit to MI6. They set up fake rugby tours to meet people...”

There is also the issue of what being a whistleblower has cost Brian Morrow. There was a price he had to pay for being a whistleblower.

MR: ***“Being a whistleblower cost you a lot, didn’t it? Can you tell us what that price was? There was a lot that you lost...in personal terms...”***

BM: “Yes I lost a lot... my kids grew up without seeing their grandparents... or any of my family... and there were also tremendous other sacrifices. I’m kept sane by people like Anton Harber, who said that I was the only guy who did something out of my conscience.”

MR: ***“What are the South African authorities saying about your status now?”***

BM: “I haven’t been in touch with them recently.”

MR: *“Do you have any regrets? Is there any bitterness that you may harbour towards South African authorities today? Do you still yearn to return?”*

BM: “No regrets. Bitterness...? Maybe a little...yes... because there weren’t many whites like me... with a conscience...everyone at the Durban Security Branch was the opposite... And I wouldn’t want to return... I totally fear for my life...anyone could kill us”

Morrow did have a parting shot for those who do not wish to acknowledge the part that he played in highlighting the gaps in the political negotiating process post 1990, in South Africa.

BM: “I just feel that my contribution has been underestimated by the South African authorities...It may have been the actions of just one person (me)....but I did what I felt I needed to do. I mean there were some policemen who killed up to 17 people in custody... and they got away lightly at the TRC.”

8.2.4. Anton Harber

The interview with Professor Anton Harber was conducted as a one-on-one, in his office. I began by asking him about the historical context that led to the publishing of the Inkathagate expose'.

MR: ***“Prof Harber, as editor of the Weekly Mail, in the 1980s and 1990s, you were instrumental in several newspaper expose’s that were an embarrassment to the Apartheid South African government. How would you describe what was going on in the country at that time of the Inkathagate expose’ in 1991? What was your take on the state of the nation?”***

AH: “It was early in the political negotiations process. The ANC was back in the country, and it was a critical time for people to jostle for position...between the ANC and the IFP. And the story had a fundamental effect on the way in which the IFP was seen and positioned.”

Harber also pointed to the shrinking of the gap between the Mainstream newspapers and the so-called Alternative Press post-1990.

AH: “The gap between the alternative and the mainstream newspapers had closed down in a way that one didn’t notice until it happened. So there were areas before 1990 that only the Alternative press covered, and after 1990, the Mainstream press began to move into those areas too. What had differentiated the Alternative media was eroded, and at the same time a lot of the funding for the Alternative media was falling away. This meant

that papers like *Weekly Mail* had a growing crisis of identity, such as how to manage financially.”

MR: *“Tell us about the link between the Guardian and the Weekly Mail at that time...”*

AH: “It was an informal link at the time, mainly through David Beresford.”

MR: *“The Inkathagate scandal came to you through the efforts of whistleblower Brian Morrow and journalist David Beresford. How did that happen?”*

AH: “From our point of view, David called us from London... and said “We’ve got this source and these documents. Have a look at them and we could do something together on this”. I never met Brian until long afterward. I had a sketch of who it was, but from my point of view, it was about trusting David. And David couldn’t tell me completely who it was, because we were talking long distance. So for me it was about trusting David and we had worked many times together, and so that wasn’t too difficult. I was happy to trust him. And we did our own check of the source.”

Harber also related how incriminating the faxed documents were:

AH: “the moment when we saw the documents, it was clear that this was very serious stuff: the transfer of police money to IFP, the rallies, to support IFP growth and membership. There was an account, name and number... it wasn’t IFP, but we did check that the account existed. We did the verification.”

MR: *“The UK’s Guardian and the Weekly Mail in SA broke the Inkathagate story simultaneously, on 19 July 1991. How did you feel as you looked at the article in print? What was going through your mind at that time?”*

AH: “I was extremely nervous. We were terrified that we were being set up in some way.”

MR: *“Once the story broke, were there any repercussions for you and the Weekly Mail? How did the South African authorities react? Court action... Death threats or other intimidation?”*

AH: “No, their reaction very quickly showed the documents were genuine. At no stage did they deny the authenticity of the documents. And the state couldn’t take action against the paper. It really was a free for all, and we were aware that if we got it wrong it would destroy our credibility and that if we got it right it was a huge story.”

One of the significant repercussions of the Inkathagate story was the demise of Cabinet Minister Adriaan Vlok. Harber confronted him about the Inkathagate revelations one night on a live television current affairs programme on SABC TV.

AH: “Well that’s an interesting part about the way it played out. It was a time when the SABC was trying to show that it was changing. They were making me up to go on air, and after the intervention from the police, they bounced me off. That story ran in the Saturday Star. So then they invited me back on Sunday, and we now had the trump card. We were able to play the event so that it escalated the story, and cornered Vlok. The big

factor was that the SABC window was briefly opened, and I had a one-on-one with the Minister.”

Our interview turned to the interaction between the source or whistleblower (Morrow) and the journalists (Harber and Beresford).

MR: *“Let’s go back to Brian Morrow. Until the time that Morrow actually publicly revealed his identity in 1994-95, did you have any contact with him? Was there any interaction between you and him?”*

AH: “No I didn’t.”

MR: *“How should a journalist trust a source like him?”*

AH: “First, you need to complete extensive interviews, focussing on small details. Second, understand the person’s motives. Third, check whatever you can...background, bank account, and any other details.”

MR: *“Did Morrow want anything from you and Beresford? Money or protection?”*

AH: “He only asked to be kept anonymous.”

MR: *“Morrow is still trapped in exile; he tried several times to get indemnity from prosecution in SA, because of the breach of the Official Secrets Act. Did he ask for any help from you during this process?”*

AH: “I seem to remember that he told us what he was doing, but he didn’t ask us directly for help. He missed the cut off for the TRC... and you also had

to say you were part of a political party... which he wasn't. It was a problem for people."

Harber did also mention that the working relationship with the *Guardian* newspaper was necessary, for the protection of the *Weekly Mail*.

AH: "I think understanding that working with the *Guardian* was often done to protect ourselves, when we felt we were vulnerable. We sometimes gave them the story first and then report that it came from the *Guardian*. Or sometimes report it simultaneously. That would give us protection."

8. FINDINGS

8.1. Introduction

The central issue in this study is: how did the journalists conduct themselves in their interaction with their sources, and what yardstick do we weigh that conduct against? That yardstick is the Press Code, or the Code of Ethics and conduct for the South African print and online media, the latest version of which was published in January 2016. What has emerged in this study is that due to the historical context and legal framework under which the media was operating at the time, there were ethical and practical challenges faced by the journalists in both the “Vlakplaas” and “Inkathagate” cases.

8.2. Libertarian theory & the South African Context

From a normative perspective this study reveals the role of the journalist in South African society during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Normative theory looks at how and what the media publish as matters of public concern, as well as what the social responsibilities of the media are. This study looks at what kind of reporting Pauw and Harber were involved in at the time. Both journalists were part of the “alternative media” (as opposed to the mainstream media) in South Africa, which was responsible for much of the journalism that was critical of apartheid.

One of the key findings in “Vlakplaas” story was that it was precipitated by the particular context of South African life that the alternative press of the time was intent on exposing: the brutalities perpetrated by the state and its security establishment, in

a vain attempt to cling to power. Pauw said that he and Max du Preez started *Vrye Weekblad* in October 1988, and that it was a real battle for the newspaper's survival, since du Preez "was charged time and time again under security legislation". Pauw pursued the publication of the Vlakplaas story after a series of deadly attacks on left-wing political activists, as Pauw stated: "On the 1st of May 1989, David Webster was assassinated... and after that...I went to Max and said to him we have to go and speak to Coetzee again and see what we could do. Then I went back to Coetzee..."

It is clear that both stories fit into the normative framework of media theory, which places "emphasis on the maximum independence of the media, consistent with its obligations to society" (McQuail, 1987:116). *The Weekly Mail* and *Vrye Weekblad* were independently owned newspapers that published stories that were clearly Libertarian, in that they emphasized "the uncensored access of knowledge to the public" (Oosthuizen, 2002: 40-41).

From this study it has emerged that Pauw and Harber were involved in newspapers that exercised Libertarian functions, and that these journalists were fulfilling the role of socially responsible journalists. Although there were restrictions imposed on them, these journalists were intent on reporting the truth, and on seeking 'maximum independence of the media', free from state control. They were intent on acting on their 'obligations to society', and Pauw and Max du Preez took risks because they believed in themselves and their role as journalists of the free press.

Exposing apartheid's subversive activities whilst supporting the broad liberation anti-apartheid movement was what motivated these journalists and newspaper editors. In

the normative/Libertarian sense, the journalists were focussed on exposing 'matters of public concern', issues that are perceived to be 'in the public interest'. Both sets of journalists reiterated that they published the stories to expose wrongdoing on the part of the apartheid government and its agents. The draconian laws of the State of Emergency, imposed by the South African Government from 1985 onwards, did not deter Pauw and *Vrye Weekblad*. Pauw said that he had no moral and ethical dilemmas about publishing the Vlakplaas story.

By performing a normative function through publishing that largely exposed the South African government's repressive tactics, alternative newspapers were vulnerable to attack from the state and its agencies. It was a reality at the time that apartheid spies were used to infiltrate newsrooms and pretend to be sources and whistleblowers. There was the real possibility that Harber and Beresford were being set up by reactionary forces or agents of the South African government.

Harber also revealed that establishing an informal working relationship with the UK's *Guardian* newspaper was done, in order to protect the *Weekly Mail* in South Africa. He revealed that he would sometimes "give the story first to the *Guardian*, and then report that it came from the *Guardian*." Or sometimes the two newspapers would report on a story simultaneously, in order to give the *Weekly Mail* some protection from the South African authorities.

Significantly, there was also a shift in the South African socio-political context after 1990, when the ANC was unbanned, and the move towards a negotiated political dispensation was initiated. This ultimately led to the demise of apartheid, and the birth of democracy, which also caused a shrinking of the gap between the Mainstream newspapers and the Alternative Press in South Africa. Harber pointed

out that “there were areas before 1990 that only the Alternative press covered, and after 1990, the Mainstream press began to move into those areas too. What had differentiated the Alternative media was eroded, and at the same time a lot of the funding for the Alternative media was falling away. This meant that papers like *Weekly Mail* had a growing crisis of identity, such as how to manage financially.”

Arising from Black, Steele and Barney’s handbook, “*Doing ethics in journalism*”, one of the guiding principles for the journalist is “*Seek truth and report it as fully as possible*” (Kruger (2004: 14). In utilising this principle of truth seeking, Pauw and Harber’s conduct in these two stories exemplifies the role of the media and the journalist’s need to break that “give voice to the voiceless” and “hold the powerful accountable” (Kruger 2004: 14), which is in keeping with the core of Libertarian theory of the media.

8.3. Journalistic Ethics

In an examination of Pauw and Harber’s conduct in their interaction with their sources, there are several ethical issues that have surfaced. Let us examine the broader ethical principles of *truthfulness, accuracy, fairness, objectivity, impartiality, and public accountability*.

Telling the truth

The ethical principles of *Truthfulness, Accuracy* and *Fairness* are all linked to the journalistic guiding principle of “truth-telling”. When journalists seek to “tell the truth” about a particular story, they need to be accurate about the facts concerned. They

also need to conduct themselves with fairness, both to the source and the story, in order to be truthful in their reporting. In an attempt to seek the truth and report it as fully as possible, journalists need to be “honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting accurate information” (Kruger 2004: 14).

In both the Inkathagate and Vlakplaas stories, the journalists made honest attempts to seek the truth. Verification of the information in the Inkathagate story, because it came from an anonymous source, was vital for accuracy and truthfulness. This is borne out in Harber’s interview, in which he states: “there was an account, name and number... it wasn’t IFP, but we did check that the account existed. We did the verification”.

In order to achieve the principles of accuracy and truthfulness, in the Vlakplaas story, Pauw also needed to verify his source’s (Coetzee’s) information. He could not have been able to publish the story, otherwise. Pauw did say that “it was the revelations of Almond Nofemela on death row on 20 Oct 1989, through the Lawyers for Human Rights, which gave the story confirmation. Coetzee and I had left the country a few days later. And that was a confirmation, (because) Nofemela was another source.”

And part of the principle of truth-seeking, are the notions of ‘giving voice to the voiceless’ as well as ‘holding the powerful accountable’. These notions are evident in both case studies. For instance, Inkathagate exposed the lengths to which the apartheid South African government (the powerful) would go, in order to influence the outcome of future negotiations with the ANC, by funding and strengthening the hand of the IFP, a party in direct conflict with the ANC. Harber said the Inkathagate

story “had a fundamental effect on the way in which the IFP was seen and positioned.”

The Vlakplaas expose’ was also aimed at “giving a voice to the voiceless” and “holding the powerful accountable”. The search for truth was what motivated Pauw, and in order to tell a truthful, fair and accurate story, he needed to first believe that what his source told him was in fact true, and speaking in retrospect, Pauw said “If you look back today at what Coetzee had said to me in 1989...every single thing he said was the truth...there wasn’t a single thing that he lied about.”

Public accountability

From an ideological perspective, Pauw and Harber sought to be independent journalists, fighting against the restrictions of the Apartheid government’s ideology. Through their larger body of work, both journalists sought to establish freedom of expression, and press freedom, in a harsh political and social landscape like South Africa of the late 1980s. Writing for newspapers that were clearly regarded as “the alternative press”, both journalists were actively independent. Pauw and Harber were also guided by the ethical norm of ‘public accountability’, which relates to the extent to which, they “should be prepared to explain and answer for their work, to their audiences and the public at large” (Kruger, 2004: 13).

Objectivity and impartiality

However, when examining the ethical principles of *objectivity* and *impartiality*, linked to the broad guiding principle of journalistic *independence*, both case studies show

evidence of these, but to varying degrees. The SA Press Code is clear about independence and conflicts of interest:

“The media shall not allow commercial, political, personal or other non-professional considerations to influence or slant reporting. Conflicts of interest must be avoided, as well as arrangements or practices that could lead audiences to doubt the media’s independence and professionalism”.

For Jacques Pauw, and the Vlakplaas story especially, the question of journalistic independence is crucial. Coetzee revealed that the African National Congress, and not the *Vrye Weekblad* newspaper, paid for the two of them to leave the country. The fact that the African National Congress, an organisation in exile that was banned in South Africa and had been operating underground with offices in several other countries paid for Coetzee to be flown out of South Africa, and not the *Vrye Weekblad* newspaper, is in conflict with the issue of journalistic independence. One of the guiding principles for acting independently is that the journalist must “remain free of associations and activities that may compromise your integrity and damage your credibility” (Kruger, 2007: 14). If his newspaper had paid for the trip, then Pauw would have been said to be acting independently, in covering the story. But that was certainly not the case here. Pauw had used money from a banned liberation organisation to secure the interview with Coetzee, an act that clearly goes against the notion of journalistic independence. This is clearly a conflict of interest in the Vlakplaas story, for the journalist. There was a clash between what is ethically and professionally the right thing to do, and outside interests and pressures. Pauw’s reporting on this story was influenced by the interests of those who paid the bills for the story to be told, i.e. the ANC.

There is also the issue of whether the ANC-funded trip to Mauritius was regarded as a “gift” to Pauw from the liberation movement, for ensuring that the Vlakplaas story received maximum global exposure. This issue is clearly an ethical grey area for Pauw and the Vlakplaas story, and brings into focus the question of the credibility of the journalist and his newspaper. This is in conflict with the SA Press code which states:

“The media shall

- not accept a bribe, gift or any other benefit where this is intended or likely to influence coverage;
- indicate clearly when an outside organisation has contributed to the cost of newsgathering”

The Vrye Weekblad did not clearly declare that an outside organisation had contributed to the cost of the newsgathering, in the Vlakplaas story.

Source-handling

Having dealt with the broad ethical principles outlined above, we now move on to the issue of source-handling, and shall examine the conduct of the journalists in their interaction with the sources. The SA Press code clearly defines the role of the journalist/media in dealing with confidential and anonymous sources:

“The Media shall:

- Protect confidential sources of information - the protection of sources is a basic principle in a democratic and free society;
- avoid the use of anonymous sources unless there is no other way to deal with a story. Care should be taken to corroborate the information; and

- not publish information which constitutes a breach of confidence, unless the public interest dictates otherwise.”

And Kruger’s three elements of source-handling provide us with useful analytical tools: “we should deal with them *honestly*... show them *consideration*, and maintain a *professional distance*” (2004: 174-5).

Honesty

Firstly, did Pauw and Harber handle their respective sources *honestly*? Were the journalists open with them, about who they were, and their intentions as journalists?

In the Inkathagate case, Harber received a batch of documents from his correspondent David Beresford in London, after they were handed to him by whistleblower Brian Morrow. Harber and Beresford did not have to declare their ‘honest’ intentions to Morrow, as they did not seek him out. It was Morrow who went in search of the journalists, in order to expose the story. But the journalists here did have to apply the principle of honesty to the facts presented, in order to arrive at the truth of the story.

Similarly, in the Vlakplaas story, the whistleblower (Coetzee) came to the journalist (Pauw) with information that he needed to have exposed. Coetzee had already approached other journalists with the same story, and revealed that he had struggled to convince reporters to take his revelations about Vlakplaas seriously. Coetzee did finally find sympathetic listeners in journalists Jacques Pauw and Martin Welz, but it took Pauw four more years to publish the story. He had to wait for verification of Coetzee’s tales, which under the circumstances was proving difficult. Nofemela’s confession provided the verification.

Interestingly, the decision to publish the story happened at a time when the newspaper *Vrye Weekblad* was taking some strain in order to survive. So the ethical issue that arises here is: was Pauw honest with Coetzee about his intentions to publish the story, and what were those intentions? One possibility was that Pauw and his newspaper were more concerned with using the massive Vlakplaas story for the newspaper's survival, and hence may not have been completely honest with Coetzee about his intentions to publish the story at that particular moment in history.

Payment for information

Another key ethical issue was whether either of the sources received any payment for their stories. The SA Press codes states:

“The media shall avoid shady journalism in which informants are paid to induce them to give the information, particularly when they are criminals - except where the material concerned ought to be published in the public interest and the payment is necessary for this to be done.”

The interviews have revealed that that neither Coetzee nor Morrow received any monetary payment from the journalists or their newspapers. Morrow also confirmed that he received no payment from Beresford or the newspaper for the documents he gave them.

But there were ethical implications that arose when Pauw took Coetzee to Mauritius, in order to carry out the complete interview with his source, before sending him off to London to meet with the ANC. What was the reason for choosing Mauritius (and not London) as a location for Coetzee to ‘spill the beans’ on Vlakplaas? From an ethical

perspective, it is also possible that this Mauritius trip was some sort of 'payment' (or pay-off) to Coetzee for his complete and unadulterated revelations to Pauw. On the other hand, perhaps the Indian Ocean Island was selected because it may have provided a safe and conducive environment (as opposed to the United Kingdom, with the inherent dangerous possibility that Coetzee could be assassinated by apartheid agents) for Coetzee to completely 'open up' his memory to the journalist. Interestingly, Coetzee's interview was loaded with resentment towards Pauw: "Jacques paid fuck all...he just rose to fame...sitting on his fuckin' backside...doing fuck all every six seconds... just wants the story... spill the beans... and add some gruesome action". Such resentment may point to Coetzee's disillusionment towards the journalist, and may be due to their interaction, which according to Coetzee was far from harmonious.

Journalists are ethically bound to protect confidential sources of information.

Let us look at what steps Pauw and Harber took to protect their sources from harm. A critical ethical issue for Pauw was the protection of his source: he had to handle Coetzee with care, and provide him with *protection for his life*. Due to the fact that Coetzee had confessed to killing several activists, there were real fears of reprisals from both the underground freedom movement as well as the security forces. And there were ethical implications in the fact that Pauw willingly handed his source over to Coetzee's enemy, the ANC in exile in London. After doing the interview with Coetzee in Mauritius over 6 days, Pauw went back to South Africa, alone. Coetzee went off to London, alone. It would have been more ethical for Pauw to have accompanied Coetzee to London, to ensure that he was not harmed. Pauw did not

foresee the possibility that the ANC could have rejected Coetzee's presentation to them as feeble, or as a desperate act of survival from an apartheid hit-man, and hence could have had his source killed in London as an act of retribution. By placing his source in a situation of grave danger, Pauw acted against the ethical principle of 'minimising harm'. Investigative reporter Sam Sole once spoke of the unusual circumstance of losing his source through assassination: "My worst experience as a journalist was to have a source assassinated, because the source had a lot more information than he provided for me, but he wanted to test the waters. He did not want his identity revealed, but of course all the people he was involved with did not have much difficulty to work out who he was and he got wiped out. So maybe as a source it's better that you don't feed things in dribs and drabs, so that there's no reason to kill you, or you take the risk rather of using your name so that any action that is taken against you subsequently is very clearly in response to your whistle-blowing action. That's the other side of source protection" (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Investigative Journalism Manual: 9).

But whilst the current SA Press code states "the protection of sources is a basic principle in a democratic and free society", Pauw could well argue that at the time of the publishing of the Vlakplaas story, South Africa was certainly not "a democratic and free society".

In the case of Brian Morrow, due to his Inkathagate revelations, the whistleblower faced prosecution in South Africa, for having breached the Official Secrets Act. This prevented him from returning to South Africa permanently. Morrow feels aggrieved that he never received amnesty from prosecution, given the magnitude of his revelations, and the effect it had on this country's history. This is proof that he wasn't

fully afforded protection. As an act of desperation, Morrow went back to David Beresford in 1995, to reveal his identity to him and the world.

Professional distance

In the Inkathagate story, Harber and Beresford clearly maintained a professional distance from their source. Beresford met Morrow face to face, received the documents, and sent them to Harber for verification and to publish the story. Morrow remained in London and did not contact Harber again. There was no ongoing interaction between the journalists and Morrow, and certainly no evidence of any relationship between source and journalist. The only time Morrow went back to Beresford was in 1995 when he asked for some help in securing amnesty from the South African government.

During the course of his ongoing (almost four-year long) interaction with Coetzee, Pauw had to walk a fine line in terms of ethics, as he sought to cultivate his source, and he said that he did not count Coetzee as a friend. Pauw stated that despite spending large amounts of time in close proximity with his source, he did not allow himself to become too close to Coetzee. Pauw did not develop a friendship or any other relationship with his source.

In his description of Jacques Pauw, and of his relationship with him, Coetzee revealed in his interview that he was not quite happy with Pauw's conduct as a journalist. There seemed to have been some lingering bitterness that Coetzee was harbouring towards Pauw.

Coetzee: “Martin (Welz) was not a drinker, at all, so we never met at a pub. He was respectable and respected. Not like Jacques, who just wanted a story. Jacques loved his liquor, just like me. So we met at pubs, etc. They all think that if they make you drunk, you’ll spill the beans more easily. Jacques was fond of buying a lunch and so on.”

MR: ***“How would you describe your relationship with Jacques Pauw?”***

Coetzee: “There’s no relationship. He’s just a guy hunting a story, for his own interest. He just feathers his own nest... furthers his own interest... an orthodox planner for his own interest.”

Coetzee’s description of Pauw clearly reveals an apparent contempt which the source seems to have towards the journalist. Coetzee’s words to describe Pauw: “feathers his own nest”, “furthers his own interest”, “orthodox planner”...all reveal that Coetzee had scant regard for Pauw and his intentions. Coetzee’s contempt for Pauw may have arisen from the manner in which Pauw handled him as a source. Perhaps the source felt that he was being used by the journalist to tell the story, and once he had done so, the journalist discarded him. On the other hand, perhaps Pauw’s handling of Coetzee was coloured by the fact that the source was a self-confessed killer, and that despite the proximity they shared, the journalist did maintain a psychological (and professional) distance from the source.

Coetzee has confirmed that Pauw did not cultivate a relationship with him. But did Pauw stretch his use of some tactics to cultivate Coetzee as a source? Having regular contact with your source, buying lunches and drinks, is all part of cultivating a source, but does this mean that Pauw’s conduct was bordering on the unethical? Pauw has denied this.

Minimise harm

And finally, there is the issue of what does a journalist do if he is given information that could save a person's life? Coetzee insisted during the interview that he had asked Pauw to warn the lawyer, Bheki Mlangeni that he will receive a parcel that could be a bomb. Pauw had failed to do so. Mlangeni was killed by the bomb, and his death could have been avoided. What are the ethical implications for Pauw in this matter? As a journalist he is expected to act ethically to save lives, especially if he is privy to information that indicates that someone's life is in imminent danger; he is ethically bound to 'minimise harm'. Having established that he trusted every word that Coetzee had spoken, Pauw ought to have believed Coetzee and sprung into action to warn Mlangeni of the danger. The fact that this did not happen raises ethical issues for Pauw.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings on the two case studies, the strengthening of journalistic ethics has become highly imperative in the current South African and global context. Faced with a plethora of leaked information, from both reliable and fake sources, today's journalists can learn from the ethical conduct (or lack thereof) that these two case studies have revealed. They must question the motives and origins of any information they are presented with, and be wary of the practice of "spin-doctoring", which could come from any source. Given the current political climate in South Africa, in which the ruling party the ANC is undergoing a succession battle, journalists need to be wary of being co-opted into factional politics. They need to examine documents methodically, evaluate their sources through the two-source

verification process, and seek to arrive at an independent assessment of source and story. Journalists must also be wary of those practices that are destroying ethical journalism, such as conflicts of interest, lack of objectivity, bias, fake news, legal restrictions, invasion of privacy, and other threats to the freedom of the press. They must avoid over-zealousness in seeking to make a scoop.

Journalists must ensure that they act firmly according to the Press Code or Code of Conduct for the South African Media. They must uphold and maintain the independence and professionalism of their media; avoid conflicts of interest; prevent political, commercial, personal or other non-professional considerations from influencing their reporting; not accept bribes or gifts, in any form. Journalists must take great care to strengthen their ethical practices; they must abide by the broader ethical principles of *truthfulness, accuracy, fairness, objectivity, impartiality, and public accountability*.

Journalists must offer protection to their confidential sources of information; ensure that they corroborate or verify their story; and avoid the use of anonymous sources unless there is no other way to tell the story. The reporter must have a clear understanding that the Press Code protects the interests of the reader/viewer, the source (confidentiality), as well as the subject of the story (privacy).

9. CONCLUSION

This research report has looked at the ethical treatment of two whistleblowers by the respective journalists in the two case studies, “Vlakplaas” and “Inkathagate”. Using the Libertarian theory as a normative framework to measure the journalists’ conduct, it is able to conclude that under extremely difficult conditions, both from a legislative and practical perspective, the respective journalists did attempt to apply journalistic ethics in their conduct to secure the stories, as well as the safety of their sources. From an ethical perspective, both Pauw and Harber followed the broad ethical principles of truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness, and public accountability. This study has also weighed the conduct of both journalists against Kruger’s three elements of source-handling: *honesty*, *consideration* and *professional distance*.

There were a few grey areas in terms of ethical lapses, especially for Jacques Pauw in the Vlakplaas story. What can be learnt from Pauw’s conduct is that the strengthening of ethical journalism is essential for the enhancing public respect for the profession itself. Over-zealousness in seeking to make a scoop can lead to ethical lapses. The overriding concern for both Pauw and Harber was that their stories were written for an interested public, and that they provided stories in their respective “alternative” newspapers, from an anti-apartheid perspective.

One of the guiding principles for the journalist is ‘*Seek truth and report it as fully as possible*’ (Kruger (2004: 14). In utilising this principle of truth seeking, Pauw and Harber’s conduct in these two stories exemplifies the role of the media and the journalist’s need to break story that “give voice to the voiceless” and “hold the

powerful accountable” (Kruger 2004: 14), which is in keeping with the ideals of the Libertarian theory of the media.

As for the overall impact of such investigative journalism: here’s an appropriate statement taken from the proceedings at the Institutional Hearing into the Media, in September 1997, in Johannesburg: “Jon Qwelane, the most severe critic of the mainstream media, acknowledged that it was the English-language newspapers whose journalists demonstrated ‘periodic flashes of courage and brilliance’ by exposing the gross injustices perpetrated by the system of apartheid. He cited examples such as reporting on the inhumane conditions in South Africa’s prisons, the Information (‘Info’) scandal, the unmasking of the Civil Co-operation Bureau (CCB) and the exposure of Vlakplaas.” (From <http://www.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/memory>).

This study has also brought into focus the need for strengthening ethics in journalism. It has raised questions about what may be killing ethical journalism: what are the threats to journalistic ethics, such as conflicts of interest, lack of objectivity, bias, legal restrictions, invasion of privacy and over-zealousness.

This study has also highlighted the need to look at ways to raise the standards of ethical journalism and encourage journalists to adopt better ethical practices. In so doing, journalism as a profession will benefit by enhancing public respect for it and giving its members more reason to place confidence in each other’s integrity.

As Wasserman points out: “Journalists do not readily perceive the discussion of ethics as a priority when faced with the pressure of deadlines, economic realities and huge workloads. They often also have a dislike of anything resembling academic

pipe dreams. In their world, practice dictates, the Big Story does not allow itself to become ensnared in moral quandaries and the front page awaits. Such an argument often stems from the perception that media ethics is essentially a sermonising business, far removed from everyday realities. On the contrary - ethics has everything to do with reality. Journalists do not work in a vacuum, but in a society in which they can cause great harm but also have a great influence" (2002: 142).

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