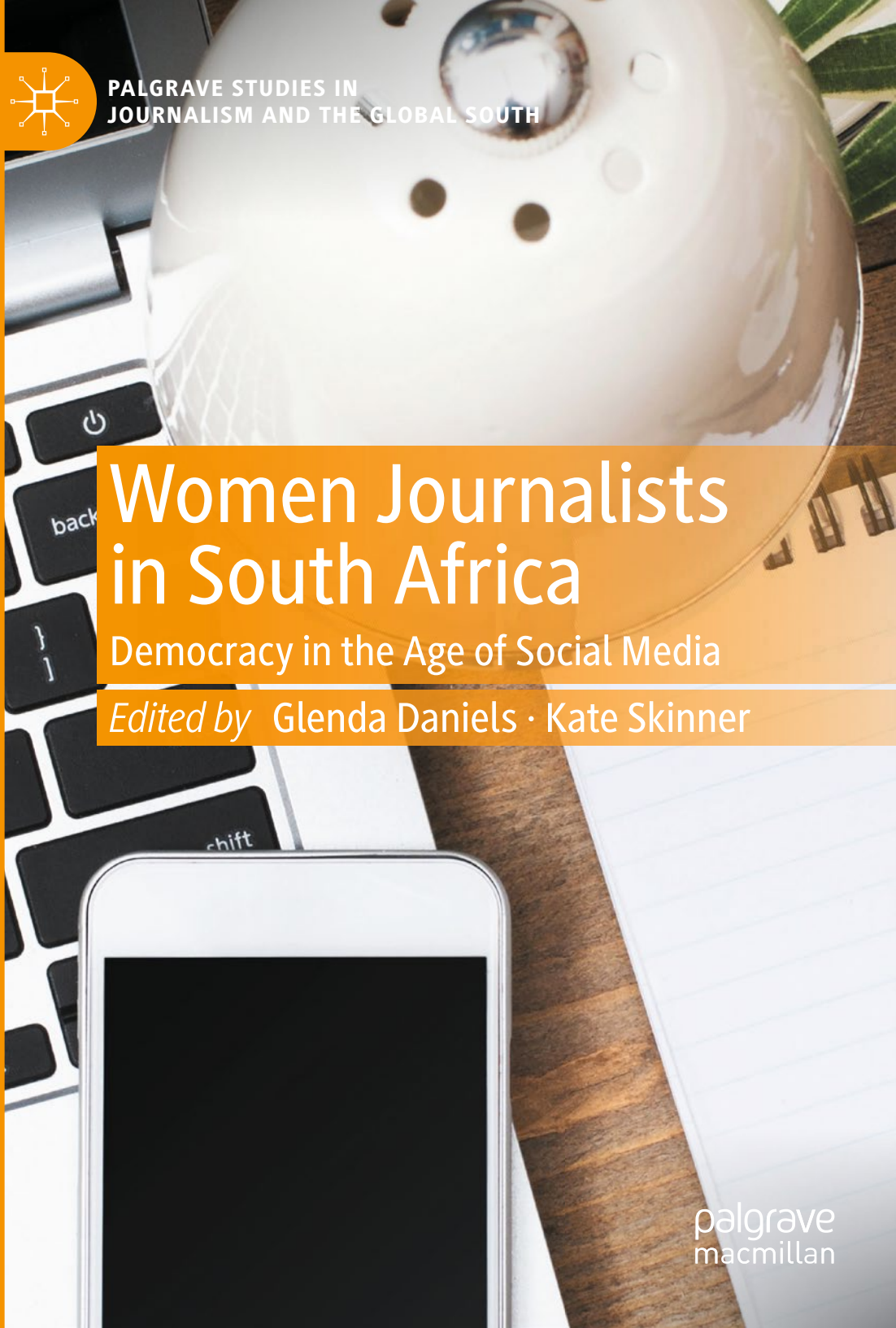

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Women Journalists in South Africa

Democracy in the Age of Social Media

Edited by Glenda Daniels · Kate Skinner

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Glenda Daniels • Kate Skinner
Editors

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This book is dedicated to all women journalists around the world, and in particular the ones who suffer online violence, or cyberbullying.

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Kate Skinner has been a media freedom activist, researcher and policy analyst for the last 25 years. She has worked in the unions, NGOs, government and the media industry. She was the coordinator of Support Public Broadcasting Coalition (SOS) for many years. In 2017 she completed her PhD at Wits University on public service broadcasting. She is the author of "How Covid-19 shocked the media industry" published in the 2020 volume of *State of the Newsroom.*

Thandi Smith is head of programmes for Media Monitoring Africa. She has a Master's in Media Studies from Wits University. Her research and activism focus includes media freedom, digital rights, internet governance and freedom of expression. She is the co-author of Weekly Trends Reports on Disinformation in South Africa.

Abbreviations

AIP	Association of Independent Publishers
AME	African Media Entertainment
CGE	Commission for Gender Equality
GMMP	Global Media Monitoring Project
IFJ	International Federation of Journalists
IWMF	International Women's Media Foundation
MDDA	Media Development and Diversity Agency
MMA	Media Monitoring Africa
NICD	National Institute for Communicable Diseases
PCSA	Press Council of South Africa
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SANEF	South African National Editors' Forum
SAPS	South African Police Service
SARS	South African Revenue Service
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Glenda Daniels and Kate Skinner

Women journalists in South Africa crack major investigative, corruption-busting stories and exercise their freedom of expression on social media. Their contributions, therefore, to deepening democracy is significant and shows evidence of how they exercise power. However, there is also a misogynistic power pressing down upon them on social media, when they are trolled. The country's women journalists are vilified and threatened online, referred to as "cybermisogyny", which is the online hatred and bullying of women (Daniels, 2020). South Africa is by no means alone in this growing trend which is now becoming an international scourge as indicated in the article "The Chilling: the biggest issue in world press freedom is attacks against women journalists" (Daniels, 2021).

The international context is that nearly three quarters, or 73%, of more than 900 women journalists surveyed from 125 countries in a 2021

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UNESCO international study reported that they had experienced online bullying. This abuse consists of interpellation (hailing, shaming, naming), for example, being called "bitch", "slut", "whore", "presstitute" (meaning a press plus prostitute), "ugly", as well as body shaming or slandered as "fat". The research delineates these abuses and other discriminations such as the gender pay gap, and includes ideas on how to provide an environment that is safer, freer and more equal for women in journalism. The book is an edited collection of chapters on, and written by, women journalists in the South African democracy space and the obstacles they experience through vilification, mainly on social media. These attacks are now bound up with disinformation, intersectional discrimination and populist politics.

Women journalist voices exercise power and add a vital dimension to diversity. However, they are harassed, and there are attempts to silence and marginalise them in the online social media space of the big tech companies such as Twitter and Facebook by populist, corrupt politicians and their supporters who are often from troll factories. Emerging from the research is that women journalists appear to be the biggest target in the digital age of social media and misinformation. This book looks at how women journalists in South Africa exercise their power and how attempts to curb their power are exercised—the anti-feminist backlash.

South Africa is chosen as a case study deliberately and purposively for a few reasons: First, the Constitution of South Africa protects gender equality and freedom of expression, so women are not fighting against the all-powerful body of laws in the country. Second, South Africa has a rich civil society culture of commitment to human rights and resistance to abuse, therefore, making it an ideal zone to explore ideas on how to tackle the scourge. Indeed, there are over 20 civil society media organisations[1] in just

[1] For example, the South African National Editors Forum (Sanef); Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ); Press Council of SA; South African Communications Association (SACOMM); Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA); Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI); Save our SABC (SOS); Media Monitoring Africa (MMA); Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA); Association for Independent Publishers (AIP); Broadcast Complaints Commission of SA (BCCSA); Pen South Africa (PENSA); National Press Club; SA Freelance Association (SAFREA); Right2Know; National Association of Broadcasters; and Amabhungane.

one space, and there are many unions[2] in the media space too, yet this scourge continues. Third, exploring one country affords the editors and chapter researchers and writers an opportunity for an in-depth or deeper study, rather than a superficial, around the world gloss over. Fourth, the editors and researchers are geographically located in South Africa and have access to women journalists to interview them, which was done online due to the Covid-19 era.

According to the book *Glass Ceilings: Women in South African Media Houses* (Daniels & Nyamweda, 2018), women editors, senior journalists, "influencers" and news sources continue to be under-represented. The attempted closures on and suppression of women's freedom of expression has serious consequences for the role they play in democracy. This role could be lost unless there are ways to stop cybermisogyny. Cybermisogyny intersects with impactful stories concerning women exposing state and private sector corruption. This book argues and advocates that the voices of women editors, senior journalists, influencers and sources—the shapers of the news agenda—must all be protected and, indeed, bolstered in the digital age.

Through this research, brainstorming and workshopping of ideas to ensure the diversity of women's voice is not lost, women media academics (together with contributions from industry and civil society) could spread awareness to help break the cycle of growing anti-feminist backlash. This book is an edited collection of academic chapters with an advocacy element, written mainly by women academic media scholars. It covers the highlighted issues from a Global South, African feminist gaze.

This introduction delineates the theory and methods used in the book, as well as the media landscape, legally and politically. It sets the scene, so to speak, for the chapters to follow. The sequence of chapters follows the logics of the political landscape on where gender fits in historical apartheid's oppression, where women were always at the bottom of the pile of hierarchies. Hence, we start with the triple oppression and trace the history of women in this structure.

[2] For example, Media Workers' Association of South Africa (MWASA); the Communications Workers Union (CWU); and the Broadcasting, Electronic, Media and Allied Workers Union (BEMAWU).