Evaluating coverage of the environment: A comparative study of the observations of academics and journalists

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DECLARATION RELATING TO PLAGIARISM

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work. I have acknowledged all other authors'
ideas and referenced direct quotations from their work. I have not allowed anyone else to borrow
or copy my work.

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ABSTRACT

This study is a comparative analysis of the way that academics and journalists evaluate media coverage of news about the environment. The purpose is to gain insight into the kind of contributions that each of these groups can make to debates about the role that such coverage should play within processes of public deliberations about the environment. The dissertation begins by establishing theoretical terms of reference for assessing discussions of the journalistic coverage of the environment. It proposes that it is of value to consider the conceptualisation, within such discussions, of credible knowledge about the environment and, more particularly, to establish whether such conceptualisation is based within a positivist, interpretive, or critical realist paradigm. It is demonstrated that each of these epistemological traditions brings valuable perspectives to the discussion of journalism about the environment within such literature. It is, however, the positivist perspective that remains dominant, and this limits the extent to which the potential of the other two epistemological positions are fully realized. It is also demonstrated that there is a tendency, within this literature, to focus on the performance of individual journalists with minimal attention to the particularities of institutional and social context. It is proposed that this tendency results from the adherence to a positivist approach to the evaluation of journalism. The dissertation then describes the design and implementation of the empirical component of the study – dealing with decisions made about the overall methodological framing, the choice of method, the fieldwork plan and the approach to analysis. It is explained that the aim of the empirical component was to examine South African print journalists' discussions of coverage of the environment in their own publications, and to compare such discussion to that which is represented in the academic literature. The dissertation then presents a summary of the themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview material that formed part of this empirical work. It is demonstrated that the evaluation of coverage of the environment, as articulated by the research participants, is informed by many of the assumptions and values that can be identified within academic literature. Such evaluation is, furthermore, similarly informed by a positivist, interpretive and critical treatment of knowledge – with, again, a tendency for the positivist position to dominate. One important difference is that the research participants include more references to institutional context. It is proposed, however, that the tendency to prioritise a positivist epistemological framing continues to place limitations on the extent to which the participants are able to fully articulate their knowledge about such context.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This study was prompted by my professional interest in the way that newspapers produce journalism about the environment[1]. This interest is linked, firstly, to my experience of working as a print journalist specialising in environmental reporting. Secondly, it is informed by the work that I do as a communication specialist for the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD).

As part of my work at GDARD, I monitor local newspapers kept at our office library. I pay particular attention to the way journalists write news reports on GDARD's environment and development projects in both urban and rural parts of Gauteng Province. Through this process of monitoring, I became aware of general trends within the approach to coverage of the environment adopted in these newspapers. Even before starting my masters degree, I had identified three characteristics of such coverage which, in my view, place limitations on the role that these newspapers play in promoting public participation in South Africa around the discussion of environmental issues. It was my observation, firstly, that the journalists who write for these publications depend heavily on official sources. This includes the environmental experts who represent scientific organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government officials and representatives of the private sector. They fail, at the same time, to balance the views that emerge from such sources with those of so-called 'ordinary people'. Secondly, I became conscious that the way in which environmental issues are described and explained in the newspapers I was monitoring does little to facilitate understanding of the issues and debates concerned. One reason for this appeared to be journalists' tendency to make use of environmental jargon, and their failure to include information that provides context. Thirdly, it was my observation that these newspapers marginalise particular environmental issues. For example, there is a tendency to give more coverage to urban rather than rural news, a failure to highlight disadvantaged groups' problems and a deprioritisation of stories that educate people about their environmental rights.

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[1] The term 'journalism about the environment' is used consistently throughout the dissertation, in order to signal that this study does not exclusively focus on environmental journalism but rather on both general news and specialised environmental journalism.

I wanted to gain a better understanding of how journalists and editorial staff within the South African mainstream press evaluate such journalism as it appears within their own newspapers. Given my own experience as a journalist, my sense was that such individuals are well placed to contribute to understanding of the challenges that journalists face in producing such journalism. I was interested, at the same time, in learning more about the extent to which the academic study of journalism about the environment can enhance public debate about such journalism. I therefore decided to use my masters dissertation to compare the way these two communities of practice evaluate journalism about the environment. I would, firstly, review such evaluations as they form part of academic literature dealing with journalism about the environment. I would then compare these evaluations to those of journalists and editors working within the South African press. I was interested, in particular, in making sense of the kind of contribution that each of these groups can be said to make to debates about the role that journalism should play within processes of public deliberation about the environment.

The resulting study explores how such evaluations are influenced by particular understandings of the nature and purpose of the production of credible social knowledge. It is concerned with finding out how journalists and editorial staff on one hand and academics on the other, it seeks to make sense of the role that the mainstream press should play in covering environmental issues. It pays attention to the understanding that emerges from both of these sources with regards to the contribution that journalism can make to facilitating public debate about environmental issues. It also looks at the way in which both groups describe the kind of journalism that needs to be produced in order to achieve these goals, and how the production of such journalism should be approached.

Chapter One consists of a literature review. The chapter establishes a theoretical framework within which it is possible to discuss the different perspectives that academics and journalists bring to an evaluation of journalism about the environment. It focuses on identifying conceptual tools that can help to throw light on both groups' understanding of authoritative knowledge. It is argued that such understanding plays a key role in the kind of contribution that each group can make to public debate about the journalism that deals with the environment. The chapter includes a review of scholarship that deals with the evaluation of journalism about the environment. Within this review, special attention is

paid to the way in which different writers understand the role that journalism should ideally play within processes of public deliberation about the environment. The different positions that emerge are located within a spectrum of approaches to the production of authoritative social knowledge. It is argued that the way the authors locate themselves along this spectrum of approaches has important implications for the way in which they make sense of the coverage of environmental concerns.

Chapter Two then serves as a description of the plan for the empirical component of this study and evaluates the implementation of this plan and effectiveness to help answer the research question. I discussed the need to use a qualitative research method because the study of an interpretive nature. I decided to present the views of research participants and not those of the researcher. I decided to firstly conduct interviews with mainstream newspapers journalists from *The City Press and The Mail & Guardian*. I started with focus group interviews with general reporters, then individual interviews with freelance and full time environmental journalists writing for these papers and other South African newspapers and lastly individual interviews with editors who would react to views of general reporters. All the research participants were asked the same questions in the same order. The questions had been pre-tested to ensure that they would solicit for the desired answers to the research question. I planned to identify themes and patterns that would emerged from these interviews. This would allow for a theme and pattern-based comparative analysis of the participants and the academics' evaluations. I prioritised the questions based on four themes. The first one focused on the participants' own experience of journalistic practice, particularly in the context of coverage of environmental issues. The second focused on their understanding of what is meant by an 'environmental' issue, and their view of the role that journalism should play in covering such issues. The third dealt with their experience of the challenges and opportunities involved in putting into practice their beliefs with regards to the role that journalism should play in this regard. The fourth theme focused on editorial guidelines for coverage of the environment. The themes that I used for the interviews with editors were similar to those for journalists.

The next two chapters describe the themes that emerged within the interview material that I generated as part of this empirical work. Chapter Three focuses on the

research participants' conceptualisations of journalism about the environment as it should ideally exist. Chapter Four then discusses their evaluation of the extent to which these ideals are being put into practice by journalists within their own work context. Both chapters explore the extent to which the participants' statements can be located within the spectrum of approaches to the conceptualisation of knowledge described in Chapter One. Through this comparison, these chapters explore the extent to which approaches to the conceptualisation of knowledge can be seen to determine the way in which environmental journalism is discussed, both within academic and journalistic environments.

The conclusion to the dissertation compares the patterns that emerge within these interviews to those that were identified in context of the academic literature reviewed in Chapter One. This section offers general conclusions about the unique contributions that academics and journalists bring, respectively, to an evaluation of journalism about the environment.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter describes the theoretical framework that has been developed for this study. Section One presents an outline of different approaches to the conceptualisation of authoritative knowledge. It deals, more particularly, with three different perspectives on the evaluation of credible scientific knowledge, as this has been articulated within the social sciences. It teases out the implication of each approach for a conceptualisation of the role that such knowledge should play within processes of public deliberation.

The aim of Section Two is then to establish the extent to which one or another of these approaches to knowledge can be traced within literature dealing with environmental journalism. The discussion teases out the implications for the approach adopted, within such literature, to the role that different kinds of knowledge about the environment should play within such journalism. The discussion teases out, in particular, the implications for the evaluation of the role played by such journalism in contributing to processes of public deliberation around environmental issues.

In this way, the chapter establishes terms of reference for the empirical investigation of journalists' observations about environmental reporting, later in this dissertation. It articulates, in particular, a conceptual language for engaging with the way in which such journalists understand the role that they play in producing and circulating knowledge about the environment within the public domain.

1.   Conceptualisations of knowledge

Approaches to credible knowledge in the social sciences can usefully be discussed in relation to three different 'metascientific' positions, each linked to its own methodological approach. These have been referred to as the 'positivist', 'interprevist' and 'critical' traditions of thought (Babbie and Mouton 1988, pp. 28-33). Each of these

perspectives offer a different theorisation of reality, and each has distinct implications for the definition of both the nature and purpose of social scientific knowledge.

It has been noted in social science literature that, of these three conceptualisations, it is the one based in the positivist tradition that has become dominant in contemporary society. This is true, firstly, within the academic sphere but also more generally within everyday conceptualisations of knowledge (Bryman 1988, pp. 1-3; Deacon et al, 1999, p. 14; Dunwoody, 1999:62; Filmer 1972, p. 43). The other traditions of social scientific research can, to a degree, be seen to be articulated in response to positivism, challenging its dominant position. With this argument in mind, this section describes the approach taken to the social purpose of knowledge within positivism and then compares this to that of the other traditions of social scientific research. The aim is to demonstrate that although positivist scholarship makes key contributions to the conceptualisation of social scientific knowledge, the interprevist and critical traditions also serve as crucial terms of reference. Firstly, they have widened the spectrum of philosophical and political perspectives from which such conceptualisation can take place. Secondly, they have introduced a wider range of methodological strategies to social research, which allows researchers to tease out in practice, the implications of each of these perspectives.

In literature dealing with social science, it is explained that proponents of positivism believe that only those phenomena which are observable, in the sense of being amenable to the physical senses, can be warranted as credible scientific knowledge. The focus is, furthermore, on measurable evidence, and for this reason the positivist model tends to prioritise quantitative research. In this respect, positivist social science can be seen to model itself on an idealised conceptualisation of natural scientific research, which is understood to base its credibility on measurable (and therefore quantifiable) evidence (Stempel and Westley 1989, p. 13).

An important implication of this approach to scientific research is that normative issues are placed as external to the realm of science. Positivists contend that for research data to be reliable and valid, the research process should not be influenced by one's social interest. This means, for example, that the researcher should do away with personal values that may impair his or her objectivity and therefore undermine the credibility of knowledge produced by the research (Bryman 1988, p. 15). Researchers are also expected

to draw a sharp distinction between statements of scientific fact and those that have to do with norms or interests. It is for this reason that the research methods that tend to be associated with the positivist tradition of social science prioritise surveys, experimental research in laboratories and content analysis (Deacon et al 1999, pp. 4-5). These methods are deemed as most appropriate for research that draws a firm distinction between 'fact' and 'value', and between scientific knowledge and social context. Surveys, for example, are particularly suited to the gathering of quantitative data, while the purpose of experimental research is to create a controlled environment, as free as possible of the influence of context (Deacon et al 1999, pp. 4-5).

This separation between fact and value can also be observed within the positivist conceptualisation of the kind of knowledge that should inform public deliberation processes within the political sphere. It is assumed, within this approach, that scientific knowledge is neutral, factual and credible (Deacon et al 1995, p .35). This is an understanding that has, in fact, become broadly accepted within contemporary society. Indeed, scientists are now looked to as a matter of course by governments and other agencies to provide policy-relevant research because their research approach is generally understood as providing a standard against which knowledge about society should be gauged (Bryman 1988, p.13; Dunwoody 1999, p. 62). The assumption tends to be that it is through their emphasis on the production of disinterested knowledge that scientists and experts more generally help to ensure that decision-making processes are based on sound knowledge about society (Bryman 1988, p.11). There is, in other words, a widely held belief that positivist social science can help decision makers to make informed judgments, in their negotiation of debates that affect the whole of society because it has the status of neutral knowledge, free of political bias (Deacon et al 1999, p. 35).

It has been proposed that this understanding of the social purpose and status of credible knowledge within processes of public deliberation is rooted in the liberal model of the state. This model stipulates that the state is obliged to intervene in the 'public realm' where it has the role of negotiating impartially between competing interests. Within this space a further distinction is drawn between matters that are decided by popular authority and those that are best left to experts (Root 1993, p. 17). The so-called 'ordinary' people's knowledge of the social world is differently positioned, because it is

not grounded in systematic methodologies that emphasise the need for accurate and 'factual' information (Deacon et al 1999, pp. 4-266; Babbie and Mouton 2001, pp. 271-272, Geertz 1973; Mills 1959; Bryman 1988; Filmer 1972, p.43). Such knowledge may still be recognised as an important reference point within public debate, but is accorded a different role to that of scientific or expert knowledge. It may, for example, be considered to be of great value in cases where decision-makers need to understand the lives of specific and unique communities and their idiosyncratic characteristics (Babbie and Mouton 2001, p. 270; Deacon et al 1999; Bryman 1988).

A central critique of the positivist approach to the role of knowledge within processes of public deliberation has for long related to its implications for progressive political culture. It has been argued, in particular, that the positivist framework tends to undermine belief in the possibility and necessity of an educated and politically engaged public (Mills 1959). The role that positivism is thought to play in dismissing the possibility of an intellectually capable public is, for example, referred to in literature that insists that all scientific information should be simplified so that it can be understood and used by a generally illiterate public to facilitate social welfare (Einsiedel and Thorne, 1999, p. 51; Filmer 1972, p. 43; Zehr 1999, p. 8; Rowan 1999, pp.209-219; Rogers 1999, pp. 182-183). As will become apparent below, both interpretive and critical social science offer valuable terms of reference for engaging with these limitations of the positivist tradition.

The interpretive tradition is driven by an interest in understanding how people interpret the meaning of their own different worlds (Babbie and Mouton 2001, p. 28; Deacon et al, 1999:7). Interpretivists caution against the exclusive emphasis within positivism on quantitative research, arguing that a quantitative framework cannot capture all aspects of knowledge about social meaning. Instead of viewing numbers as providing the answer to research questions, they can be seen as a source for questions, a springboard for further investigation and analysis (Deacon et al 1999, pp. 8-9). The interpretive approach is therefore said to play an important role in providing research information that positivism cannot access. It does so, for example, by producing in-depth knowledge about social behaviour that is unique to specific communities and by discovering how such communities define their own way of life (Alder 1983).

Interpretivists contend that there are social phenomena of great importance which have to be observed in their full actuality and this cannot be achieved by only using methods such as that of surveys or laboratory-based experiments (Malinowski 1922, p. 18). One of the arguments that are often made in support of interpretive research is, then, that it draws on methods that are more sensitive to the complexities of such phenomena. These include field observation and qualitative interviewing, which is seen to allow more direct access of social experience. Such methods are prioritised because they unearth rich and complex information about human behaviour and attitudes (Deacon et al 1999, p. 250).

At the same time, the interprevist approach still shares certain fundamental assumptions with the positivist tradition regarding both the nature of credible scientific knowledge and its social purpose. Though different in approach, both are strongly based on the ideals of neutrality and rationality as key to the production of scientific knowledge. The interpretive tradition nevertheless makes an important contribution of its own through its insistence that there can be no social world independent of the lived experience of its members (Filmer 1972, p. 49). Through this insistence, this tradition necessarily facilitates the inclusion of such experiences and perspectives within the public domain. It has been argued that the inclusion of 'ordinary' people's views is of great value towards promoting progressive public deliberation that is representative of the social interests of society in general (Priest 1999, pp. 100-101, Frome 2001, p. 39).

In contrast to the positivist and interpretivist traditions, critical social research is not guided by principles of neutrality or value freedom in its understanding of what makes social scientific knowledge credible. Instead, this tradition begins from the assumption that the production of social scientific knowledge is necessarily informed by historical context and social interest. Moreover, it is often argued that scientific knowledge tends to be constructed in service of the social elite (Thompson 1988, Richardson 2004, pp. 47-68). It is also typically assumed, from this perspective, that scientific knowledge should be purposefully produced and used as a tool to stimulate progressive political and social changes in society. Proponents of the critical tradition generally align themselves with the interests of marginalised groups in society, and understand the purpose of their own work to be that of challenging oppressive systems (Littlejohn 2002, pp. 207-232). The goal is

social transformation involving the displacement of existing structures of domination, the development of more democratic structures and the opening of opportunities for social participation among persons previously excluded and dominated (Gephart 1999, p. 7).

Research methods associated with the critical tradition tend to be grounded within a qualitative paradigm, such as that of interviewing, participant observation and critical discourse analysis. In many cases, such methods are designed to foster conversation and reflection both amongst researchers and research participants. This reflective dialogue allows the researcher and participants to question understandings of society that are generally regarded as the 'natural' state of affairs. They are also understood to expand people's 'discourses' - that is, their ways of seeing and understanding the world (Deetz 1999; Foucault 1980; Giroux 1988; Guba and Lincoln 1994; Kinchelou and McLaren 1994; Richardson 2004, pp. 1-68; van Dijk 1996, pp. 2001:1). In this way, critical research encourages awareness of the generally unacknowledged role of ideological, economic and political forces in shaping the different worlds of research subjects. It operates, in other words, to involve participants in a process of challenging the mechanisms for maintaining the status quo within such social contexts (Morrow 1994).

It would seem, then, that each of the three epistemological 'lenses' described in this section has something of value to offer for the conceptualisation of knowledge and its role within processes of public deliberation. The positivist paradigm emphasises the need for knowledge based on observable, measurable evidence. This is undoubtedly important in context of environmental debates, in which knowledge of systematic and rigorous science is of particular value. The interpretive perspective, in turn, draws attention to the importance of balancing such knowledge with insights into the social experience of 'ordinary' people. Again, there can be no doubt that everyday experience of environmental issues is of profound relevance to their public debate. Finally, the critical tradition argues compellingly that it is not possible to produce value free knowledge, suggesting that all research information is produced for a purpose. This draws attention to the need for critical vigilance with regards to the assessment of the ideological interests that informs the production of all knowledge about the environment, scientific or otherwise. The literature review, in the next section, will demonstrate the role played by

each of these sets of guidelines in framing the way that academic commentators conceptualise of the nature and purpose of environmental journalism.

2.   Critiquing environmental journalism - a summary of the debates

Within literature that deals with political processes surrounding environmental conservation and improvement of the state of the environment, it is generally agreed that there is a need for public involvement in deliberations around such concerns. It is thought that public participation would help to promote better awareness, improve understanding of the issues at stake, and ensure that those in charge of environmental management are held accountable (Dunwoody 1999, pp. 64-65; Frome 2008, p. 39; Priest 1999, p. 98; Stocking 1999, p. 28). Commentators suggest, furthermore, that journalists should play a key role in facilitating the process of public participation in environmental debates (Priest 1999, pp. 99-104; Einsiedel and Thorne 1999, pp. 51-55).

There is a preoccupation, in this literature, with the different categories of knowledge about the environment that are at issue. It is for example repeatedly implied that, in order to contribute successfully towards facilitating public deliberation, journalists need to inform themselves about the differences between these kinds of knowledge. Distinctions are drawn, in this respect, between knowledge generated by experts and non-experts. Commentators also discuss the difference between such knowledge and that of 'traditional' or 'indigenous' knowledge about the environment, particularly as this relates to conservation. This is understood to refer to knowledge gained over centuries within the context of particular cultural groupings that is orally passed down from one generation to the next, especially in rural communities (UN Convention on Biodiversity Article 8 J 1992). Reference is made, furthermore, to the role played by the 'official' knowledge of government as well as the NGO community as this relates, for example, to environmental policies and laws on environmental management (Berger 2002b, pp. 8-11; Detjen 1997, p. 179, Frome 2008, p. 39; Kaheru 2005, pp. 41-42).

Trends within literature generally suggest that, in engaging with such knowledge, journalists should ideally play three roles, in order to promote social progress. Firstly, they are thought to be responsible for facilitating public awareness of environmental

issues. Secondly, they are expected to facilitate public understanding of such issues. Thirdly, they are seen to have the responsibility of adopting a critical stance towards different types of knowledge about the environment (Ensiedel and Thorne 1999, pp. 49-52); Detjen 1997, p. 177, Dunwoody 1999, p. 645; Green 2008, Priest 1999, pp. 100-102). As will be explained below, the second and third categories can be seen to operate as subcategories of the first.

The discussion below demonstrates that different perspectives emerge, within such commentary, with regards to the interpretation of these three roles. It will be argued that these differences are informed by the distinctions in the conceptualisation of knowledge (positivism, interpretive and critical) discussed in Section One. These distinctions are, furthermore, of crucial significance to the approach adopted, within this literature, to an evaluation of journalism about the environment.

2.1 Facilitating public awareness

It is possible to identify two main approaches, within literature dealing with journalism about the environment, to the role that journalists should play in facilitating public awareness of environmental issues. Within the first, the emphasis is placed on the role that journalists should play in the circulation of 'expert' or 'official' information about environmental issues. Within the second, the focus is on the role they should play in diversifying the categories of knowledge about the environment that form part of the public domain, thus widening the spectrum of perspectives on the issues involved. The first category could be said to be informed by a positivist perspective on authoritative knowledge, while arguably the second is informed by an interpretive and maybe even a critical approach.

Discussions that fall into the first category generally propose that, in facilitating public awareness about environmental issues, the central aim should be to disseminate expert and official knowledge to an 'unknowing' public (Einsiedel and Thorne 1999, pp. 50-53, Layton et al.; Hansen 1994). Significantly, the literature focuses primarily on the need to achieve this in relation to scientific expertise. Reference is made, for example, to the need to educate the public about the role played by burning fossil fuels which results in the appearance of a hole in the ozone layer, which reduces protection against harmful

solar radiation (Einsiedel and Thorne 1999, p. 50). Another example can be seen in a discussion that refers to the need for experts to inform the public that species such as elephants are crucial to food chain balance. It is proposed that knowledge of such matters would encourage people to conserve the world's remaining elephant population through boycotting the purchase of ivory products (Einsiedel and Thorne 1999, pp. 50-51). Such commentary then tends to refer to a perceived failure of journalists to provide access to expert knowledge of this kind. The argument is also often that journalists are not informed or educated enough about expert knowledge and therefore are not in a position to communicate this in a way that facilitates public understanding (Detjen 1997, pp.174-175; Stocking 1999, pp. 30-175; Dunwoody 1999, p. 76).

It is possible to identify, within such arguments, the positivist conceptualisation of the nature and social purpose of scientific knowledge, as discussed in Section One. This is apparent, firstly, in the reference to the ideal of objective 'fact', which are seen to have the power of rationally persuading the public to acknowledge the importance of particular arguments about environmental issues. It is also apparent in the assumption that the knowledge that needs to circulate in this respect is drawn from the domain of scientific expertise.

Within the second category of discussion, relating to the task of diversifying categories of knowledge, commentators often refer critically to the extent that expert and official knowledge tends to dominate public debate. It is pointed out, in this respect, that journalists have a tendency to privilege expert knowledge at the expense of other kinds of knowledge. The use of scientific expertise as a yardstick to determine who should or should not participate in environmental debates is, in particular, understood to lead to the exclusion of 'ordinary' people's knowledge (Hansen 1994, Shepherd 1979, Stocking 1999:25-26). It is, furthermore, thought to point not only to a bias towards scientific knowledge, but also a privileging of particular kinds of scientific expertise (Einsiedel and Thorne 1999, pp. 54-55). As a result, the media does not always provide news coverage that fully allows for a broad public engagement with different types of knowledge on environmental issues from experts and non-experts (Priest 1999, p.104 and Dunwoody 1999, p. 62). It is highlighted in such discussions that public deliberations on environmental issues are generally biased towards expert knowledge and that journalists

play a part in reproducing this bias due to the 'grid' of news values that informs their selection of sources and stories. The continued imbalance in the treatment of environmental knowledge from different news sources is described as a missed opportunity for facilitating democratic debate around environmental issues (Detjen 1997, pp. 174-175, Priest 1999, p.101; Stocking 1999, pp. 24-33).

This view of journalism's shortcomings in facilitating an all-inclusive public deliberation process is, clearly, based in a very different set of assumptions to that of the first set of arguments for the circulation of authoritative knowledge. It is, in particular, grounded in a different conceptualisation of the role that knowledge about the environment should play within the public domain. One could argue that its understanding of this role is influenced by the ideals of interpretivism, given the reaction against the exclusive privileging of expert knowledge and the emphasis on the need to include 'ordinary' people's voices within the rational sphere of debate. It is arguable that both sets of arguments bring important insights to debates about the role of journalism within processes of public deliberation about environmental issues. While the first points to the undeniable importance of basing such journalism on authoritative scientific knowledge about the environment, the second cautions against the assumption that such knowledge should be privileged. The presence of both traditions of social research within this literature can, then, be said to result in a greater balance of perspectives on the evaluation of environmental journalism.

2.2 Facilitating public understanding

Within discussions of journalists' role in facilitating public awareness of environmental issues, more specific reference is also made to the need to enhance understanding of environmental debates. Although some scholars suggest that journalists are doing good work towards promoting public awareness and education on environmental issues (Einsiedel and Thorne 1999, pp. 50-53, Rensberger 1997, p. 89), others blame them for failing to communicate the environmental awareness and education messages in a way that is easy to understand (Detjen 1997, p. 177). The literature points to two forms of explanation that journalists can adopt in order to achieve this goal. These include, firstly,

translating expert environmental terminologies or jargon into 'everyday' language and secondly, the contextualisation of environmental issues.

It is suggested, firstly, that, through the use of easy-to-understand language, journalists can help the general public to make sense of environmental issues. This in turn facilitates public participation in environmental debates (Rogers 1999, Ensiedel and Thorne quoted in Friedman 1999, p. 51; Long 1995, Zinsser 1994, p.157 and Frome 1998, p.125). Instead of using a phrase such as 'climate change', journalists should use more every day, explanatory phrases such as 'changing weather patterns around the world'. Similarly, rather than calling global warming the 'greenhouse effect', they could use an analogy that the audience would have more experience of, referring for example to what happens inside a parked car with windows rolled up on a very hot day (Detjen 1997, pp. 38-37). Instead of writing that acid rain in some parts of the Adirondack Mountains has a "PH of 3", journalists could simplify this jargon by saying that "the rain becomes as acidic as vinegar" so that the 'layman' can understand the message clearly (Detjen 1997, p. 177). Other suggested strategies include the translation of scientific statistics into everyday language. For example, when describing levels of air pollution, it is suggested that journalists should not just write that "X parts per million of sulphur are being released into the air". Instead, they should compare these levels with those that can trigger an asthmatic attack in the sick and elderly (Detjen 1997, p. 177).

Secondly, journalists are expected to give context to stories, in order to explain them better (Levy et al. 1986). Reference is made, in the literature, to research which indicates that environmental stories published in the media lack basic contextual information that is needed in order to understand the content. Such research notes, for example, that in dealing with the issue of global warming, media audiences look for information that allows them to fit the issue into the 'bigger picture'. Newspaper readers and television viewers also want to be told "...what came before and what would come next". It is argued, in light of this, that journalist should explain to the public how environmental issues are directly linked to everyday life, including issues relating to human welfare, politics, law, agriculture and tourism and health (Detjen 1997, p. 179; Rogers 1999, pp. 196-197). Journalists are, in particular, urged not to present environmental information in separation from social context as isolated 'facts' (Survey

Research Centre 1958, p.178). They need, rather, to show how environmental issues are related to socio-economic issues, in order to help the public understand how the issues relate to one another. For this to happen, they need to illustrate in their stories that the lens of environmental journalism is wide enough to embrace both the aspects that relate to natural scientific knowledge, and the 'social' aspects (Detjen 1997, p. 179; Rogers 1999, pp.196-197).

Within these approaches to forms of explanation, it is possible to discern the influence of more than one tradition of thought about the nature and social purpose of credible knowledge about the environment. On the one hand, the preoccupation with the translation of scientific jargon into more simple language could be seen to be rooted in the positivist perspective. The assumption within such discussion remains that it is knowledge of experts which is primarily at issue, and that such knowledge has to be "passed on" in simplified form to the public or 'ordinary people'. On the other hand, the literature dealing with the importance of social context seems to be informed by an interpretive acknowledgement of the relevance of everyday, lived experience to an understanding of environmental concerns. Again, the valuable role played by the influence of both epistemological traditions to the articulation of debates within this literature becomes apparent.

It is, however, noticeable that the critical perspective is not strongly represented within the debates referred to so far. In the discussion below, it will be demonstrated that this perspective is at least of equal importance to that of positivism and interpretivism in the evaluation of environmental journalism. This becomes apparent when one considers discussions, within the literature, about the more detailed strategies of explanation and critique adopted within environmental journalism.

2.3 Adopting a critical stance

The influence of a more critical perspective on knowledge can be identified in at least one strand of commentary within the literature about environmental journalism. This perspective is not always 'critical' in the sense of being informed by the critical tradition of social research, but points rather to a more general consciousness of the need to scrutinise the credibility of knowledge about the environment. Such consciousness can

be seen in the general claim within this literature that journalists tend to be 'uncritical' of scientific knowledge. It is explained that, for this reason, they are less likely to question their scientific news sources' motives than they would if they were covering business or political beats (Priest 1999, p. 104). They are also thought to have an unquestioning acceptance of dominant scientific views, failing for example to give the same treatment to the knowledge of fringe scientists (Detjen 1997, p. 179; Dunwoody 1999, pp. 70-72). Commentators note that one reason why journalists are not critical of scientists is because they fear losing them as their regular news sources. This is so, they explain, because it is generally the journalists who need the information provided by scientists more than scientists need the public visibility that journalists can provide. This has effectively allowed scientists to set many of the ground rules of their interaction with journalists. Scholars observe that scientists do not hesitate to cut off their functional relations with journalists who displease them (Dunwoody 1993; Nelkin 1995). The literature suggests that journalists should nevertheless engage more critically with all kinds of knowledge and be aware of the power relations that inform their production and circulation. In this respect, scholars emphasise the need for journalists to remain skeptical not only of 'ordinary' people's knowledge about the environment, but also about the claims made by scientists, politicians and industrialists (Priest 1999, pp. 96-105, Stocking 1999, p. 38).

The literature deals with two strategies that journalists should adopt in order to achieve this goal of 'symmetrical' critical engagement with all categories of knowledge. The first concerns the need to assess the validity and reliability of claims made or information provided by news sources. The second strategy calls for the need to make news sources' social interests visible. In their implementation of the first strategy, journalists are urged to evaluate whether the claims made by news sources can be substantiated. It is suggested, for example, that when scrutinizing the truth claims of an example of scientific research, journalists should always ask themselves how they know that these claims are valid. Validity generally refers to the extent to which a concept or a conclusion is well-founded in evidence (Detjen 1997, p.177); Babbie and Mouton 2001, pp. 274-275). It is argued that, in order to engage with this question, journalists need to become generally familiar with the mechanisms that scientific communities employ within their own knowledge production practices (Griffin 1999, p. 227). Other strategic

steps that are recommended in order to scrutinise the truth value of knowledge include an evaluation of the extent to which such claims are acknowledged as credible within the community of expertise in which they located. This comment is applied in particular to scientific communities, since they are seen to pride themselves on having their own internal checking mechanisms, to hold their members to account, such as processes of peer review. It is suggested that journalists should monitor such processes, checking for example whether research findings have been published in a peer-reviewed journal Detjen 1997, p.177; Rensberger 1997, p.7; Rowan 1999, and pp.205-209).

Although such commentary is informed by an argument for critical engagement, it does not, of course, necessarily point to the influence of the critical paradigm of social research. The strategies for critical assessment can be seen to point, rather, to the conceptualisation of the evaluation of scientific knowledge that underpins social research generally. It seems to draw, in particular, on the contention that if the production of scientific knowledge does not meet the requirements of 'good' social research, it is not valid and reliable.

The influence of critical conceptualisation of knowledge can, however, clearly be traced within the second strategy for critical engagement. Here it is argued that journalists need to always critically check the social interests that inform different kinds of knowledge about the environment, and make such interests visible in their coverage of environmental issues. They should, in other words, constantly establish how the interests and agendas of those who speak about the environment influence their knowledge claims (Priest 1999). The suggestion within such commentary is not that the existence of social interest is in itself problematic or that it is possible to have value-free knowledge about the environment. The point is, rather, that there is a need to acknowledge that representations of environmental issues are very often controversial, because people engage with such issues from conflicting social perspectives. This creates the need for journalists to present all knowledge about the environment as having the status of claims rather than that of 'truth' that cannot be challenged.

At the same time, it is also thought to be important not to present environmental controversies or contestations as irresolvable and to avoid framing them in terms of opposite and extreme views. It is, for example, for this reason that reporters are advised

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not to rely too heavily on the views of 'fringe' scientists. They should, rather, present environmental stories in more measured terms, mapping out the perspectives that exist in between the extremes. As part of this, they should attempt to identify interests that people have in common. Journalists should, in other words, map out controversies but should do so in a way that lends itself towards the resolution of conflict (Dunwoody 1999, pp. 70-71; Greenberg 1997, pp100-101; Priest 1999, p.100).

It is possible to trace the influence of a critical perspective within such commentary, both in context of the call upon journalists to make visible the social interests of knowledge production and in the emphasis on constructive negotiation of knowledge claims. There is no doubt that these preoccupations are of great relevance to the conceptualisation of the environmental journalism and of the role that it plays within processes of public deliberation.

Conclusion

This chapter identified, within literature dealing with environmental journalism, a spectrum of approaches to the conceptualisation of knowledge about the environment. It is argued that different approaches to the conceptualisation of journalism about environmental issues are fundamentally informed by particular understandings of the role that knowledge about the environment plays in society. It is proposed, furthermore, that these approaches are variously informed by positivist, interpretivist and critical conceptualisations of knowledge. The discussion therefore identifies the influence of different traditions of social scientific thoughts within this literature. It is concluded that although these approaches have their individual shortcomings, each brings important insights or terms of reference to debates about how environmental knowledge should be produced and circulated to facilitate social progress.

The value of the positivist tradition lies in its acknowledgement of the centrality of scientific knowledge to debates about the environment; its emphasis on the importance of translating such knowledge into simple everyday language and its insistence that scientific knowledge be scrutinised against guidelines for validity and reliability. The value of the interpretive tradition lies in its respect of social knowledge of ordinary people, implying that their views are valuable and also that their inclusion in public

debates about the environment are critical towards the creation of a progressive public deliberation process in society. The value of the critical tradition is located in its interest in exposing the social construction of knowledge, and more particularly the role that social interests play within this.

The study is interested in considering the extent to which journalists, in their understanding of the role they play in covering environmental news, can be seen to position themselves in relation to the spectrum of approaches to knowledge identified in this chapter. The aim is, then, to tease out the implications of such positioning for the way in which journalists understand the role they play, and the strategies they adopt, in covering environmental issues.

In context of the focus of this study, it should be pointed out that the literature discussed in this section tends to assume Western industrial society as its central term of reference, as if this context is of universal significance to debates about the environment. It could be argued that the discussion of strategies of news coverage referred to in this literature is, for this reason, based on the assumption that the environments in which journalism is practised are economically privileged. This represents a key concern that this study explores in the empirical section that follows. One aim of this empirical work is, then, to determine whether the assumptions about social context that inform the literature referred to in this chapter are reproduced in interviews conducted with journalists and editors working within the mainstream press.

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH DESIGN AND EXECUTION

Introduction

This chapter serves to describe the decisions that were made about the design and execution of the research plan for the empirical section of this dissertation. The aim is both to explain the motivations behind the research design and to describe how this plan was then implemented. Section One describes and evaluates the research design decisions, including the methodological positioning, choice of method and design of research instruments. Section Two then deals with the way that this research plan was implemented. It explains the choice of news organisations that interviewees were drawn from and the selection of candidates for interviews. It then reviews the strengths and weaknesses of the fieldwork process. Finally, it reflects on the process of articulating the research findings, i.e. the analysis of interview material and the writing up of these findings in the final chapters of this dissertation. In writing this chapter I have opted, in some instances, to refer to myself in the first person, since I am talking about decisions that I had to make and tasks that I had to carry out.

1.   The research design

1.1 Methodological decisions

Given the aims of this study, I decided to base the research design within a qualitative paradigm. This decision was informed by the argument often cited in research literature that a qualitative research approach allows for rich descriptions of specific social experiences and phenomena (Bryman 1988, p.78; Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p.2; Geertz 1973). Commentators also describe qualitative research as a highly rewarding activity because it allows the researcher to explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world. Through such research, we can learn more about the texture and weave of everyday life, the experiences and imaginings of the people who live these lives, the ways social processes, institutions and relationships work and the significance of the meanings that

they generate. Because of such attributes, qualitative research is understood to have "… unrivalled capacity to constitute compelling arguments about how things work in particular contexts" (Mason 2002). The general argument seems to be, then, that within the qualitative paradigm it becomes possible to establish a clearer, broader and deeper understanding of social life. By locating research within this paradigm, important but not-so-easily noticeable social details are 'magnified', showing their implications for the way we behave or think. In my view, this emphasis on richness of detail and contextual specificity is particularly suited to my study, given its focus on practicing journalists' understanding of environmental issues and the institutional factors that enable or constrain their coverage of these issues.

The study draws, more particularly, on the interpretive tradition of qualitative research because this approach foregrounds the importance of gaining insight into the way that people understand their own social context, without imposing inappropriate conceptual frameworks on them (Babbie and Mouton 2001, p.271; Bryman 1988; Deacon et al. 1999; Geertz, 1973; Bryman 2008, pp.2-3; Moores 1993, p.33; Strelitz 2000, p.112). An interpretive approach creates the opportunity, in other words, for researchers to 'get closer' to research subjects and in this way to attempt to study human action from the perspective of social actors themselves. To adopt such an approach means that even in cases where the participants' understanding of ideal journalism practice differs with mine, I would strive not to impose my own conceptualisations on theirs. Within this tradition, the interpretive emphasis allows the researcher to make a deliberate attempt to put herself or himself in the shoes of the research subjects (Babbie and Mouton 2001, pp. 271-272). This emphasis on the way research subjects understand events and phenomena is of direct relevance to the focus of my study on journalists' understanding of environmental reporting as it exists in the practical context.

In its approach to qualitative research, the study also draws on the critical tradition of social science. It has been argued in Chapter One that critical research is concerned with scrutinising the social interests and relations of power that shape the lived experiences of research subjects (Littlejohn 2002, pp. 208-210). Such an emphasis is of value to this study because it allows for an exploration of the role played by institutional forces in both enabling and limiting journalists in their attempts to democratise debate on

environmental issues. As such, it is of relevance to my intention, noted at the end of Chapter One, to engage not only with the individual ideals of journalists, but also with the way that they experience the material relations that define their work environments.

Reference to the critical tradition also enables me to reflect on the impact that my own research can make as an intervention into the role that a particular group of journalists play in the public discussion of environmental issues. Proponents of the critical tradition contend that there is need for social research to make such interventions, facilitating a process that promotes democratic change (Morrow 1994; Littlejohn 2002, p.230, Blumler 1983, p.85). In designing this study I hoped to achieve this, firstly, by facilitating discussion amongst the journalists taking part in the research process, in a way that would allow them to reflect critically on their own assumptions with regards to the coverage of environmental issues. The interviews and workshops that I aimed to conduct with journalists would, in other words, operate as a space in which they are given the opportunity to articulate their thoughts on the role they play in reporting on environmental issues, and also to challenge assumptions made by their colleagues. My hope was that by the end of this research process, the way that this group of people thinks about environmental journalism might in fact have shifted. It is also because of this critical aspect of the study that I decided to include interviews with newspaper organisation's middle management, particularly editors. In this way, I hoped to facilitate a dialogue between these editors and the journalists whom they are responsible for. With this in mind, I intended to ask the editors included in the study to react to other participants' conceptualisations of environmental journalism practice, both as an ideal and as it exists in practice. In this way I hoped to encourage a flow of ideas between the two groups.

The description, below, of the decisions made around choice of method will demonstrate how I have attempted to maintain this emphasis on both interpretive and critical research aims within this study.

1.2 Choice of Method

1.2.1 A case study approach

One of the first decisions that I made, in designing this study, was that I wanted to make use of a case study of a particular news organisation. I opted for a case study design because this is regarded, within research literature, as an appropriate way of investigating a specific contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin 1994 and Dooley, 2002). This research approach facilitates the sourcing of information about unique phenomena (Babbie and Mouton 2001, p.271; Bryman 1988; Deacon et al 1999, Geertz 1973, Moores 1993, p.33; Strelitz 2000, p. 112). Such an approach can be seen to be of relevance to the study, given its focus on South African environmental journalism practice as a unique phenomenon. It is also of relevance to my study given my emphasis on understanding how particular journalists interpret this world of practice. According to reviewed literature, case studies are also especially suitable for learning more about little known or poorly understood situations or phenomena (Leedy and Ormrod 1985, p. 149). This is of relevance to this particular study, given that very little is known or even written about journalists' understanding of environmental issues, treatment of environmental knowledge and what they consider to be ideal environmental news reporting.

Given that the research question deals with newspaper journalism, my assumption was that the case study would necessarily be that of a newspaper. My original reason for focusing on newspaper journalism was linked to the fact that my own background is in print journalism, specialising in environmental reporting. For this reason, I was interested in finding out how other print journalists understand the coverage of environmental issues. My decision to focus on newspaper journalism was also influenced by the fact that I had access to back copies of Johannesburg-based newspapers that are kept at the GDARD library. Such access provided me with the advantage of being able to easily establish an informed opinion of trends in the coverage of environmental issues in these papers before conducting interviews with the journalists who work for them.

I originally planned to work with a case study exclusively focusing on interviews with general reporters and environmental journalists based at *The Star*. This is a mass-circulated daily newspaper that is widely read by close to one million of South Africans from all classes daily (*The Star*, Website, 2014, viewed 16 February 2014,

www.star.co.za). I considered *The Star* appropriate to this study primarily for reasons of convenience; it is close to my work place, and as such it would be easy for me to travel to and from its offices to interview its journalists and editors. Furthermore, it is described as South Africa's most influential daily newspaper, covering the local, national and international news and sport. It is understood to favour a tolerant democratic society and is highly proactive in its reporting (*The Star*, Website, 2014, viewed 16 February 2014, www.star.co.za). As such, it belongs to the category of so-called 'quality' press (*The Star*, Website, 2014, viewed 16 April 2014, www.star.co.za). Besides the matter of convenience, then, I also chose *The Star* because the paper has a certain status, as a platform that reaches a large audience, and also one that is regarded to be credible (*The Star*, Website, 2014, viewed 16 February 2014, (www.star.co.za).

When I entered into negotiations with *The Star*'s management with regards to research access, it quickly became clear, however, that I would not be able to implement the research design that I had in mind at this paper. The newspaper's management felt strongly that it would be inappropriate for me to talk to their general reporters about journalism that deals with the environment. They explained that they did not see such journalism as being of relevance to the responsibilities of these reporters, and proposed that I only interview specialist 'environmental' journalists. There was, in their opinion, no need to interview general reporters because, as they saw it, their work does not have anything to do with reporting on environmental issues. Subsequent to this, I also approached *The Sunday Times*, to explore the possibility of using this newspaper as the basis of my case study. However, the management of this newspaper echoed *The Star*'s view that it would be inappropriate for me to interview their general reporters, and suggested that my study should instead be focused exclusively on environmental journalists.

To my mind, the approach suggested by the management of *The Star* and *The Sunday Times* would have meant that I would not be able to answer my original research question. An exclusive focus on environmental journalists would mean, firstly, that it would not be possible for the study to explore the relationship between environmental journalism as a specialised 'beat', and the coverage of environmental issues within the more general content of newspapers. Such a shift in focus would also mean that I would

need to change my original plan of focusing on journalists working within a particular paper because there are very few specialist environmental journalists in South Africa who work exclusively for one newspaper.

My interaction with one of the freelance environmental journalists who regularly files stories to *The Star* provided me with important insights with regards to principles that I needed to keep in mind in the design of this study. This journalist reacted against *The Star*'s argument that the general content of newspapers has nothing to do with the coverage of environmental issues. For this reason, she disagreed with the view that my research should exclusively focus on journalists who specialise in environmental reporting. She argued that if I did want to interview journalists, I should focus on all reporters, regardless of what they specialise in. She also thought that a better project would be to interview South African editors and news editors, focusing on their general understanding of environmental issues. Her argument was that these editors operate as 'gatekeepers', who "…set the news agenda, set the tone of the paper, decide on content and decide on the priority each story gets on a daily basis" (Personal communication; Beukes 2012). As such, she saw their conceptualisation of journalism about the environment to be of greater relevance than that of the specialists environmental journalists who work for them.

As I see it, the assumption by the editorial leadership of *The Star* and *The Sunday Times* that environmental news is an exclusive beat for environmental journalists and that such journalists would be the only 'appropriate' candidates for my interviews is significant to my study. The implication of this understanding is that discussion of the environment is not of fundamental relevance to the socioeconomic issues that general reporters cover. This understanding brings to mind the comment, referred to in the literature reviewed in the previous chapter, that journalists have a tendency to de-link environmental issues from socioeconomic issues. It would seem that this distinction is reproduced at the level of editorial leadership within The *Star* and *The Sunday Times*. In my view, this is not a distinction that I should be reproducing through this research project.

In making sense of these newspapers' reluctance to have their general reporters interviewed, I also considered the fact that they may have been concerned about the

implications of my research for the papers' public image. My conclusion was, in particular, that the management of these newspapers was concerned that I might criticise reporters' conceptualisation of environmental issues.

I decided, in response to these concerns, to include more than one newspaper in the design of my study. I hoped, in this way, to make clear to all stakeholders that my intention was not to single out any one organisation for special critique. Secondly, I decided to interview not only general reporters but also news editors and editors based at these papers. My reasoning was that this would add an important dimension to the study, since it would allow me to engage better with the role played by editorial staff in framing the conceptualisation of journalism about the environment at such papers. It would also enable me to engage better with issues of organisational context, which form a backdrop to the reporters' work. Thirdly, I decided to include another tier of research, focusing on environmental journalists working in different parts of South Africa, writing for a range of newspapers. This decision was based on the observation, as noted above, that there are, in fact, relatively few such specialist environmental reporters who work exclusively for one particular newspaper.

The resulting research plan was based in a multiple case design, which includes two separate foci. The first focus is represented by a review of perspectives on journalism about environmental issues as articulated by general reporters and editors working at three different newspapers, based in the same geographical area. The second focus deals with the experiences of specialised environmental journalists based in different parts of South Africa, and includes both those journalists who work full-time for particular papers and those who do freelance work, writing for a range of South African newspapers. Here, the cases are represented by the individual journalists. The use of this multiple case studies design is of value to my research project because it allows me to draw comparisons between the experiences and perspectives of three very different groups of journalists involved in the coverage of environmental issues - that of general reporters, environmental journalists and editors.

Given that *The Star* and *The Sunday Times* had specifically requested that I do not interview their general reporters, I decided to exclude them from this study. I opted, instead, to focus for the first part of the study on journalists and editors based at *The Mail*

and Guardian and *the City Press.* I came up with this alternative, hoping that the management of these newspapers would permit me to interview their reporters as well as their editors. These papers share certain characteristics, in that they are all based in the same immediate geographical area and cover issues of national significance, given that they all have a national circulation. All three papers are also widely read by millions of South Africans from all classes and belong to the category of 'quality' press that cover issues of national relevance (*The Mail and Guardian* Website *2014; the City Press* Website, 16 February 2014; *The Citizen* Website, *2014*). The newspapers were also chosen because it was convenient to be able to work with papers that are based in the same geographical area as the one in which I work.

In choosing these papers, I kept in mind guidelines for social research which stipulate that the selection process may not be skewed by the personal preferences or hunches of the researcher (Hansen et al 1998, p.103). I was also conscious that the newspapers that I selected needed to be theoretically appropriate to my study. It is recommended, in guidelines for media research that in order to choose a theoretically appropriate newspaper for a given study one needs to consider a range of factors. These include geographical reach (national versus regional reach), audience size (mass versus minority) as well as content characteristics of a newspaper, for example, tabloid versus quality press (Hansen et al 1998, p.103). I avoided selecting tabloid newspapers and instead focused on 'quality press', because such journalism tends to present itself as more credible in its coverage of news. It also claims to play a more measured role within processes of public deliberation. Such claims are relevant to my research, given that I am interested in the role that journalism about the environment plays within public debates about environmental issues.

1.2.2 Qualitative interviews

As has been indicated above, the study draws on qualitative interviews. This method of fieldwork is appropriate to this study because it lends itself to research that is concerned with finding out the research subjects' personal understanding of their own world (Lunt and Livingstone 1996, p. 79). Such concerns are of relevance to my research, given my interest in the personal views of journalists with regards to the coverage of environmental

issues. I decided, more particularly, that the field research would be done through focus group interviews with the general reporters and individual interviews with the environmental journalists and editors.

Focus group interviews bring together a group of individuals to discuss an issue in the presence of a moderator (Lunt and Livingstone 1996, p.80). One of the most commonly cited advantages of such interviews is that they can provide valid and rich information that engages the subjects fully on a given topic (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996:89). It is argued that the particular strength of such interviews lies in their potential to encourage participants to feel free to express their views (Khan and Manderson 1992, p. 57). The conversations that take place within focus groups also provide researchers with the opportunity to observe how people negotiate the meanings that they read into a discussion topic. The group interview approach also generates a diversity of perspectives on how different groups actively create meanings (Fraser 1990; Philo 1993; Hiemstra 1983, p. 807; quoted in (Lunt 1996). I understood that the focus group interviews would give me the opportunity to observe participants engaging in interactive debates. I might even, perhaps, be able to see how journalists reposition themselves after comparing what they consider to be ideal environmental journalism practice with their past and current journalism practices.

Literature about social research suggests that individual interviews allow the researcher to engage with participants under conditions that are less pressurised than that of the focus group, because of the absence of complex group dynamics. It is also argued that certain participants might be able to speak more freely within the context of an individual interview and that the interviewer is able to give the participant undivided attention (Hoiijer 1990, p.34). Like focus groups, individual interviews also lend themselves to the generation of detailed fieldwork material, but for different reasons. It is of particular value in capturing such detail when one is concerned with finding out the research subjects' personal understanding of their own world (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996, p.79). In context of such an interview, the participant can speak for a long time, enjoying the researcher's undivided attention and without being interrupted as happens in group interviews. My decision to conduct individual interviews with the specialist environmental reporters and editors was informed by these arguments. My sense was that

in the interviews with the specialist reporters, I would have the opportunity to discuss the research topic at a more complex level than my interaction with general reporters, and thus individual interviews allowed me to optimise this opportunity. In the case of the editors, it was imperative that they participate in the research without any sense of self-censorship, in order to articulate their response to the issues fully and thoughtfully, and again, the individual interview seemed best able to ensure this.

I also decided to conduct aspects of the field research in a particular order, starting with the focus group interviews with general reporters, followed by the interviews with environmental journalists and then ending up with the interviews with the editors. In this way, I would create an opportunity to share with the editors some of my discussions with the general reporters and environmental journalists, and could then ask them to comment on this. I purposefully arranged the interviews following this sequence, in order to facilitate and ensure the collection of useful research material that would help me to answer the research question meaningfully.

1. 3   Designing the fieldwork process

1.3.1 Meeting the guidelines for credible social research

In planning the fieldwork I had to ensure that I was guided by the ethical requirements for social research. It is recommended in literature that the researcher needs to ensure that selected interviewees would be willing to participate in interviews and able to provide information sought (Hansen et al 1998, p. 264; Babbie 1992, p. 148). As I understood it, one of the main ethical considerations that need to be kept in mind, in this context, is the establishment of informed consent. Gaining informed consent is a procedure that aims to uphold the principle of individual autonomy and is widely agreed to be a safeguard for rights of human subjects to participate in research knowingly and voluntarily. The aim is to ensure that the participants are able to decide for themselves what their best interest is and what risks they are prepared to take within the context of the research (Ali and Kelly 2004, p.121). In order for this requirement to be met, the potential risks need to be explained in appropriate detail and in a way that participants fully understand. Participants should, as part of this process, be given enough information about the research without overwhelming them with details and specialist jargon. Ideally, a written

consent form should be provided, signed by both the participant and researcher (Searle, 2004, p.121). I responded to these guidelines by drafting an interview contract, to be presented and discussed with participants (see Appendices). The aim was then for each research participant, as well as myself, to sign these contracts before the interviews could take place.

I also attempted to ensure, in my design of the fieldwork process that I responded to principles of privacy and confidentiality. The literature suggests that invasion of privacy can be considered harmful to research participants. Both foreseeable and unforeseeable problems may arise from unwitting disclosure of personal information and the researcher has the duty to protect participants from this (Kelman, 1982). To help ensure anonymity I decided to provide participants with pseudonyms. I also committed myself to ensuring that research material would be securely stored, as recommended in the literature (Ali and Kelly 2004, p.121).

I was conscious, however, that these measures might not be sufficient for ensuring anonymity, given the particular challenges associated with the group of research participants with which this project is concerned. South African journalists belong to a relatively small community of practice, and one in which the individual members are easily distinguishable. The high public profile of some of these individuals, especially in the case of editors and specialised environmental journalists, makes it difficult to maintain confidentiality, even if pseudonyms are used. Accordingly, I factored enough time into the interview schedules to be able to discuss this matter with participants, so that they would enter into the research contract with consciousness of the difficulties that exist around the guarantee of their anonymity (see Appendix II). I took note, in particular, that I would need to explain to the participants that the use of pseudonyms could not safeguard them completely as their high profiles and the comments they make might make some readers identify who they are. I considered it important that research participants should decide to participate in the research knowing the risks of exposure.

Questions relating to validity were also kept in mind in my approach to the design of the fieldwork process. The literature suggests that validity is ensured through systematic collection and interpretation of information, which helps to ensure that the information gathered, is in fact of relevance to the original research question. Research

can be valid without generalising information to other groups, or quantifying the results of the research into an overall truth (Leedy and Ormrod 1985, p.153). In this study the aim is not to generalise the findings to all South African journalists but rather to gain insight into the understandings that existed amongst the groups of journalists studied. My efforts to ensure validity therefore concentrated on the formulation of an interview guide that could be used systematically with each group, and with the articulation of coherent guidelines for the analysis of the resulting research material.

The literature also recommends that group size is important in determining the quality of the resulting discussion, with consensus that 6-10 participants work best (Lunt and Livingstone 1996, p.96). However, in the context of this research that involves journalists who are busy professionals and not always readily available for interviews, I anticipated that it would be difficult to get 6-10 journalists working for the same newspaper to participate in a focus group interview. In view of this challenge, I decided on a group interview size of 3-4 people. Commentators also recommend that one should continue to run new group interviews until the last new group has nothing to add, but merely repeats previous contributions (Lunt and Livingstone 1996, p.83). In response to this requirement, I planned to run a series of group interviews with journalists from the two newspapers that I had selected as part of my case study.

1.3.2   The formulation of questions for interviews

When formulating interview questions, one needs to keep in mind that they must solicit responses that help to answer the research question. For a qualitative study, the literature also suggests that questions must facilitate answers based on people's beliefs, feelings and motives. It is suggested, furthermore, that questions should encourage respondents to talk about their present and past behaviours, their standard behaviours, and what people think should be done in certain situations. Research subjects should also be prompted to give information on their conscious reasons for actions or feelings – by commenting for example on why they think engaging in a particular behaviour is desirable or undesirable (Silverman 1993). I kept these principles in mind in my formulation of questions for the focus groups an individual interviews. My interview guides were designed to prompt participants to speak about , their conceptualisations of environmental issues, what they

personally feel should be an ideal approach towards environmental news coverage and whether or not they consider that their newspapers measure up to these requirements. The resulting interview guides are available in the appendices to the study (see Appendices).

It is also pointed out in the literature that when one asks about past events and behaviours, the interviewees must rely on their memories and that, because of this, their answers are not always accurate. The literature suggests, in fact, that human memory is notoriously inaccurate (see Ormrod 1999). This point is of relevance to my study because my questions focused, for example, on how journalists personally make sense of environmental issues, and on their personal experiences of reporting on such issues. The literature suggests that, in such instances, the interviewer should focus on the 'actual' rather than on the abstract (Leedy and Ormrod 1985, p.160). I therefore kept in mind, in the formulation of my interview questions, the need to focus on the 'actual' and concrete. I was also conscious of the need, during my interviews, to prompt participants to consider particular examples in demonstration of general points.

I organised the interview guides so that related questions were grouped together under themes, and these themes were ordered so that the resulting discussion could unfold logically. One theme was represented by a discussion of participants' own experience of journalistic practice, particularly in the context of coverage of environmental issues. A second focused on their understanding of what is meant by an 'environmental' issue, and their view of the role that journalism should play in covering such issues. A third dealt with their experience of the challenges and opportunities involved in putting into practice their beliefs with regards to the role that journalism should play in this regard. A fourth theme focused on editorial guidelines for coverage of the environment.

The themes that I used for the interviews with editors were similar to those for journalists. At the same time, I included further questions about the strategies that both journalists and editors use to encourage the kind of environmental journalism that they personally believe in *(see Appendix 2)*. However, this does not mean that I planned to stop journalists from expressing their views around such themes if they were to raise them during the interview process.

It is suggested in literature about social research that pre-testing interview guides creates an opportunity to assess the clarity of questions, to check that respondents understand and answer the questions asked and to ensure that the interview flows in an efficient and purposeful manner. Pre-testing can help address many of the potential difficulties which the researcher, who is bound up intimately with the subject cannot always anticipate (Hansen et al, 1998 p.247). I therefore planned to pre-test the interview guides, in order to ensure that the questions would solicit for the desired answers the research question. In this way, I would be able to identify questions that produced unintended responses, and therefore in need of rephrasing, in order to solicit responses that answered the research question.

1.3.3   *The role of the research facilitator and of the research venues*

According to literature dealing with focus group interviews, the role of a moderator is to facilitate a discussion that encourages active involvement of all interviewees, in order to elicit responses that help answer the research question. He or she should be flexible, objective, empathic, and persuasive and listen carefully to the participants (Fontana and Frey, 1994 p.365). The moderator should not agree or disagree with research participants' contributions and should also ensure that all participants take part in the discussions (Deacon et al, 1999). In order to ensure that I would be able to play such a role, I kept the core questions in the focus group guide to a minimum, and factored in enough time for the discussion of follow-up questions. In this way I hoped, firstly, to ensure that I would be able to manage the dynamics of the group being interviewed. It would allow me, as stipulated in the literature, to simultaneously take responsibility for ensuring that all questions stated in the interview guide are answered, while at the same time allowing for diversions in order to remain sensitive to evolving patterns of group interviews (Fontana and Frey, 1994 p. 365). This interview approach would give me time to ask the interviewees to explain in detail some unclear answers and those that may need further explanation.

The decision to keep to a short list of core questions and factoring enough time for discussion would also allow me to respond to the recommendation, in the literature, that the moderator must stop one person or a small group from dominating the discussion.

Second, it would enable me to ensure that I would be able to encourage inactive participants to get involved in discussions. In this way, I could be sure to obtain responses from the entire group, to ensure fullest possible coverage of the research topic (Babbie and Mouton 2004; Deacon et al 1999; Fontana and Frey, 1994 p. 365).

It is also noted, in literature, that research venues play a role in determining the enthusiasm and participation of research subjects and in turn, the amount of information that they can give. It is argued that the most conducive setting for both focus group and individual interviews would be under conditions that are familiar to participants (Deacon et al, 1999; Fontana and Frey 1994, p.365; Schroder et al. 2003, p. 143). For this particular study, I assumed that the ideal venue would be at journalists and editor's workplaces. My assumption was that the journalists would appreciate not being taken away from their work space, because travelling to and from an out-of-office meeting place would take time. At the same time, I anticipated that some of the participants might feel tempted to step out of the meeting to deal with urgent business in the newsroom. My assessment was, nevertheless, that such dynamics would be easier to manage than some of the difficulties likely to arise when interviews are conducted away from the work place.

1.4   Analysing the interview material and writing up the research findings

The analysis of research material involves decisions about which lines of analysis to pursue and which to put to one side. The researcher's choice not to go down particular routes may have ethical implications because decisions made at this stage may give undue prominence to the contributions of some people while excluding other points of view. The production of knowledge through the analysis of fieldwork material has, therefore, to be understood to be guided by ethical considerations (Ali and Kelly quoted in Seale, 2004 p. 124).

I planned to be methodical in the process of first identifying themes and patterns emerging within the interviews, so that I could be satisfied that I understood what people were telling me. I also knew that I would need to ensure that I had done justice to the material, in identifying the different ways in which participants positioned themselves in relation to the conceptualisation of knowledge about the environment. I recognised that,

in order to achieve these goals, my approach to the analysis would need to be influenced by the interpretive tradition. I would, in particular, need to remain conscious that the analysis is based on how journalists and not the researcher personally conceptualise of environmental issues.

I also recognised that, my analysis of research information, I would need to be mindful of the need to present "oppositional accounts" without "producing one-sided accounts" (Song 1998; Seale 2004, p. 125). This ethical guideline is important to this study particularly when it comes to analysing oppositional responses that arose from my facilitation of interactive debates between the reporters and editors and also those between environmental journalists and general reporters. The analysis of these responses should as much as possible balance views that came from all research participants. In line with Song's (1998) call for a balance presentation of research participants' views, I decided to provide the same amount of space to the oppositional responses, in order to avoid giving the impression that responses from a particular side carried more weight or were more important.

I understood that there would be a need to tease out common themes that would emerge from the different interview responses. This resonates with the recommendation in literature that the central task during analysis of research information is to identify common themes in people's descriptions of their experiences (Barrit 1986). I hoped that the identification of themes would then help me to present an overall description of how the research participants typically and personally understand and cover environmental issues as well as what they consider to be ideal environmental news reporting. By following all of these guidelines, I hoped that the final result would meet what I understand to be one of the fundamental requirements of a qualitative study of a social phenomenon: that it should give a description of the situation which as closely as possible approximates the views of the people who have experienced it firsthand (Babbie and Mouton 2001, p.271; Bryman1984; Deacon et al 1999; Geertz 1973, Bryman 2008, pp.2-3, Moores 1993 p.33).

2.   Implementing the design decisions

This section describes how all aspects of the research were implemented in practice. It focuses on how each of the decisions made was interpreted and how the final process ended up differing from the original plan.

2.1   The implementation of the fieldwork

In practice, I only conducted one focus-group interview, with journalists from *The Mail & Guardian*. My original intent, as noted in the previous section, had been to conduct two or more focus groups, with journalists from the *City Press* and *The Citizen* respectively. This was, however, not possible, due to logistical problems and time constraints. I also did not reach my intended target for the number of participants included in this focus group; whereas I had wanted to include at least seven journalists, I ended up with a group of three. According to reviewed literature, it is acceptable to interview three people in a focus group interview. In Morely 1980's most cited focus group interviews-based media research he set three as the minimum number of people he could interview and 13 as the maximum number. Also see (Lunt 1996, p.84) who makes reference to Morley's media study, citing 3-13 people as an acceptable range of people who can be interview in focus group interviews.

I was, nevertheless, able to generate far richer material than I had expected from this one focus group. The journalists seemed very interested in the questions I posed to them, and indicated that they wished to continue our discussion long past the allotted time. For this reason the interview lasted for almost two hours, much longer than the 45 minutes that I had prepared for. The fact that I was not able to work with the ideal group size recommended in literature also did seem to stop the interview from generating diverse and nuanced debate. My sense was that the journalists' responses contributed significantly to answering the research question for this study. I took note that it is accepted in research literature that what matters is quality of information rather than the number of people interviewed. Based on this argument, I concluded that the presence of only three individuals within this focus group could be regarded as acceptable. I decided that, together with the one-on-one individual interviews discussed below, the focus group

with the *Mail & Guardian* journalists provided me with enough field material to make further focus groups unnecessary.

It is also my judgement that, in line with what I had originally planned and what is recommended in literature, I was successful in ensuring that no one dominated the focus group discussion or imposed their views on others. In my estimation, participants were given enough time to express their views. This opportunity allowed me to gain insight into the participants' conceptualisation of environmental journalism, both as an ideal and as it exists in practice.

In my view, the individual interviews were also successfully conducted. I interviewed four environmental journalists, five editors and five general reporters. I was able, to my mind, to ensure that the participants were treated with respect and not made to act against their wishes. Before the interviews, participants were given the choice to decide where and when they would like to interviewed. They were also asked to choose an interview venue that they were familiar with and where they would be able discuss the research questions freely. Each participant was also asked if they fully understood the contents of the research contract and signed it before the interview. During the interviews. It was clear to me that the participants understood the questions and that they were able, as a result, to give responses that contributed towards answering the research question. As per the original plan, all participants were asked the same research questions, in the same order. In my observation, they were allowed to respond freely, sharing their personal conceptualisations of the current status of environmental journalism practice and what it ought to be. To ensure accurate presentation of their views at a later stage in the research process, their answers were recorded on both cell phone and a voice cassette recorder. Despite having failed to follow the original plan for the interviews, I was still able to generate the anticipated interview material that helped answer the research question. I did not follow my original plan of conducting a focus group interview with reporters before the interviews with editors at *The City Press.* The reason for this was that the general reporters based at this newspaper could not participate in one interview at the same time, due to pressure of work. Instead, I conducted individual interviews with these journalists. These interviews, and my interviews with environmental journalists at this paper, took

place before those that I conducted with the editors, as per my original plan. I have noted in Section One of this chapter that, by following this sequence, I hoped to create an opportunity to share with the editors some of the discussions that I would have with the general reporters and environmental journalists. This sequence of conducting interviews did, indeed, help me to achieve my original aim of giving editors a chance to react to the two groups of reporters' comments.

Fortunately, at *The Mail and Guardian,* I was able to precede editors' interviews with a group interview of general reporters from that paper. This approach again enabled me to share with *The Mail and Guardian* editors, the views of the general reporters. The editors reacted to these views in ways that significantly helped me to make sense of these three groups of journalists' conceptualisations of environmental journalism. It enabled me, for example, to ascertain whether editors and journalists share the same conceptualisation of the ideal nature and purpose of journalism about the environment. In my view, it also facilitated a flow of ideas between the editors, general reporters and environmental reporters both regards to these ideals and their implementation in practice.

In comparing the focus group to the individual interviews, it was my observation that, within the latter contexts, participants had more time to answer questions. This enabled them to share detailed perspectives. I was consequently able to explore in more detail the journalists' and editors' unique conceptualisations of the environment and of environmental journalism. The participants were also willing to talk openly about what they regarded as weaknesses in their reporting practices, and the degree to which they felt prepared for such practice.

During both individual and group interviews, I observed that participants exhibited a shift in thinking as soon as they started drawing comparison between what they conceptualised as ideal environmental reporting and their past and current practice of such journalism. It was my impression that the interviews created an opportunity for the journalists to stand outside the world of environmental journalism practice in order to look into it critically as outsiders. This often seemed to lead them to conclude that there were flaws within the approach that they were using to cover environmental news. Furthermore; they were able, in this way, to identify not only individual weaknesses, but

also the social and institutional constraints that continue to limit them from achieving what they consider as ideal environmental journalism practice.

2.2   How the analysis and writing up of the research worked out in practice

Throughout the analysis of the findings, I kept in mind the guiding principle of interpretive research which, as I understand it, is to try to come to as clear an understanding as possible of what the participants were communicating to me, based on their lived experiences within the South African press. Secondly, I also compared their conceptualisations with those of journalism academics cited in reviewed literature, arising from their academic studies of different newspapers. The aim was to compare these two kinds of discussions and to consider the kinds of contributions that each can be said to make to understanding of the contribution that journalism can make to public deliberation.

I started by identifying broad themes that emerged within the discussion, with regards to definition of the environment and the importance of public deliberation. This included exploring how participants make sense of public deliberation around environmental issues, of the social purpose of journalism about the environment. These themes are discussed in Chapter Three. I also looked at the way the participants assess South African journalism about environmental issues, the environments in which such journalism is produced, and strategies to improve such journalism. My discussion of these themes is covered in Chapter Four.

Within my discussion of each of these themes, I looked at ways the different comments can be located in relation to the spectrum of approaches, described in Chapter One, to the conceptualisation of knowledge. I then also considered how the way in which participants located themselves in relation to this spectrum can be seen to echo similar patterns of positioning that emerged in the environmental journalism literature. I also analysed the extent to which environmental and general journalists differed or shared the same conceptualisation of ideal environmental journalism practice.

A comparative analysis of the participants' discussions with those of the journalism academics was used in order to tease out the terms of reference that the two groups bring to the conceptualisation and evaluation of journalism about the

environment. As recommended in literature, I was able to balance oppositional views, in order to avoid being biased towards a particular group's views.

Conclusion

In reviewing the above discussion of the conceptualisation and implementation of my research plan, I conclude that I have been successful in producing a study that is both valid and reliable. Although I was not able to follow all aspects of the original research plan, the fieldwork process was nevertheless successful. I was able to source rich responses that helped me, in the process of analysis, to answer the research question based on the perspectives of participants whose social experiences this study seeks to understand.

CHAPTER THREE

THE RESEARCH FINDINGS PART I: CONCEPTUALISING THE IDEAL

Introduction

This is the first of two chapters which describe and discuss the participants' contributions to the research process. This chapter focuses on the participants' conceptualisations of journalism about the environment as it should ideally exist. Chapter Four then discusses participants' evaluation of the extent to which these ideals are being put into practice within their own work context. Both chapters conclude by pointing out how different statements made by the participants can be located within the spectrum of approaches to the conceptualisation of knowledge described in Chapter One. The way that participants locate themselves within this spectrum is also compared to the patterns that emerged, in this respect, in context of the studies of journalism about the environment reviewed in Chapter One. Through this comparison, I explore the extent to which approaches to the conceptualisation of knowledge can be seen to determine the way in which journalism about the environment is discussed, both within academic and journalistic environments.

The discussion that follows in this chapter focuses on the participants' understanding of the role that journalism about the environment should ideally play in society. Section One describes the way they define the term 'environment'. As part of this, it teases out their conceptualisation of human beings' relationship to the environment and their understanding of what it means for society to have a responsibility towards the environment. Section Two also looks at the way that the participants make sense of the nature and purpose of processes of public deliberation around environmental issues. Section Three deals with participants' understanding of the ideal social purpose of environmental journalism. As part of this, it teases out their understanding of the roles that journalists should ideally play in producing such journalism. Within all three sections, attention is paid to the kind of statements made by editors, general reporters and environmental journalists, respectively.

1. Definitions of the environment and the importance of public deliberation

A careful scrutiny of the way in which the participants define the environment shows evidence that many of them understand public deliberation about environmental issues to be of central importance to society. The general reporters, environmental journalists and editors all tend to argue that the term 'environment', as it is used in everyday speech, is understood to mean 'the environment of human beings'. It is in such terms, for example, that environmental journalist Daniel Matthews[2] defines the term:

> The broadest definition is one that talks about the environment as involving any kind of interaction between humans and the natural world in whatever form (Matthews 2012, p. 1).

Lesego Vilakazi, who works as a general reporter, also describes the environment in terms of an interactive relationship between the 'natural' world and human beings:

> The environment is where we live. For me it is more about the planet earth and how we relate to plants and animals (Vilakazi 2012, p. 1).

The participants also generally explain that the environment tends to be discussed, in public debate, in terms of its value to human beings – particularly in context of the resources that it provides that can help to ensure their quality of life. The term is, in other words, closely associated with the recognition that the resources that the environment provides such as water, clean air, and living space are crucial to the survival of human society. General reporter James Mbata describes how the environment is understood to operate in the service of human need:

> The environment is the natural environment in which human beings operate – the air we breathe and the soil, the water we drink, that all-encompassing biosphere ... (Mbata 2012, p. 1).

Likewise, Angela Raaths, an environmental journalist, explains that the concept of 'environment' is defined by the role that it plays in ensuring the survival of human beings:

> The environment is the place where humans live. It is the world around us. It is basically the space in which humans survive (Raaths 2012, p. 1).

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[2] As explained in Chapter Two, all of the names of individuals who participated in this study have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Samatha Beukes, who also specialises in environmental journalism, similarly emphasises that the environment is defined by its importance to humans:

> Without the environment people would not survive and it is the source of our livelihoods (Beukes 2012, p. 1).

The three groups of participants (editors, general reporters and environmental journalists) all point out, through such comments, that within everyday understanding; the environment is generally conceptualised as humanity's life-support system.

A second point that many of the participants make about the way that the term 'environment' is used in everyday speech is that such usage is generally informed by different understandings of the relationship between the 'social' and the 'natural'. For instance, Jacqueline Bizos, editor of the *City Press*, argues that the word 'environment' is generally understood to refer to 'nature', conceived of as a domain separate from that of human beings:

> ...the environment has become widely accepted as a standard way to refer to the natural world, excluding humans (Bizos 2012, p. 1).

Some of the participants suggest that the dualistic opposition between the natural and the social, within this understanding of the environment, can be challenged. This position is articulated, firstly, by those participants who work as environmental journalists. Diana Muller, for example, points to an alternative conceptualisation in which this opposition falls away:

> Depending on what school of thought you subscribe to, you may even say that the human environment – that is anything built by humans – is also a part of the environment (Muller 2012, p. 2).

Matthews seems to subscribe to an extreme version of this conceptualisation, explaining that the term 'environment' is very broad and could mean many things:

> In fact I don't have a direct definition that would exclude anything from the environment (Matthews 2012, p. 1).

It would seem, however, that it is not only the environmental journalists who assume that the environment includes both human-made and natural surroundings. This is, for example, also a perception that is shared by general reporter Peter Daniels:

> The environment is all that is around us, even in the city that is your environment. I think it is narrow to say it is only about nature (Daniels 2012, p. 1).

Daniels suggests, here, that this conceptualisation is preferable to one in which the environment is equated with the natural and placed in opposition to the social, because it allows for a more inclusive and fluid way of thinking about our relationship with the world that surrounds us. General reporter Mandla Zulu also shares the view that the word 'environment' refers to more than 'nature':

> I used to think it is about fauna and flora only but my knowledge later expanded beyond that (Zulu 2012, p. 2).

It would seem, then, that many of the participants – whether from the position of editor, general reporter or environmental journalist – identify with an understanding of the environment which challenges the simple opposition of the social and the natural, and suggest that this understanding is the 'better' one. This emphasis on fluidity and interconnectivity signals that the environment does not exist separately from human concerns.

It is, thirdly, possible to identify different approaches amongst the participants with regards to human beings' responsibility towards caring for the environment. Some participants see such responsibility as stemming from the fact that, if we do not look after the environment, we place the survival of human society in jeopardy. From this perspective, responsibility is understood to stem, again, from the importance of the environment to human beings:

> South Africa … has a huge responsibility to look after its biodiversity because we are dependent on a lot of plant and animal species that are of great value to our livelihoods (Matthews 2012, p. 2).

The participants then also point out that, within public discourse, there are different approaches to what 'taking responsibility' might mean. One approach places the emphasis on individual lifestyle, while a second is concerned with the role that social institutions should play in taking responsibility. In both cases, there is a strong emphasis on the need for such responsibility to be publically acknowledged. The extent to which participants foreground either individual or collective responsibility does not appear to be depend on their status as editors, general reporters or environmental journalists. Dianna

Muller, for example, who is an environmental journalist, places an emphasis on the 'individualised' conception of responsibility:

> Green issues have widely evolved into popular use as referring to lifestyle issues. For example, how green are you? (Muller 2012, p. 3).

On the other hand, Raaths, also speaking as an environmental journalist, foregrounds debates that stress the need for an acknowledgement of society's collective responsibility towards the environment:

> To reflect on the policies and government's attitude to challenges and about the positive things about state of the environment and about how we as the society are dealing with the environment (Raaths 2012, p. 1).

At the same time, despite their difference in approach to this issue, these two participants can be seen to share certain assumptions about the requirements that need to be in place if human beings are to take responsibility for their environment. Within both the quotations presented above, it is possible to identify an emphasis on the importance of reflection, in which the need for responsibility is confronted.

The participants speak, fourthly, about the way they conceptualise of the ways in which human beings make an impact on the environment. Here the suggestion seems to be that the issues that we deliberate about when talking about the environment inevitably involve the discussion of such interaction. It is, for example, in such terms that Muller, an environmental journalist, defines the topics of such debate:

> Environmental issues refer to the natural world plus anything that impacts on it is that mining or the active conservation of species (Muller 2012, p.3).

When they discuss environmental impact, editors, general reporters and environmental journalists all tend to foreground the significance of the systemic conceptualisation of responsibility referred to above. Impact on the environment is then often equated with the destructive effect of economic activity and also with systemic corruption, both within business and in government. The suggestion is that the relationship between humans and their environment can be described primarily in terms of the way in which human activity can damage the environment. The focus is, furthermore, on the role that economic activity plays in this respect.

The examples that the participants provide with regards to the damage caused by economic activity give some indication of their conceptualisation of environmental impact. Repeated reference is made, in this context, to the impact of pollution and a key example of economic activity that contaminates the environment in this way is understood to be that of mining. General reporter Vilakazi observes, for example, that the oil mining industry is threatening the stability both of the earth's atmosphere and of water as a resource for human survival:

> ...the oil that we mine damages the environment through global warming ... the impact of mining through pollution of water resources from where people's livestock and people themselves drink and use the same polluted water for irrigation (Vilakazi 2012, p. 1).

Another general reporter also identifies the impact of unprincipled industrial practices on land pollution as a form of environmental damage:

> Businesspeople irresponsibly dump medical wastes and body parts on dumpsites, putting the lives of residents at risk (Daniels 2012, p. 1).

One of the editors, Hudson Williams suggests that systemic human interaction with the environment results in negative impact:

> That varies from pollution through to social issues; it has to do with how people are using natural resources (Williams 2012, p.1).

A number of the participants also argue that business practices that are damaging to the environment often continue even when it has become publicly accepted that they should be curtailed. Regulations that prohibit such practices tend to be ignored, and it is suggested that this occurs because of corruption amongst the stakeholders involved. Such corruption is understood to apply not only to businesspeople, but also to civil servants working within the systems of government. Daniels (2012), from the perspective of a general reporter, explains for example that there are in fact regulations in place that prohibit the dumping of medical waste. He argues that the breaching of these guidelines occurs because of dishonesty in the process of awarding tenders. In this instance, environmental destruction is linked to corruption and greed that leaves both the people and the environment to suffer.

The discussion in this section has mapped out the way the research participants conceptualise the environment. It is possible to observe, within this discussion, that the

participants locate themselves in different ways in relation to the paradigms of knowledge discussed in Chapter One. There are, for example, instances in which some of the participants appear to express consciousness of the limitations of positivism in making sense of the questions that were dealt with in the interview process. As we have seen, some of the participants assert that the 'environment' is located in the sphere of the 'natural', which stands over and against the 'social'. At the same time, other participants define the term 'environment' in a way that challenges the idea of a separation between the social and the natural. This approach can be seen to resist some of the basic assumptions of positivism.

In the next section, it will be demonstrated that the participants can, furthermore, be observed to make reference to approaches to knowledge that represent alternative paradigms to that of positivism. This can be seen, firstly, in those instances in which the participants' argue for the importance, within processes of public deliberation, of 'ordinary' people's experience of environmental concerns. This emphasis can be seen to point to the influence of an interpretive framework, in which such insight into ordinary people's experience is regarded as an important knowledge resource. It is, similarly, also possible to see examples of 'critical' conceptualisations of knowledge about the environment. This can be seen, in particular, in discussions of the role that the circulation of such knowledge can play in exposing instances in which people in positions of power are guilty of damaging the environment. In this context, many of the participants acknowledge the role that conflict of interest and relations of power play in the construction of knowledge about the environment. Again, such paradigmatic positions are not expressed by one particular group of participants, but are instead shared within the group as a whole.

2.   How participants make sense of public deliberation around the environment

When the participants speak about the way society deliberates on environmental issues, it is possible to identify aspects of a critical conceptualisation of knowledge about the environment. This can be seen; firstly, in the extent to which all three groups of participants acknowledge the role that conflict of interest can play within processes of deliberation. The environmental journalists, editors and general reporters all appear to

understand stakeholders in public deliberations around environmental issues to include interest groups from different sections of society. They explain that these groups represent conflicting environmental interests at community, national, regional and international levels. Furthermore, such groups are understood often to take up contesting positions within debates about the environment. The general suggestion seems to be that, because of the contestation that characterises debate about these issues, deliberation about the environment does not only concern the neutral circulation of facts or exchange of information. The three groups of journalists acknowledge that what is 'fact' about the environment is in itself contested terrain, with different stakeholders presenting their interpretation of events or issues as the 'truth'. Such 'truth' is often selectively presented, in order to give credence to the position of a particular interest group within deliberations around environmental concerns. In demonstrating the significance of this point, the participants argue, for example, that such debates sometimes form part of broader power struggles such as those between developing nations and the industrial West. This point is made, for example, by Vilakazi, who is a general reporter:

> The whole notion of disallowing us to use coal power. The West tells us not to use coal and proposes nuclear technology as an alternative. These are controversial issues (Vilakazi 2012, p. 2).

Vilakazi suggests, here, that economically powerful Western countries tend to dictate to economically weak developing nations on what type of energy they should use. Power relations are seen to be at play within public debate about the environment:

> Super powers blame China for destroying the environment because it is emerging as a super power. They use this as an excuse to suppress it (Vilakazi 2012, p. 3).

Struggles that take place around economic power are, then, understood to represent a key term of reference for public deliberation about the environment. Furthermore, such struggles are perceived to take place in context of conflicting agendas and unequal relations of power.

A second term of reference that many of the participants understand to be of significance to public deliberation around environmental concerns is the acknowledgement of the principle of 'public good'. The articulation of aspects of a critical framework of analysis can again be seen in context of the discussion of issues

related to public good. It can be observed, in particular, in the acknowledgement that economically powerful institutions threaten the extent to which poor people gain access to basic human rights. General reporter Mbata makes this argument in context of the need to prioritise basic human rights, such as the right of communities to a secure water supply:

> BP Shell wanted to mine underground gas from the Karoo ... The local residents opposed this and said that it would pollute water and negatively impact on their general welfare (Mbata 2012, p. 2).

Mbata explains, further, that in public discussion of this issue, BP Shell mentions job creation benefits only and does not talk about the impact of mining on water supplies. As an environmental journalist, Beukes also understands such debates to be associated with the protection of group interests:

> Obviously, if the issue is about nuclear power and you're talking about someone in charge of nuclear power in ESKOM you know that they are going to support the initiative, because their interests lie in the development of nuclear power. On the other hand, if you are talking to Earth Africa about the same issue you know what their interests are too [they will obviously oppose it] (Beukes 2012, p. 3).

Environmental journalist Muller also points out that those with power often have more resources at their disposal in order to frame the debates according to their own best interest:

> These days there are many press releases written by public relations companies who are generously paid by business to green-wash their image (Muller 2012, p. 2).

The suggestion is that there are unequal power relations within the process of public deliberations on environmental issues. In such instances, businesspeople sometimes use financial power to "sanitise" their environmental malpractices through press releases written and published on their behalf by influential public relations companies. Given the contestation that frames debates about the environment, public statements by the more powerful players often have the status of 'spin'.

One of the general reporters, Tyron Adams argues at the same time that the more powerful stakeholders within environmental debates do not always succeed in avoiding public opposition to their projects:

> Residents of Kwazulu Natal Province recently opposed a project that was later discontinued because it was meant to benefit the rich and famous without benefiting the people and environment. Dubai wanted to develop a Walt Disney type of tourism facility in Durban and a whole new bay and 30-metre statue of King Shaka and the public was opposing it. There was no consideration of public welfare and also to pay people well (Adams 2012, p. 5).

It is clear, then, that all three categories of participants perceive environmental debates to be characterised by controversy, conflict of interest and struggles around the protection of the public good. All three groups similarly argue that such debates take place in the context of unequal power relations in which particular stakeholders are able to claim more authority for themselves in presenting their perspective on environmental concerns. The acknowledgement of the existence of such unfair power relations may point to the influence of a critical framework of thought. It is argued, below, that the conceptualisation of public deliberation that results from this influence has important implications for participants' understanding of the role that journalists play in reporting on environmental issues.

3. Conceptualisation of the social purpose of journalism about the environment

In discussing the social purpose of journalism about the environment, the participants identify three distinct roles for such journalism: that of facilitating public awareness, that of enhancing understanding and that of encouraging critique. It can be regarded as significant that these are also the three roles identified by the journalism studies scholars cited in reviewed literature in Section Two of Chapter One. As will be demonstrated in the discussion below, the spectrum of positions that the research participants adopt in relation to their treatment of each of these roles can be seen to mirror the positions adopted by the journalism scholars in Chapter One. The positions they adopt can, furthermore, be seen to be directly related to the way they locate themselves in relation to the three different knowledge paradigms discussed in this study.

3.1 Facilitating public awareness

It should not be a surprise, given the commentary in the previous two subsections, that there is agreement amongst all three groups of participants that the key social purpose of

journalism about the environment is to supply the public with relevant knowledge. The suggestion is, furthermore, that the focus should be on knowledge about the way society impacts on the environment and the effect that this has both on society and nature. The social purpose of such journalism is understood, specifically, to be that of informing public debate dealing with matters of environmental responsibility and accountability. As we have seen, this is the first of the three categories that academics also mention, in the literature reviewed in Chapter One.

Amongst the research participants the general argument seems to be that, within processes of public deliberation, people can refer to such knowledge in order to make choices with regards to how to use and care for the environment. For example, Beukes, an environmental reporter, considers that it is necessary to give people knowledge about the state of the environment because it enables them to understand why it is important to become involved in environmental work:

> Nobody is going to take action if they are not informed about a bad thing happening to the environment and what they ought to do about it (Beukes 2012, p. 1).

Matthews, in turn, argues that just reminding society to look after the environment is an important goal for journalism about the environment:

> Unfortunately many people forget that we need to inform them about the need to use it wisely (Beukes 2012, p.2).

Knowledge about (and consciousness of) the environment – and of the impact that human beings are making on the environment – is, then, regarded to be of inherent journalistic value.

In commenting on the way journalism should cover environmental issues, the participants speak about the kind of knowledge that reporters should draw on. In doing so, many of the participants make a point of distinguishing between scientific knowledge and the knowledge of 'ordinary people'. In context of their discussion of this distinction it is, again, possible to observe the influence of different paradigms. Most of the participants appear to agree that there should be a balance between these two categories of knowledge (that of ordinary people and that of science or expertise) in the coverage of environmental stories. Two of the environmental journalists nevertheless argue that

scientific knowledge carries particular authority within discussions of environmental issues. Beukes proposes that many environmental stories are inherently 'scientific' in nature, and that it is necessary in such instances to prioritise the knowledge of scientists:

> On scientific matters I value the views of scientist over those of the ordinary people (Beukes 2012, p. 4).

The suggestion is that scientists' views should necessarily be privileged in the context of 'scientific' stories because they have access to the most authoritative and credible knowledge of relevance to such stories:

> I would not consider non-scientists' knowledge on matters related to scientific issues (Beukes 2012, p. 4).

Matthews (2012) notes, similarly, that in context of the more 'scientific' stories, it is the voices of scientists that should carry the most weight:

> …on climate change, one needs to highlight what the experts are saying and the real hard realities on the ground and give space or voice to affected people to explain how they are affected e.g. farmers and farm labourers … but you are not going to give them a major view point (Matthews 2012, p. 3).

It may be significant that Beukes and Matthews are both environmental journalists, and that their commitment to the authority of scientific knowledge should be understood in this context. It should be noted, however, that these participants also seem to assume that the reason why scientific knowledge carries more importance within such stories is because such knowledge is not that of 'affected people'. The image of science that is invoked is therefore that of knowledge that exists outside the realm of the social, at a distance from the interests of any particular group. This, again, can be seen as a positivist conceptualisation of the credibility of scientific knowledge.

Matthews also proposes, however, that although environmental issues demand the foregrounding of scientific knowledge, this does not invalidate the inclusion of other kinds of perspectives:

> You obviously need to include expert opinion in any kind of story but that does not mean you should exclude valid points of view from non-experts (Matthews 2012, p. 3).

Raaths, who is also an environmental journalist, goes further to argue that ordinary people's knowledge should also be prioritised because it is not secondary:

> I think that experts are important people that one wants to consult because they have knowledge. We need to highlight public opinion. It is important and therefore it does not mean that ordinary people are not observant and that their public opinion is not important in stories (Raaths 2012, p.2).

Within this acknowledgement of the importance of knowledge that is based on everyday experience, it is possible to see the emergence of paradigmatic influence other than that of positivism. In the case of Matthews and Raaths, this can be read as the invocation of an interpretive approach, which recognises the role that understanding of social experience can play with public deliberation. In Beukes' instance, it is also possible to observe the emergence of a critical inflection. She, too, speaks of the need to balance the assertion of the superiority of scientific knowledge with recognition of the value of knowledge based on social experience and social interest. She does so, however, by pointing out that journalists have the responsibility to ensure that the voices of the powerless are represented alongside those of powerful groups within debates about the environment:

> I recognise the need to give a voice to the voiceless. For instance politicians and businesspeople have power and also access to the media. However, journalists should give a voice to poor people by going to speak to them so that they also have access to the media (Beukes 2012, p. 4).

Beukes is able, then, to combine commitment to the ideal of science as 'objective' knowledge with aspects of a more 'critical' conceptualisation, which acknowledges the role of unequal power relations within the construction of public knowledge about the environment.

Acknowledgement of the importance of knowledge of ordinary people is also echoed by the other two groups of participants. Bizos, from the position of editor, suggests that there is in fact a tendency to place too much emphasis on the views of experts when such perspectives should be balanced by reference to the experiences of ordinary people:

> We tend to want to speak to doctors, professionals and scientists. There is definitely a need to speak to ordinary people as much as we do to scientists (Bizos 2012, p. 2).

General reporter Vilakazi also thinks that fellow journalists are not doing enough to ask people to express their social experiences about the environment:

For example, on global warming, they do not ask ordinary South Africans about global warming. They tell them and [don't] ask them about their global warming observations and experience about soil erosion (Vilakazi 2012, p. 3).

Vilakazi (2012) observes that one of the weaknesses that journalists have is to look down upon ordinary people's knowledge, and suggests that this can lead to the dismissal of the importance of knowledge grounded in local tradition:

Traditional people know all these things and understand them. They [journalists] underestimate their indigenous knowledge. They look down upon indigenous knowledge (Vilakazi 2012, p. 3).

The implication of this statement seems to be that the treatment of knowledge that can be observed in such journalism limits the possibility for journalists to facilitate inclusive public deliberation on environmental issues.

The consensus among all three groups of participants seems to be, then, that there is a need to include both the knowledge of scientists and that of ordinary people in the coverage of environmental stories because both kinds of knowledge are of importance in the facilitation of public debate. The importance of each category of knowledge is, however, explained in different ways by particular participants. The environmental journalists in particular propose that scientific knowledge provides trustworthy insight into the 'scientific' aspects of environmental phenomena. Science is regarded, within this analysis, as necessarily a more credible source of knowledge when it is applied to the description and explanation of environmental phenomena. The credibility of such knowledge derives, furthermore, from its status as the product of systematic, measurable and objective research about such phenomena. In contrast, the knowledge of ordinary people is understood to be shaped by social experience, and therefore informed by social interest. The importance of such knowledge stems from the role that it plays in increasing understanding of the way in which environmental phenomena are affecting people.

The emphasis on the importance of science versus that of 'everyday' knowledge do not, however, stand in contradiction with each other; instead, they can be seen to combine in a coherent understanding of the role of knowledge within processes of deliberation. Within this conceptualisation, scientific knowledge is understood to neutrally 'inform' processes of deliberation, so that the interests of different groups can be weighed up against each other. This analysis of the role that different kinds of knowledge play within

processes of public deliberation is, of course, classically that of a positivist framework of thought. An 'interpretivist' interest in understanding the perspectives of 'ordinary' people is, in fact, easily assimilated into this understanding of public deliberation.

Another way in which journalists are expected to respond to the first responsibility (that is, of facilitating public awareness) is by mapping out of environmental debates. In discussing this task, the general assumption amongst the participants seems to be that journalists should play the role of neutral arbiters. This is, again, an understanding of journalism that is positivist in its emphasis, given that the credibility of journalistic knowledge is understood to depend on it objectivity. Editor Mildred Nel argues, for example, that journalists should ensure that everyone can air their perspective on particular environmental concerns:

> You have bunny huggers and people with different positions so you need to let people present their own different views (Nel 2012, p. 2).

Other participants argue, in contrast, that it is sometimes necessary for journalists to support particular interests. Bheki Dlamini, an editor, argues for such an approach in situations that involve the protection of the rights of people who do not have access to power:

> It is the role of journalists to agitate for change by creating debate around issues of equitable access and benefits from the environment. Currently, you have a situation where the minority of people have exclusive access to wildlife such as Kruger National Park that is enjoyed by a few locals and foreign tourists (Dlamini 2012, p. 3).

General reporter Adams shares this view, arguing that defending the public good is one of the requirements for socially responsible journalism about the environment. In his view, environmental journalism can demand of journalists to take sides, and to advocate for social change:

> I think it involves bringing about social change, sort of politics of the environment. My area of interest is more egalitarian society. This involves the need to write stories about people living under electric pylons and lack of toilets (Adams 2012, p. 2).

Adams can be seen to draw, in this statement, on an approach to journalism that is based within a framework of thought that incorporates critical inflection. This is evident, in particular, in the proposal that the purpose of producing journalistic knowledge is to

facilitate social transformation. Many of the participants remain uncomfortable, however, with the idea of 'taking sides'. Adams himself warns, for example, that 'advocacy' journalism should be carefully considered. One needs, he proposes, to be careful of idealising community struggles simply because one sympathises with poor communities when they are pitted against the powerful (Adams 2012, p. 6). Environmental journalist Muller argues even more firmly that journalists should not take sides in their news coverage:

> The environmental journalist's role is not to be an activist for either side, but, simply put, a journalist (Muller 2012, p. 2).

Muller suggests that it is possible to protect the interests of the poor without taking sides, because the task of the journalist is ultimately to attempt to report the truth:

> … without fear, favour or spin. Investigative and hard-news reporting is essential in order to honour this principle (Muller 2012, p.2).

Muller (2012) is clearly invoking a model of journalism based on the ideal of courage in the pursuit of truth, in response to the realisation that there are forces in society that do not want the truth to emerge. Williams argues similarly, from the perspective of editor that the business of newspapers is not to sympathise with particular side but to write newsworthy stories:

> It depends on the story, every story is different, and it varies every time. You use both experts and non-experts where appropriate (Williams 2012, p. 1).

It would seem, then, that even though many of the participants acknowledge the importance of both interpretivist and critical conceptualisations of journalistic knowledge, most still hold fundamentally to a positivist approach to journalism.

3.2   Facilitating public understanding

The participants also speak about the role that journalists should play in their treatment of different categories of knowledge. Here, again one can see the role that location within paradigm plays in the way that the participants engage with this issue. It is proposed, firstly, that journalists have the responsibility of explaining knowledge in order to ensure that the public understands environmental issues. This, as we have seen, is a role that the journalism academics cited in Chapter One also point to – that of facilitating

understanding. Dlamini, an editor, argues for example that better understanding of the causes of environmental problems is essential, if ordinary people are to take up an active and engaged role within environmental politics:

> It is their articulation and interpretation that people cannot understand. Because they are not made to understand the cause of climate change, they just consider it as the sadness or punishment by God and spirits (Dlamini 2012, p. 3).

The suggestion is, furthermore, that such explanation is necessary because knowledge about the environment often relates to highly complex issues. When people do not understand the exact causes of such complicated phenomena, they end up drawing uninformed conclusions. Environmental journalist Raaths suggests that the explanatory role demands of journalists themselves to be knowledgeable about environmental issues:

> They should know that there is need to unpack complex issues such as climate change. Journalists need to understand the issues about the science and the bureaucracy about United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC) process and present them in layman's terms and sexy language that the public can understand (Raaths 2012, p.1).

Editor Bizos suggests that linked to the task of explaining complex issues is the need to use language that people can easily understand:

> Our readers are a broad church, many of whom do not have in-depth scientific understanding or knowledge. We need journalists who are experienced to break down the text-speak and expert-speak … to the level that people understand (Bizos 2012, pp. 1-2).

It is noticeable that the participants who are quoted here are making the assumption that it is expert knowledge that needs explanation or mediation, rather than the knowledge of ordinary people. This understanding can, again, be seen to be expressive of a positivist conceptualisation of authoritative knowledge, in which scientific knowledge is regarded as more 'credible'. It may again be significant that four of these participants are environmental journalists, who have a particular investment in the importance of scientific knowledge. Indeed, it is noticeable that it is participants with the status of general reporter who point to the importance of unpacking the meaning of other kinds of knowledge, beyond that of the world of scientific expertise. For example, Zulu argues that journalism should help to ensure

that learning about environmental concerns operates as a reciprocal process, in which 'experts' and 'ordinary people' learn from each other:

> ...we can learn something [from] ordinary people's environmental knowledge ... There is huge evidence that they have and apply indigenous knowledge in conserving the environment because it is important to their lives. Education on the environment in the media should ideally therefore be two-way; learning from ordinary people and also from experts (Zulu 2012, p. 3).

Zulu (2012) can be seen, within this argument, to be adopting an interpretative approach to the kind of learning that needs to take place in society with regards to environmental issues. It is not, however, possible to make a strong argument that it is the environmental journalists who are most closely associated with principles of positivism, while general reporters adopt an interpretative position. Indeed, in the end, most of the participants seem to agree that the explanatory function of journalism about the environment is important because it serves to facilitate a flow of communication from the 'top' (the world of expertise) to the 'bottom' (the world of ordinary people).

3.3   Adopting a critical stance

The third responsibility that journalists are thought to have, in their treatment of knowledge of the environment, is that of the critique of such knowledge. Their statements about this journalistic role can be seen to be both positivist and critical in emphasis. The influence of these frameworks can be observed in the statements that the participants make about the role that journalists should play in evaluating the credibility of the different categories of knowledge. Muller, an environmental journalist, proposes that journalists who report on the environment need to be acutely conscious that facts, including scientific ones, are being continuously manipulated to protect group interests:

> ...numerous press releases are written by public-relations companies who are generously paid by business to green-wash its image, and the environmental journalist's challenge is to separate the wheat from the chaff... (Muller 2012, p. 2).

All three groups of journalists acknowledge that such critique should also be applied to scientific knowledge. It is noticeable; however, that many of the participants draw a distinction between the kind of critique that should be applied, respectively, to scientific knowledge and other kinds of knowledge. Matthews, who is an environmental journalist,

argues that there is a need to distinguish between 'credible' scientific knowledge and 'less trustworthy' scientific perspectives:

> ...you have to balance what people are saying by figuring out what sort of space you need to give them. For example, I believe that science is unequivocal that climate change is happening but that does not mean that I should exclude alternative views on climate change but you are not going to give them a major view point (Matthews 2012, p. 3).

Daniels (2012), who is a general reporter, also cautions that while experts are expected to provide society with unbiased factual information, this is not always the case:

> ... journalists need to be wary of the label of 'expert' because by giving them that name it confers truth upon them, that what they say is true. But we have seen scandals where experts are told what to say. They are no longer experts when they do that, they become people with vested interest (Daniels 2012, p. 11).

Daniels argues that in practice, science becomes "framed or contaminated by social agendas", which affects its status of credibility (Daniels 2012, p. 11). The suggestion, here, is still that credible scientific knowledge should operate in separation from vested social interest. This evaluation of the credibility of scientific knowledge is clearly positivist in its emphasis.

Conclusion

It has been argued, in this chapter, that the research participants can be seen to adopt one of three different positions within a spectrum of available approaches to the conceptualisation of knowledge. The way they position themselves along this spectrum can, furthermore, be seen to have important implications for their understanding of the role that journalism should ideally play within processes of public deliberation about the environment. From each of these positions, it is acknowledged that both scientific knowledge and the 'everyday' knowledge of ordinary people are important to journalism that deals with the environment. Each position can, however, be seen to foreground different aspects of the role that each of these categories of knowledge plays within journalism about the environment.

The first of these positions, which can be described as 'positivist' in nature, places a particular emphasis on the importance of 'scientific' knowledge within journalism

about the environment. From this position, the credibility of science is understood to depend on the degree to which it is informed by systematic and rigorous research, free of social bias. The role of such knowledge, within processes of public deliberation, is then understood to be that of providing neutral sources of knowledge that can inform decision-making processes. The assumption is also that engagement with such knowledge represents one of the key tasks of journalism that reports on the environment. The 'explanatory' purpose of such journalism is, for example, understood to operate as the process of simplifying and explaining 'expert' knowledge, so that ordinary people can understand its implications.

The second position, which is described in the chapter as 'interpretive' in its inflection, points to the importance of knowledge about ordinary people's lived experiences. From this perspective, it tends to be argued that foregrounding such knowledge helps to ensure an inclusive process of public deliberation, in which both the legitimacy of expert and non-expert sources are acknowledged. It has been argued in this chapter that within the participants' discussion, the interpretive position can in fact be seen to complement the positivist one. In other words, people can hold both these positions at the same time – asserting that knowledge of science is important, but acknowledging that knowledge of ordinary people has its place too. There seems to be a shared understanding of how such journalism should operate, with different participants lifting out particular aspects of what is important. Positivism and interpretivism seem to come together, in other words, in a fairly coherent understanding of journalism, deliberation and the environment.

Thirdly, some research participants can be said to adopt a 'critical' conceptualisation of the role that journalism plays within public deliberation. These participants argue that journalism about the environment should confront the existence of unequal power relations within public deliberation about the environment. In doing so, they can then play a role in the facilitation of progressive social change.

In Chapter One, it was noted that these three paradigmatic positions can also be seen to play a role in the way that different academic writers make sense of the nature and purpose of journalism about the environment. In comparing this academic scholarship to the discussions that took place in context of the discussions with journalistic practitioners

that formed part of the fieldwork for this study it is, nevertheless possible, to observe some differences in inflection. Within the latter context, it is, in particular, possible to trace a more pronounced consciousness of the role that relations of power play within the construction of knowledge. This difference may possibly be informed by the tendency, as noted in the conclusion to Chapter One, for scholarship about environmental journalism to refer to particular social contexts, such as that of America and Europe. It may be that the participants in this study are more sensitive to the need for critical analysis because unequal relations of power are more pronounced within the environments within which they are based.

It can also be concluded, from the discussion in this chapter, that each approach to knowledge – that of positivism, interpretivism and critical analysis - bring important terms of reference to debates about the role that journalism about the environment should play within processes of public deliberation. The three positions collectively contribute towards widening the terms of reference available for discussion of and production of environmental journalism. The positivist perspective draws attention to the importance of producing measurable evidence, in the form of reliable and valid knowledge. It is understood that such knowledge should be produced through research processes that are not influenced by one's personal values. The interpretive position motivates for the need to allow ordinary people to discuss their social experiences and personal perspectives, in order to promote deeper understanding of behavior that is unique to specific communities. The critical position calls for the need to actively promote transformation through questioning structures of domination, and replacing them with more democratic ones. As will be seen in the next chapter the presence of all three perspectives within the participants' discussion ensures a rich mixture of terms of reference for the evaluation of environmental journalism.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RESEARCH FINDINGS PART II: PUTTING THE IDEALS INTO PRACTICE

Introduction

Chapter Three focused on the participants' conceptualisation of the role that journalism about the environment should ideally play within processes of public deliberation. This next chapter deals, in turn, with their understanding of the factors that either constrain or enable journalists in their attempts to put these ideals into practice. Section One is a discussion of the participants' evaluation of journalism about the environment as it is practiced by individual journalists. Section Two focuses on their views regarding the role that institutional context plays in either enabling or constraining journalists in their attempts to fulfill these roles. It also summarises the strategies that they recommend in order to respond to these factors.

1. Assessing journalists as individual practitioners

The research participants refer, in their evaluation of individual journalistic practitioners, to the three roles that they believe journalists should play in reporting on the environment as described in the previous chapter. As such, they touch on the role that journalists play in facilitating public awareness of environmental issues, increasing understanding of such issues and encouraging critical engagement with knowledge about the environment. The review of the participants' evaluation of South African journalists' approaches to reporting on the environment, as set out below, deals with each of these areas of discussion in turn.

It should be noted that, within such evaluation, the participants tend to place an emphasis on shortcomings in journalists' approaches to reporting on the environment rather than highlighting strengths. This may suggest that they believe that journalists generally fail to measure up to their expectations with regards to the way such journalism should be practised. It is, at the same time, possible that the participants understand the critique of journalistic practice to be generally concerned with the identification of

weaknesses and that such thinking may have contributed to their tendency to omit discussion of the strengths of such practice. This possibility should be kept in mind in making sense of the participants' commentary, as captured below.

It is also of interest to note that, when the participants reflect on their own coverage of environmental issues, it is sometimes possible to observe a shift in their assessment of such work. It would seem that the opportunity to reflect on their own practice, in the context of a research interview, enabled them to think in new ways about this work. Zulu, for example, talks about identifying ways in which he could improve on past practice:

> The dumpsite story or landfill story ... If I [was] to do it again, I would do it much better ... (Zulu 2012, p.6).

Mbata's comments about one of his stories similarly suggest a shift in thinking that occurred during the research interview:

> I just based the story ... on what experts said without focusing on the public views about water pollution. If I had to do it again, I would include [ordinary people's] voices (Mbata 2012, p.2).

Such comments would suggest that the participants, and perhaps other journalists like them, would generally benefit from being provided with more opportunity to reflect critically on their own work. It may be that they would be able to make use of such reflection to acknowledge their own strengths and also to consider what they would like to do differently.

1.1 Facilitating public awareness

The participants identify two aspects of journalists' approach to the coverage of environmental issues that will need to be improved if they are to succeed in facilitating public awareness of environmental issues. They also identify possible factors that help to explain these weaknesses.

A number of the participants suggest, firstly, that journalists can do more to ensure the facilitation of public awareness of the diversity of perspectives that exist on environmental issues. Dlamini, an editor, argues that such diversity is lacking because journalists fail to put into practice what he regards to be a fundamental principle of good reporting – that of ensuring a 'balanced' approach to the selection of sources. He suggests

that this failure places limitations on the role that reporters play in producing journalism about the environment that operates in the interest of the public good:

> They should give [voice] to all interest groups ... and not focus [as they tend to] on sectarian interests without balancing them with general public interest (Dlamini 2012, p.4).

Bizos, who is also an editor, refers similarly to this need for balance. She notes that when journalists report on environmental issues, they have a tendency to focus on the views of experts to the exclusion of all else. She suggests that there is, in particular, an over-emphasis on scientific expertise:

> There is a bias towards science ... we tend to only want to speak to doctors, professionals, scientists etcetera (Bizos 2012, p.2).

General reporter Daniels explains, in turn, that journalists often foreground the opinions of experts who locate themselves in non-governmental organisations (NGOs). At the same time, they fail to speak directly to the communities that these organisations serve. This means that the voices of ordinary people are not adequately represented:

> I see it [the exclusion of ordinary people's knowledge] as very narrow ... It is like an 'NGOisation' of environmental stories. There are some voices that are heard while others are not (Daniels 2012, pp.7-8).

Beukes, an environmental journalist, points out that in the context of South Africa the absence of ordinary people from environmental stories means the exclusion of the views of those who occupy a marginalised position in society:

> ...journalists should give a voice to poor people by going to speak to them so that they also have access to the media (Beukes 2012, p.4).

A number of the other environmental journalists also agree that what is missing from such journalism is a focus on the perspectives of the general public. It is noticeable that these participants generally assume that such perspectives are strongly defined by subjective experience. This is understood to distinguish their perspectives from those of experts and officials. Matthews, for example, assumes this distinction when he talks of the absence of the voices of the general public within the coverage of issues related to climate change:

> ...one needs to highlight what the experts are saying [but also make visible] the real hard realities on the ground and give space or voice to affected people

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to explain how they are affected. For example, farmers and farm labourers (Matthews 2012, p.3).

Similarly, when Raaths notes that the voices of ordinary people are missing from journalism about the environment, her assumption is that what they have to offer is 'opinion':

> We need to highlight public opinion. It is important ... [we should not create the impression] that ordinary people are not observant and that their ... opinion is not important in stories (Raaths 2012, p.2).

A second problem that participants identify is that journalists do not inform their stories with enough research. Editor Bizos argues, for example, that journalists do not adequately answer the 'who, what, when, why and how' questions that are basic requirements to reporting practice (Bizos 2012, pp. 3-5). Environmental journalist Beukes considers that it is necessary for journalists to provide the public with access to in-depth knowledge about the state of the environment in order to demonstrate why it is important to become involved in environmental work:

> Nobody is going to take action if they [as is currently happening] are not informed about a bad thing happening to the environment and what they ought to do about it (Beukes 2012, p.1).

The argument seems to be that when such depth of knowledge is missing, journalism cannot operate as a call to action.

A number of the participants suggest that journalists' inability to meet the requirements of facilitating public awareness can, at least partly, be explained by the attitudes and value systems that they bring to their practice. The tendency to prioritise news from experts can be linked, in their view, to the fact that it is generally easier to reach such individuals because, in contrast to many ordinary people, they are easily contactable by telephone and e-mail (Adams 2012, p. 7; Raaths 2012, p.4, Daniels 2012, p.8). Daniels notes, for example, that "it just takes 10 minutes" to access information about environmental concerns by telephoning experts associated with companies and NGOs (Daniels 2012, p.7).

Secondly, some participants propose that journalists tend to devalue certain categories of knowledge about the environment. General reporter Vilakazi thinks, for

example, that journalists fail to include the views of ordinary people because they do not take indigenous knowledge seriously:

> They [journalists] tell them [ordinary people] and do not ask them about their global warming observations and experience about soil erosion. Traditional people know all these things and understand them. They [journalists] under-estimate their indigenous knowledge. They look down upon indigenous knowledge (Vilakazi 2012, p.3).

Editor Dlamini agrees that journalists tend to devalue indigenous knowledge in this way. He proposes that this impacts on the role that their journalism can play in facilitating inclusive public debate about the environment:

> The current tendency is to say when it comes from Greenpeace [that is associated with expert knowledge]; the news value is greater than that coming from views expressed by Zulu King Goodwill Zwelethini [who is associated with indigenous knowledge system] (Dlamini 2012, p.3).

Dlamini also argues that journalistic staffs who are in positions of editorial leadership reproduce this approach to the evaluation of different categories of knowledge:

> Even we as editors [our] perspectives tend to … endorse the views of scientific knowledge as opposed to indigenous knowledge value. [We] really do not give [voice] to people who are at grassroots level and suffering from environment mismanagement (Dlamini 2012, p. 3).

The suggestion, here, seems to be that exclusive focus on the experts and officials who take responsibility for 'managing' environmental issues can limit journalists' ability to make visible the impact of such management on the lives of ordinary people.

Daniels suggests, thirdly, that lack of diversity in the sourcing of environmental stories results at least partly from journalists' inability to speak a variety of South African languages. This inability places restrictions on the extent to which journalists can engage in detailed discussions with a wide variety of sources. Daniels understands this principle to apply, furthermore, both within the context of interviews with ordinary people and in the context of speaking to experts and officials. To demonstrate this point he explains how his own monolingualism has placed restrictions on his ability to report on environmental debates:

> One disadvantage is that I only speak English. If I were to do environmental reporting in the way that I know it should be done, then (…) I should be able to speak Afrikaans because most of the big players in the environment in

South Africa are Afrikaans speakers ... I would also need to know one African language because people at grassroots level would speak to you easier if you speak their language (Daniels 2012, p.11).

It would seem, then, that the participants generally agree that journalists fail to live up to the first of the three roles that they believe they should play in reporting on environmental concerns – that is, the facilitation of public awareness. They argue, in particular, that journalists do not provide their audiences with inclusive and in-depth exposure to different interest groups' knowledge about, and experiences of, environmental issues. For the researcher, it was interesting to note that the weaknesses that the participants identify in this respect are ones that, in his observation, typically form part of journalists' assessment of reporting practice of any kind. They are, in other words, representative of an understanding that is shared amongst journalists with regards to problems that generally occur in journalism. This applies both to the proposal that journalism about the environment lacks balance and the suggestion that journalists fail to answer the "who, why, when, where and what" questions. The argument that linguistic barriers place limitations on reporting practice represents, in the researcher's view, a more unusual perspective– but even here the emphasis remains on the identification of a weakness that is not specific to environmental journalism.

What is also clear, however, is that these generic problems are understood to manifest in particular and special ways in the context of environmental journalism. The participants' discussion suggests that this particularity has to do with the fact that journalism about the environment often needs to refer to highly specialised forms of knowledge – such as that of science. The suggestion seems to be that, in context of such specialised knowledge, the usual tensions that exist between the prioritisation of official voices versus the acknowledgement of 'ordinary people' and also 'traditional' knowledge become exacerbated.

1.2   Facilitating public understanding

The participants identify two aspects of coverage of the environment that would need to be improved if journalists are to do well at facilitating public understanding of environmental issues. They speak, firstly, about the need for journalists to translate

complex debates into simple language. Editor Bizos argues, in this context, that journalism about the environment tends to be convoluted:

> It [journalists' writing on issues about the environment] comes across as being dense, difficult to get into. Not well communicated (Bizos 2012, p. 5).

General reporter Mbata proposes that writing about the environment is often very "technical" in its emphasis:

> This is not good because it means people are not being well informed. In our papers I would find such information technically written and difficult to understand in the opinion pieces (Mbata 2012, p. 1).

The participants suggest, secondly, that journalists can do more to contextualise environmental issues. Mbata argues in this respect that journalists generally fail to tease out the socioeconomic implications of environmental issues, particularly the impact that they have on the quality of life of human beings. He believes that the tendency to delink coverage of environmental issues from questions of socio-economic context is exacerbated by the fact that some journalists treat the environment as a specialised subject that exists in separation from other news:

> We do not have a culture where environment is seen as a multi-beat thing – cross-cutting issues into all beats (Mbata 2012, p. 3).

The beats[3] that Mbata refers to here would include topics such as business, sports, politics and tourism. The suggestion seems to be that journalists are missing the opportunity to create deeper public understanding of the connection between environmental debates and such aspects of social life.

Another way in which reference to the need for contextualisation emerges within the participants' discussion is in relation to the need for causal explanation. Some of the participants suggest that journalists are failing to include this level of explanation in their stories. It is proposed that this failure can contribute to public perception that there is little that can be done in response to problems such as climate change:

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[3] 'Beats' in general newsroom parlance are subject areas that reporters are assigned to cover. A 'beat reporter' can be assigned, for example, to cover sports news, crime, business, the environment, etc. Such reporters are supposed to develop specialised knowledge of their subject area, and develop a network of contacts with sources with whom they can consult about this subject area.

> Climate change issues are important but it is their articulation and interpretation [by journalists] that people cannot understand – because they are not made to understand the cause; they just consider climate change as the sadness or punishment by God and spirits (Dlamini 2012, p. 3).

Within this example, contextualisation again operates to tease out the relationship between environmental issues and social issues – by drawing attention to the fact that environmental change can result from human impact. In addition, it is demonstrated that recognition of this relationship can offer audiences a sense of agency.

Isaacs argues that the lack of context that can be observed in journalism about the environment, results at least partly from the fact that journalists are not engaging in adequate investigative research:

> I do not think it [their news coverage] is good enough. It is … reactive and not proactive. I do not think it is great because of lack of adequate investigative journalism on environmental issues (Isaacs 2012, p. 5).

This reference to 'proactive' journalism can be seen to resonate with a critique that is often made of mainstream journalism – that is, that reporters tend to write about events without making clear how they are located within broader and more long-term processes. As such, they can be seen to write 'reactively', responding to the immediate news event in isolation of context[4] . The reference is, then, again to a generic problem that does not just occur in context of reporting on the environment.

The participants generally argue that reporters who are not specialised environmental journalists remain unable to facilitate public understanding of environmental issues at least partly due to limitations in their knowledge of this subject. Editor Bizos proposes, in this respect, that lack of expertise is one of the reasons why such journalists struggle to explain environmental issues to their readers (Bizos 2012, pp. 3-5). This is, indeed, how general reporter Adams explains his own struggles to translate environmental journalism into the language of everyday speech:

> I recently reported on COP17 [17th Conference of Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, UNFCC] held in Durban, South

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[4] The term 'reactive journalism' is used, in literature, to refer to news cultures in which news stories are formulated in response to isolated events, rather than in response to the need to make sense of long-term processes. 'Pro-active' journalism is then proposed as an alternative to this approach (Soroka and Farnsworth 2012).

Africa in 2011. One of the challenges that I faced was the need to get up to date with jargon and to understand issues involved (Adams 2012, p. 2).

If Adams' experience is more generally shared, it may be that journalists' failure to facilitate understanding of environmental issues originates at least partly from their own lack of knowledge about such issues. If they struggle to understand the language used in debates about the environment, they are unlikely to contribute meaningfully to public understanding of such debate. Vilakazi notes that such lack of knowledge can leave general reporters feeling intimidated:

> Journalists are afraid to report complex environmental issues. They lack depth of understanding [of] environmental issues (Vilakazi 2012, p.3).

Bizos proposes, similarly, that one of the reasons why some journalists fail in the task of explaining environmental issues is because they avoid asking questions, in fear of appearing ignorant:

> …we're often shy and think that they [our questions] are not so bright but these are the questions that promote understanding of issues (Bizos 2012, p. 5).

She also feels that journalists' limited understanding of environmental issues stems from lack of interest in reading broadly (Bizos 2012, pp. 5-6).

A review of the above points of discussion suggests that, although many of the participants believe that general reporters should also be involved in coverage of environmental issues, they also recognise that this goal poses some challenges. They point out, in particular, that such journalists will necessarily struggle to engage with the environment as a specialised subject area. It should be pointed out, here, that there is also a general assumption amongst these participants that facilitation of public understanding is primarily concerned with 'top-down' communication. Journalists are, in other words, understood to be responsible for translating complex and jargon-filled debates amongst officials and experts for the benefit of ordinary people. This is in contrast to the discussion of the first role (that of facilitating public debate), in which it was acknowledged that journalists should facilitate access to many kinds of knowledge – both those of experts and of ordinary people. The suggestion seems to be, then, that reporters who do not have specialised knowledge of the environment should prioritise the first role (that of facilitating public awareness) rather than the second (that of facilitating

understanding). This perspective can, of course, be questioned if one challenges the assumption that facilitation of understanding is only concerned with top-down communication of 'expert' knowledge and 'official' information.

1.3   Adopting a critical stance

The third role that the participants believe journalists should play is that of encouraging critical engagement with different types of knowledge about the environment. As in the case of the first two roles, it is the participants' assessment that journalists do not meet the basic requirements for achieving this task. In commenting on this, the participants refer to two strategies that they feel journalists are failing to make good use of.

The participants suggest, firstly, that journalists need to do more to assess the validity and reliability of the claims made by their sources about environmental issues. A typical example of this weakness is the tendency by some journalists to shy away from asking questions that require experts to validate their knowledge claims. The reference, here, seems to be to general reporters rather than environmental journalists:

> We are too scared to ask questions on what scientists for example base their prediction on how fracking in the Karoo will destroy water sources and we write this unquestioningly (Bizos 2012, p. 5).

Environmental journalist Beukes suggests that this is a general shortcoming among journalists, including those from other countries. Again, her comment seems to apply to journalists who do not have a particular expertise in the environment:

> The Americans used to tell me while I stayed there that climate change does not exist. The media there would go to scientists and weirdoes with extremist views on climate change and would give them space to say "climate change does not exist" without giving a scientific basis for their arguments. This is unacceptable (Beukes 2012, p. 3).

Secondly, the participants believe that journalists need to make visible the vested interests of the different groups that contribute to environmental debate. Here it is pointed out that journalists often assume that the knowledge of experts and scientists is not informed by vested interest. This, in Daniels' view, limits such journalists' ability to identify the way in which interest does, in fact, inform such knowledge:

> I think journalists need to be wary of the label of expert because by giving them that name it confers truth upon them, that what they say is true.

Journalists often take it for granted that information from experts is always neutral and factual. But we have seen scandals where experts are told what to say. They are no longer experts when they do that. They become people with vested interests and the knowledge they give is no longer uncontaminated – it has vested interests (Daniels 2012, p. 11).

Vilakazi argues that, because of the failure to expose such interests, journalists often do not deal critically with the role that the contributions of experts play within environmental debate. He points out that such critique could, for example, help to make visible the role that scientists play in supporting the economic interests of super powers within the climate change debates:

Super powers blame China for destroying the environment because it is emerging as a super power, using this as an excuse to suppress it. Unfortunately even journalists from South Africa just report on these views without exposing the geopolitical interests behind such views about China (Vilakazi 2012, 3).

According to the participants, the tendency to assume that scientific knowledge is always neutral is a key problem that journalists need to be aware of and avoid. The general suggestion seems to be that the assumption of neutrality is most likely to apply to journalists who do not specialise in environmental reporting. The participants would presumably also argue that environmental journalists would be more discerning and critical in their approach to statements made by scientists. It should also be noted, however, that they are still assuming that, within the context of scientific knowledge, vested interest is necessarily problematic. This assumption frames their overall understanding of the critique of scientific knowledge – either by general reporters or environmental specialists.

The participants argue, thirdly, that journalists' do not reflect enough on the assumptions that they themselves bring to stories about the environment. This comment seems to apply both to environmental journalists and those who have no particular expertise in the environment. The participants speak, in this context, about the way in which journalists unconsciously reproduce standard ways of framing[5] environmental

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[5] The researcher is aware that there is a body of literature that makes use of the term 'framing' in a specialised way. Within such literature, a media frame is defined, for example, as the main organising objective or story line that delivers meaning to events that are unfolding (Scheufele 1999, p. 106). In

stories. They refer, in explanation of this point, to at least two examples of such framing. The first frame is based on the assumption of a dualistic opposition in which investment in the need for environmental care becomes equated with the views of privileged people, and the rejection of such care becomes associated with the interests of the poor. Such framing is often accompanied by racially specific assumptions, in which 'white' communities are understood to be invested in the principle of environmental care, while 'black' communities are not. Editor Bizos proposes that such journalism also assumes that environmental care is the domain not just of so-called white communities, but also of the middle class:

> There is a perception among some journalists that the environment is something that white people care about or middle class people care about. They also think that the environment seems not an issue [it is not important] to poor people (Bizos 2012, p.p. 2-3).

General reporter Daniels argues that one reason why such framing is problematic is because it oversimplifies environmental debate:

> Some think that when one is poor the environment is not important because survival is priority. This is a simplification (Daniels 2012, p. 5).

Beukes argues that such assumptions may deflect journalists from considering the role that privileged people play in the degradation of the environment:

> Affluence is also problematic in that the greater the affluence the greater the demand from the environment because there is enormous consumption and waste generation (Beukes 2012, p.2).

General reporter Daniels argues, along similar lines, that journalists often fail to critically examine the environmental impact of the social practices of the privileged – such as, for example, that of land owners:

> Fencing places [the so-called hands-off conservation methods] by rich should be exposed by the journalists that they might not be the best way to conserve the environment (Daniels 2012, p. 4).

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context of this study, however, the term is being used in a more everyday common-sense way, simply to refer to a shared set of assumptions that are invoked when dealing with a particular topic of discussion.

Zulu points out, conversely, that because of the assumptions that journalists make about the way poor people are located in relation to environmental debates, they often omit to examine the role that poor communities can play in taking care of the environment:

> ...some journalists tend to accuse [poor people of] causing deforestation without looking at their indigenous knowledge that shows huge evidence about ordinary people's value on environmental conservation and especially their interaction with wildlife and conservation of rivers and forests which are intact in some of the places they live. There is huge evidence that they have and apply indigenous knowledge in conserving the environment because it is important to their lives (Zulu 2012, p. 3).

The participants also refer to a second example of problematic framing, represented by a tendency to focus on urban spaces only, as if rural areas are unimportant. Moya suggests that this tendency results from the fact that journalists' evaluation of what is newsworthy tends to be framed by their own experience as urban dwellers:

> Even ... editors' perspectives tend to be ... influenced by our [urban location] ... even [the news values that we apply to the] environment is now focused on potholes and malfunctioning traffic lights and really do not give [voice] to people who are at grassroots level and suffering from environment mismanagement (Dlamini 2012, pp. 3-4).

The suggestion is, then, that journalists' failure to reflect on their own social positioning can impact on their ability to produce critically engaged journalism about the environment.

A number of the participants suggest that journalists' failure to engage critically with environmental stories, as described in this section, results from gaps in their general knowledge about society. One such gap relates to the extent to which journalists have knowledge of cultures that differ from their own. Dlamini argues, for example, that lack of knowledge of, and sensitivity to, other people's cultural rituals is one reason why journalists interpret the practices of poor communities as uncaring of the environment:

> ...our traditional leaders do not slaughter animals for fun [but for survival]; they identify with and value wildlife [they engage in sustainable exploitation of the environment] (Dlamini 2012, p. 3).

A second 'knowledge gap' is understood to relate to lack of awareness of the degree of inequity that exists between different social groupings in South Africa. Dlamini suggests that this also manifests as a lack of consciousness of the degree to which imbalance in

power relations define the construction of public knowledge in this country (Dlamini 2012, pp. 3-4). It is noticeable that, in referring to such gaps in knowledge, the participants are again speaking about very generic weaknesses within South African journalism, rather than about problems that are unique to environmental journalism.

This section has served as a review of the participants' evaluation of the extent to which journalists live up to three roles that they believe journalism about the environment should play. As we have seen, in each case, it is the participants' judgment that journalists do not measure up to these roles. It is noticeable that, in explaining this failure, the participants often refer to the way journalists engage with the knowledge of experts and officials. In doing so, they focus particularly on journalists who do not have a particular expertise in reporting on the environment. At the same time, they also talk about journalists' lack of general knowledge about their own social environment. This comment seems to apply both to general reporters and environmental specialists.

In these discussions, it is possible to identify statements about the way journalists locate themselves within a spectrum of approaches to the conceptualisation of knowledge, similar to that which is described in Chapter One. This can be observed, for example, in the proposal that journalists tend to privilege expert knowledge over that of non-experts. As we have seen, the participants argue in this context that journalists tend to consider expert knowledge as more reliable and valid because they assume that it is necessarily 'factual' and 'neutral'. The participants can, in this respect, be seen to suggest that journalists draw on a positivist conceptualisation of science without necessarily taking into consideration whether particular examples of science match up to the ideals of positivism. This commentary is understood to apply, in particular, to journalists who do not specialise in reporting on the environment.

Within the participants' own conceptualisation of authoritative knowledge about the environment, it is possible to observe a more rigorous understanding of positivist science. This can be seen, in particular, in the arguments for critical engagement with scientific knowledge, in which the validity and reliability of such knowledge is scrutinised, and also the extent to which it is informed by social interests. It is, furthermore, also noticeable that the approach to general social knowledge articulated by the participants themselves is more sophisticated than that which they accord to their

fellow journalists. This is evident in the comments that they make about the importance of achieving a heightened consciousness of social context that transcends the particular social perspective of the individual journalist.

It is also possible to observe a wider spectrum of epistemological positions within the participants' own discussion of authoritative knowledge, in comparison to that which they ascribe to other journalists. There is, for example, evidence of what is referred to in this study as an interpretative conceptualisation of knowledge. This can be observed, in particular, in context of discussion of the first role – that of facilitating public awareness of diversity of knowledge and perspectives. Here, the participants acknowledge the need for inclusive public debate about the environment, which makes visible the perspectives not only of experts but also those of ordinary people. Indeed, the argument is also that amongst the so-called ordinary people, one may identify a different kind of expertise to that of science, represented by 'indigenous' knowledge.

There is also evidence of a 'critical' position – particularly in the acknowledgement that journalists can and should play the role of agents for social change and progress. This particularly relates to their comments about the role that journalism should play within the power struggles that characterise controversial debates about the environment. The implication is that, as long as weaker groups remain under-represented within such debates, so will the need for progressive social change. Further evidence of critical thinking can be identified in participants' suggestion that journalists should become conscious of the frames that they apply to the interpretation of environmental stories. One argument seems to be that, without such reflection, journalists may miss the opportunity to make visible the role that power relations play within stories about the environment. This emphasis on power relations is, as we have seen, characteristic of a critical approach to the production of knowledge.

It can, however, also be argued that the participants' own adherence to a positivist conceptualisation of science continues to place limitations on the extent to which they are prepared to consider an interpretative or critical approach to journalism about the environment. This can be seen, for example, in a tendency to assume that ordinary people's knowledge about the environment is necessarily distinguished from that of science by virtue of being based in subjective experience. It can also be identified

in the assumption that the existence of vested interest within the context of science is always problematic. Such assumptions are particularly strongly expressed in context of discussion of the second ideal – that of facilitating public understanding of environmental knowledge. Here it is often assumed that the purpose of such facilitation is necessarily that of communicating the knowledge of experts to an unknowing public. There is little reference, in context of discussion of this particular role, to the need to better understand indigenous knowledge, or the knowledge that ordinary people can offer. Here, then, participants tend to fall back into the assumption that the facilitation of understanding is purely about ensuring that stakeholders in public debate understand the knowledge of experts and officialdom.

2.   Assessing the institutional environments of journalism practice

In discussing the institutional environments of journalism practice, participants point out factors that, in their view, limit the realisation of the approach to environmental journalism that they consider to be ideal. The first subsection, below, summarises the comments that they make about such constraints. The second subsection deals with their suggestions as to the strategies that both media organisations and individual journalists can adopt in order to overcome these institutional constraints.

2.1   Institutional constraints and enabling factors

The participants generally agree that institutional constraints constitute one of the key problems that limit newspaper journalists from achieving the roles that they should play in reporting on the environment. They identify two such constraints that, in their view, frustrate the achievement of what they consider to be ideal coverage of environmental news. The first of these constraints is represented by the approach to environmental news that informs editorial decision-making processes, while the second has to do with the allocation of newsroom resources.

2.1.1   Editorial decision-making

The participants identify three problems with regards to the approach to journalism about the environment that informs editorial decision-making within the South African

mainstream press. They propose, firstly, that such decision-making tends to be informed by a devaluing of environmental news. General reporter Daniels explains, for example, that in his observation the editorial staff of the newspaper for which he works does not regard environmental content as 'headline material':

> In my stay here (at *The Mail and Guardian*) for the past two years, I have never seen a discernable environmental story on the front page of the paper (Daniels 2012, p. 7).

Environmental journalist Raaths suggests that this devaluation of environmental news is in fact typical of South African newspapers in general:

> Personally, I think the environment is the most important thing and it should be given a lot of respect in terms of media coverage. Unfortunately, it has always been relegated to sort of secondary item. News editors prefer to make other topics or issues take precedence over environmental issues (Raaths 2012, p. 3).

From the perspective of an editor, Dlamini argues that due to such editorial preferences, journalists find it difficult to get permission to cover environmental news (Dlamini 2012, pp. 2-6; Williams 2012, p. 4).

The second problem with editorial decision-making is identified by general reporter Mbata, who points out that journalism about the environment is usually understood to be the exclusive domain of environmental journalists. Mbata explains that this constrains other journalists from taking on stories that have environmental angles:

> At the moment I hardly do any environmental news coverage because we have hired someone to do that coverage ... we tend to treat the environment as a specialist beat and other reporters covering different beats do not cover it (Mbata 2012, p.3).

Raaths identifies as a third problem, the almost uniform tendency to exclusively focus on environmental disasters[6]. She suggests that the reason for this is that, in the view of editorial staff, good news does not sell newspapers (Raaths 2012, p. 2). In addition, such staff always has to remain conscious that there is limited space for news content, and limited time for journalists to dedicate to the coverage of particular stories. For these

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[6] The tendency to focus on environmental disasters is better explained by the findings of a comparative study of Malaysian and New Zealand press coverage of environmental news done by Nik Norma and Nik Hasan. They suggest that the focus on environmental disasters results from journalists' general disinterest in coverage of

reasons, and because environmental news is already deprioritised, journalists are likely to lose the battle when pitching for such content – with the exception of disaster stories, when newsworthiness can be argued for. Raaths argues that this places limitations on journalists' ability to provide broader and balanced coverage of environmental issues.

2.1.2 Newsroom resources

When the participants discuss problems with newsroom resources, they speak, firstly, of limitations in available budgets for the financing of journalistic posts. Beukes explains that some newspapers do not have any environmental reporters (Beukes 2012, p.5). Raaths adds that, due to the general trend towards the cutting down of the journalistic staff by the mainstream newspapers, existing posts for environmental journalists are also under threat. She explains that specialised environmental posts are particularly likely to be cut. She refers, in demonstration, to instances in which environmental journalists have retired, but their positions have not been re-advertised (Raaths 2012, p. 3). Although this is understood to be a problem that applies within all areas of news coverage, the suggestion is that coverage of environmental issues is particularly affected:

> Environmental issues are treated very differently by [South African] newspapers. There is lack of adequate [financial] resources to cover the environment. As a result there is not much coverage on environmental issues. (Raaths 2012, p. 3).

The participants also talk about the role that limited budget for the financing of journalistic research plays in constraining the production of news about the environment. They propose that lack of resources makes it difficult for journalists to cover environmental news in ways that they consider adequate. Raaths argues, for example, that due to inadequate budgets set aside for environmental news coverage, it becomes difficult to cover news from more distant places:

> That is South African media for you. I have often had to personally subsidise resources that are needed to do environmental news coverage. I think it is not easy to persuade news editors that you need to travel for 700 kilometres and stay in a hotel, in order to cover community news on impact of climate change on their water resources (Raaths 2012, p.4).

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environmental news and are forced to only write such news when their editor ask them to cover disasters when these occur (Norman and Hasan 2007, p. 223).

For these reasons, reporters are often expected to conduct interviews primarily via telephone. This impacts on their ability to produce news that contains a diversity of perspectives on environmental concerns:

> Now we are being told to try and get stories using the telephone. Well, what kind of story are you going to get over the telephone? How many news sources are always available to be spoken to over the telephone? (Beukes 2012, p. 6).

According to Beukes, this situation places particular limitations on journalists' ability to cover environmental issues in rural areas. Indeed, the participants generally agree that poor communities' lack of access to technology such as telephones and e-mail facilities is considered as a systemic constraint that negatively impacts on journalists' attempts to facilitate inclusive debate (Daniels 2012, p. p. 7-8, Adams 2012, p. 7; Raaths 2012, p. 4).

Vilakazi also points out that one result of such resource problems is that newspapers become dependent on foreign news agencies such as Reuters for environmental news. This limits the coverage of local environmental issues (Vilakazi 2012, p. 3).

2.2   Proposed strategies for engaging with institutional context

In recommending strategies aimed at addressing problems related to institutional context, participants first pay attention to the need for journalists to undergo training and education. They suggest that journalists would benefit from training in environmental journalism, from education in fields that are of relevance to the environment and from education that improves their ability to think critically and objectively. They argue that exposure to such learning would increase journalists' knowledge of environmental issues and also provide them with a language in which to write about the environment (Beukes 2012, p. 7; Dlamini 2012, p. 3; Mbata 2012, p. 4; Vilakazi 2012, p. 3). Mbata proposes that training in environmental journalism should be provided in-house. He argues that lack of in-house training is one of the reasons why journalists often do not have the ability to pitch successful story ideas about environmental news to their editors (Mbata 2012, p. 4).

Secondly, the participants suggest that newspapers need to articulate editorial guidelines that deal explicitly with the way in which reporters should go about covering environmental issues. General reporter Mbata recommends that such policy should, first of all, reject the assumption that environmental news is an exclusive beat for environmental journalists. Instead, guidelines for reporting should encourage all journalists (general reporters as well as those working on specialised beats such as business news) to cover environmental issues. They should be directed, furthermore, towards exploring the relationship between such issues and broader socioeconomic concerns (Mbata 2012, pp. 1- 4).

Editor Bizos proposes that newspapers could articulate, in their editorial policies, a commitment to balancing good and bad news. This would, she suggests, help to address the fact that journalists tend to only focus on environmental issues when they relate to disaster (Bizos 2012, p. 2). She proposes, furthermore, that 'human interest' stories could be prioritised as opportunities for raising awareness around environmental concerns. She provides one example of such a story, in demonstration of her point:

> ... we have a story in this coming issue about a group of people working in cities throughout South Africa, who illegally green cities. They sneak into parks without permission of the local authorities ... their argument is that cities need trees. Crazy people. Their agenda is that they need to take back concrete jungles. They move in balaclavas and refuse to go by their real names (Bizos 2012, p. 5).

Bizos also suggests that, in order to ensure that readers do not lose interest in environmental content; editorial staff should scatter stories dealing with environmental issues throughout their publications. Such stories can, in other words, be included under widely different news categories, rather than relegating them to an 'environmental section'. This would mean that readers are drawn to environmental content through their interest in a broad range of subject areas (Bizos 2012, p. 4).

Daniels also suggests that editors should encourage the use of special projects for the purposes of improving environmental journalism standards. In his observation, such projects help provide environmental journalists with resources that they may not otherwise have access to:

My Amabugane Investigative Unit has tools that support [an environmental journalist] to investigate the business interests of a particular business person who is mismanaging the environment (Daniels 2012, p. 10).

The suggestion, here, is that even projects that were not set up for the particular purpose of supporting environmental journalism can end up being of benefit to such journalism.

The participants also refer to the role that cultivation of a culture of leadership can play in newsrooms, in order to enhance the production of journalism about the environment. They refer, in demonstration of this point, to instances in which such an approach to editorial management has been of benefit to environmental reporting. Matthews notes, for example, that he receives support from his editor-in-chief and editor, in his coverage of environmental news (Matthews 2012, p. 4). Raaths also acknowledges that editors are often supportive:

This type of an enabling environmental news coverage environment is probably the reason why I have stayed at *The Mail and Guardian* a bit longer because they are supportive to my environmental news coverage (Raaths 2012, pp. 4-5).

Participants also feel that editorial leadership can establish approaches to management that can help their staff to develop the capacity to produce good journalism about the environment. Editor Nel proposes, for example, that editors could make better use of editorial meetings to achieve this goal. They could, as part of such meetings, explore ways in which reporters can identify 'human interest' angles for environmental stories, and also tease out the link between the environment and socioeconomic news. Participants also propose that editors could encourage some of their stronger journalists to become specialists in environmental journalism. To show that this can be done, Raaths cites the example Eddie Koch, former political reporter for *The Mail and Guardian* who succeeded in becoming an environmental journalist. Matthews, who previously worked as a photographer but is now specialising in environmental journalism, also suggests that it is possible for journalists covering other beats to begin specialising in environmental journalism (Raaths 2012, pp. 2-3; Daniels 2012, p. 1). Related to this, participants also suggest that editors could encourage senior environmental journalists to mentor young reporters to enable them to continue from where other environmental journalists have left (Raaths 2012, p. p. 4-5, Daniels 2012, p. 10). There is, within these comments, a general

acknowledgement that, if institutional systems are supportive, journalists can continue to change and develop their approach to their own practice, by deepening and expanding their own knowledge base.

Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter again points to similarities between the understanding of journalism about the environment that informs the literature reviewed in Chapter One and that which finds expression amongst the journalists who participated in this study. In Chapter Three, we saw that both these groups identify very similar guidelines for the role that journalism should ideally play in covering environmental issues. In this chapter, we have seen that, like the academics, the participants express concerns about the extent to which these ideals are put into practice.

It is also again possible to identify, within both groups' discussion of journalism about the environment, the presence of aspects of all three approaches to the conceptualisation of authoritative knowledge referred to in Chapter One. It has been argued in this study that each of these approaches to knowledge provides members of these groups with distinct perspectives on the assessment of journalism about the environment. This creates the opportunity, both amongst the academics and journalists, for a broad, inclusive and rich debate about the coverage of environmental issues in the media. However, as we have seen, the two groups also share a tendency to foreground a positivist approach to knowledge. This places restrictions on the extent to which the potential for interpretivist and critical arguments about knowledge can be fully realised. Both groups therefore remain constrained with regards to their ability to widen the terms of reference available for the critical discussion of journalism about the environment.

At the same time, there are also important differences between the academic literature and the participants' discussion. One significant difference pertains to the attention that is given, within the two discussions, to the specific institutional context within which particular journalists are working. We have seen, in Chapter One, that the academic literature does not pay substantial attention to such contextual discussion. The participants in this study, in contrast, were able to speak from experience about the role that institutional context plays in constraining journalists' ability to report adequately on

the environment. They are, furthermore, able to identify strategies that can be adopted within newspapers in order to engage with these institutional constraints.

It may, at the same time, be that the participants' attention to institutional context resulted from the fact that they were prompted to speak about this in the context of the interview process. It may also be, then, that if they were not specifically questioned about this topic, reference to institutional context may have been absent from this group's discussion as well. It is of relevance to note, in relation to this possibility, that even the journalists' attention to institutional context remains limited. Like the academic writers, they too tend to focus most of their attention on the performance of individual journalists. It may be that this preoccupation with individual performance is generally assumed, both in academic and journalistic circles, to represent the appropriate framework for the evaluation of journalistic practice. This assumption can be seen to place serious limitations on the spectrum of debate that exists, within both academic and journalistic spheres, with regards to the evaluation of journalism about the environment.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This study includes an examination of two discussions dealing with journalism about the environment. The first examination is represented by the review, in Chapter One, of academic literature dealing with this topic. The second is represented by the empirical component of this study, which consisted of interviews with journalists and editorial staff within the South African mainstream press. The central aim of the study has been to compare these two kinds of discussions, in order to consider the specific contributions that each can be said to make to debates about the role that journalism about the environment should play within processes of public deliberation. It is proposed, in this study, that the way both discussions engage with such debate is influenced by particular approaches to the conceptualisation of authoritative knowledge. It is argued, more particularly, that they are both informed by three different approaches to the conceptualisation of authoritative knowledge. These three approaches can, respectively, be seen to be representative of positivist, interpretive and critical traditions of thought. The study suggests that these traditions play an important role in framing the way in which the two groups involved in these discussions – that is, scholars of journalism and journalists themselves - approach the discussion of environmental journalism.

At the end of Chapter One it was concluded that, within the academic literature that was reviewed, there is a tendency to focus on the role that individual journalists play in determining the quality of journalism about the environment. Very few of the articles reviewed made reference to the significance of the institutional contexts within which journalists are based. Furthermore, the conceptualisation of journalism within this literature seems to be descriptive of journalism as it exists in industrially advanced Western society. The shared assumption seems to be that this is how journalism is always conceptualised of, irrespective of social context. This points, again, to a lack of conscious acknowledgement, at least within context of the reviewed body of literature, of the extent to which approaches to journalism are shaped by social context.

The study proposes that this tendency to bracket the discussion of the context of knowledge production is indicative of a positivist conceptualisation of authoritative

knowledge. The argument is that, from a positivist perspective, assessment of the credibility of knowledge is framed by the ideal of knowledge that is objectively produced, free from the influence of social interest or context. Academic literature that is informed by this understanding tends to bracket discussion of the historical specificity of knowledge production. This may, then, be one reason why the academic literature focuses so strongly in the performance of individual journalists, and pays less attention to particularities of social context.

In Chapter Two, it was explained that one of the aims of the empirical component of this study was to explore whether the participants would be well placed to contribute knowledge that addresses this omission. This research goal was informed by the recognition that journalists have direct, everyday experience of the way context influences journalistic practice. As such, they may be ideally placed to offer insight into the ways in which institutional context impacts on the production of journalism about the environment.

Comparative analysis of the two discussions illustrate that there are in fact far more similarities than differences between the assumptions that inform their approach to the assessment of journalism about the environment. Both discussions begin from the assumption that care for the environment is of crucial significance to the survival of human society. Both also assume that care of the environment depends on processes of public deliberation, in which decisions about environmental management can be made in an informed manner. It is generally assumed that such deliberation should be informed by diversity of perspectives and kinds of knowledge about the environment. It is also assumed that processes of deliberation about the environment tend to be characterised by conflict, because participants in such deliberation represent different interest groups.

Both groups also start from the assumption that journalism has an important role to play in the facilitation of such processes of public deliberation. It is understood that journalists should ideally contribute to such facilitation in three ways: by creating public awareness of environmental knowledge, by facilitating understanding of such knowledge and by encouraging critical engagement with such knowledge. It is then generally concluded that journalists fail to live up to the demands of these roles. Reference is made, for example, to the fact that journalism about the environment is characterised by

the use jargon, and by a failure to explain or contextualise complex ideas. Furthermore, both groups argue that journalists fail to trace the connection between debates about the environment and socio-economic issues. Furthermore, it is argued that journalists tend to privilege expert knowledge such as that of science over indigenous knowledge and the knowledge of ordinary people. Both groups also argue that journalists tend to be uncritical of scientific knowledge, accepting dominant scientific views about the environment at face value. It would seem then that, despite the argument put forward at the end of Chapter Two that journalists may be able to contribute to debates about journalism and the environment in ways that academics have not done, these two groups frame the discussion of this topic in remarkably similar ways.

It has also been demonstrated in this study that the two discussions are characterised by very similar approaches to the conceptualisation of authoritative knowledge. It is, more particularly, possible to trace the presence of all three traditions of epistemology mentioned above within both discussions. For this reason, both discussions benefit from the particular perspectives that each of these epistemological traditions bring to the evaluation of journalism about the environment. It has been argued that one benefit of the positivist tradition lies in its acknowledgement of the centrality of scientific knowledge to debates about the environment and its emphasis on the importance of translating such knowledge into simple everyday language. The value of the interpretive tradition lies, in turn, in its respect and recognition of social knowledge of ordinary people within public debate. The value of the critical tradition is that it contributes towards promoting social change and progress by exposing all forms of unequal power relations. At the same time, both discussions tend to be dominated by a positivist understanding of knowledge. The extent to which the interpretive and critical perspectives are pursued within these discussions therefore remains relatively limited.

It is, at the same time, possible to identify important differences between the two discussions. Based on these differences, it is possible to argue that the discussion represented by the interviews with journalists includes perspectives on journalism about the environment that is not present in the academic literature reviewed in Chapter One. As we have seen in Chapter Four, the research participants do indeed speak in a more detailed way about the ways in which institutional context constrains the ability of

journalists to put their principles into practice. It is evident that this focus on institutional context enables the participants to identify strategies through which journalism about the environment may be improved. One important debate that emerges, in context of such arguments, relates to the distinction between the reporter as generalist and as environmental specialists. The participants generally argue that it is a mistake to assume that it is only the specialist journalist that should be involved in reporting on the environment. The fact that such arguments do not emerge in the context of the academic literature may, indeed, have to the do with the failure of such literature to engage with the specificity of historical context.

It can, however, be argued that the participants' attention to institutional context resulted from the fact that they were prompted to speak about this in the context of the interview process. It may also be, then, that if they were not specifically questioned about this topic, reference to institutional context may have been absent from this group's discussion. It is of relevance to note, in relation to this possibility, that even the participants' attention to institutional context remains limited. Like the academic writers, they too, tend to focus most of their attention on the performance of individual journalists. It is also of interest to note, in this context, that the participants seem to adopt an approach to the critique of journalism that views the journalist "from the outside". Throughout the discussions summarised in Chapter Three and Four, they tend to talk not about themselves, but about other journalists. This may be one reason why they tend to reiterate a set of statements about journalists irrespective of historical context, in similar terms to the academic discussions. The image of the journalist that they offer as part of this discussion seems, in some respects, very different from their conceptualisation of themselves. It is, for example, noticeable that they tend to describe journalists as lacking in knowledge and social awareness, while they are able to affirm their own ability to engage in an informed way with their social context.

It may be that this preoccupation with individual performance of the journalist – and with the image of this journalist as ignorant - is generally assumed, both in academic and journalistic circles, to represent the appropriate framework for the evaluation of journalistic practice. The research participants can, then, be seen to share a great deal with the academic commentators with regards to understanding of what is the appropriate

way to engage in the critique of journalistic practice. This shared framework may, in the end, have limited the research participants' ability to realise the full potential of the contribution that they can make to discussions of journalism about the environment. Both groups therefore remain constrained with regards to their ability to widen the terms of reference available for the critical discussion of journalism about the environment, drawing on all three approaches to the conceptualisation of knowledge.

Given the scope of the study, I was only able to begin to uncover the potential of the comparative study of the way journalists and academics evaluate journalism about the environment, and of the role that conceptualisations of knowledge play within this. It would be of greater value to pursue further research on this topic using a multi-method research approach, involving both interviews and participant observation, based within a journalistic community of practice. This may enable the researcher to transcend the limitations that were experienced, during the current study, as a result of drawing only on interviews. It is possible, for example, that they would be able to unearth richer and more complex perspectives on the way in which journalists make sense of their own coverage of environmental issues. In this way, researchers may be able to by-pass the shared tendency, amongst both journalism scholars and journalists themselves, to evaluate journalistic practice 'from the outside'.

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