

From Hope Labour to Hope for Journalism: Career Trajectories of Precarious Millennial Journalists in Slovenia

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ABSTRACT

Journalism has always been characterised by unpredictability, freelancing and precarious employment, while it is little-known what exactly happens with precarious employment in journalism over time. To fill this research gap, this study set out to explore the career paths and structural context of precarious millennial journalists in Slovenia. In-depth interviews with stakeholders from media organisations were analysed in order to gain insight into the structural conditions of Slovenian journalism. With the aim of understanding what is going on with regard to the journalists' career transitions, the authors conducted a longitudinal study of their careers and in-depth interviews with precarious journalists in 2017, and then again in 2021. The results have shown that the widespread professional image of journalists as watchdogs drew young people into the profession and reinforced hope labour. The journalists were motivated and willing to work overtime, thinking that a steady job was just around the corner. After years of hope labour, the structural conditions of journalism had deteriorated and the journalists realised that hope labour would not lead to a permanent contract at a media organisation. At that point, one group switched careers and took on public

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relations jobs, although they still considered themselves journalists and cherished the ideals of journalism from afar. The second group readjusted their lifestyle and economic interests for the sake of keeping a career in journalism, albeit outside of the legacy media structures and in precarious working conditions. The latter group has demonstrated that precarious and underpaid, yet very motivated journalists uphold journalism ideals.

Keywords: career paths, journalism ideology, precarity, emotions, hope labour, millennials

Introduction

This article explores the career paths of millennial journalists (born between 1985 and 1996) in Slovenia, who started their careers off in precarious employment conditions. Journalism has been characterised by precarity from its very outset. The notion of the ever-attentive and free “crusading journalist” who informs citizens (Aldridge, 1998: 109-112) has developed in response to the routine process of writing for newspaper intended for the market. Nicole Cohen (2016: 57-68) has noted that freelancing in journalism developed primarily as a bottom-up approach for the sake of protection of journalism, within which workers seek to resist top-down, owner-controlled news production. However, in the 21st century, freelancing and precarious employment have become the “corporate strategy for lowering production and labour costs to maximise profit.” (ibid.: 21)

Several studies on journalistic work have shown that the current precarious working conditions are affecting journalists’ health and well-being (Penteado and Gastaldello, 2016: 295), their freedom of expression and professional autonomy (Lee-Wright, 2012: 21-39; Čehovin Zajc and Poler Kovačič, 2021: 151-164) and work-life balance (Lukan and Čehovin Zajc, 2022: 1-17), with women suffering because of the motherhood penalty on top of it all (Boateng and Epp-Lauk, 2020: 46-62). The precarious working conditions, without any clear career paths in traditional journalism, have seen many journalists turn to public relations or similar corporate communications jobs, which typically come with greater job security and higher pay (Pickard, 2019: 85).

Data from the USA show that a decade ago, the ratio of public relations workers to journalists was 3:1. In 2014, the ratio was a staggering 5:1, and, according to recent calculations, it has become as high as 6:1. Some scholars perceive this as a symptom of the slow, but steady structural collapse of professional journalism (ibid.). Others, however, are wary of drawing such overly simplistic and ominous

conclusions. Mark Deuze, for example, states, “The news industry, as it has been traditionally organized, is not necessary for journalism as an ideology to survive and for the work of journalists to remain relevant to people’s lives.” (Deuze, 2019: 3) Oscillating between pessimistic and optimistic accounts of journalism, *the objective of this study is to examine the structural context and career paths of precariously employed millennial journalists.*

The article is divided into four sections. Drawing on the sociology of work, we introduce the theoretical backstory behind precarious work and precarity in journalism, as well as the typology of journalism careers. The chosen method – in-depth interviews with media stakeholders and journalists – is described right after that. The results section reveals the structural context of journalism in Slovenia provided by stakeholders, followed by the career paths of millennial journalists who have worked in precarious conditions for at least 5 years. In the conclusion, we deduce that journalism remains relevant as the fourth estate of democracy, since journalists with precarious careers, mainly outside legacy media structures, pursue and uphold the ideology of journalism.

Precarious Work and Precarity in Journalism

The neoliberal turn in politics and society during the 1970s implies that precarity is a phenomenon of contemporary capitalism. As an economic doctrine and set of ideas, neoliberalism holds that humans should be liberated to pursue individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills, while emphasising property rights, free markets and free trade (Harvey, 2005: 2). With regard to the labour market, precarity is a by-product of the neoliberal economic doctrine, the resulting decline in standard employment relationships (SER) and the rise of various temporary employment contracts in the form of freelancing, agency work, and sub-contracting. One of the first scholars to pinpoint the concept of precarity was Pierre Bourdieu. His essay titled *Acts of Resistance* (1988) posited that precarity is all-pervasive; he conceptualised it as a labour condition under capitalism and criticised the increase of atypical and non-secure employment in France. As per Bourdieu, insecurity gives people a “sense that they are in no way irreplaceable and that their work, their jobs, are in some way a privilege, a fragile and threatened privilege, as they are reminded by their employers as soon as they step out of line.” (ibid.: 82-93) Kalleberg and Vallas (2018: 1) later defined precarious work as “uncertain, unstable and insecure form of employment in which employees (as opposed to the company or the government) bear the risk and receive limited social benefits and protection”. The precarious state

of working arrangements and lived experiences are so evident that Zygmunt Bauman (2002) even spoke up about precarious life amidst the liquid modernity. Precarious work has recently been reinforced and established in the gig economy, and labour that has transformed employees into a just-in-time workforce has fragmented the power of labour and reduced the workers' ability to organise and unionise for demanding better working conditions (Bulian, 2021: 106-119; Vallas and Schor, 2020: 273-294).

Nowadays, most media work takes place within the framework of precarious employment, in which media professionals work without permanent contracts (Deuze et al., 2020: 1-20). Journalism has always been associated with freedom, autonomy and freelancing. The notion of a "crusading journalist" who informs citizens and plays the watchdog role has been intertwined with freelancing from the very beginning (Aldridge, 1998: 109-127). It is closely related to the professional autonomy of journalists, defined as "the latitude a practitioner has in carrying out their occupational duties" (Weaver et al., 2007: 10) and manifested in journalists' opportunity to determine, devise and control the work process, as well as freedom from outside influence, and it presumes that journalists are committed to the public interest (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 1-20). In the words of Victor Pickard, "Many of the ideals and codes of conduct in professional journalism developed in direct response to the pressures of protecting the public service mission of journalism against profit imperatives that threatened democratic objectives." (Pickard, 2019: 118) Nicole Cohen (2016: 57-68) similarly described how freelancing emerged as a bottom-up and worker-developed response to top-down, owner-controlled news production. It evolved as a response to the paid and routinised writing process aimed at producing standardised news for commercial newspaper intended for the market. This individual micro-strategy of journalists was devised in order for them to obtain agency under asymmetrical power relations favouring media organisations.

Precarious employment of journalists has lately become a "corporate strategy for lowering production and labour costs to maximise profit." (Cohen, 2016: 21) The (hi)story of freelancing has taken a turn for the worse in the form of working conditions of young journalists in the 21st century.

Besides the personal impact, it also has many implications for journalism and democratic society as a whole, since power relations are conflated with the commercialisation of journalism. Chadha and Steiner (2022: 20-28) have demonstrated that corporate owners often commit solely to one goal: ensuring shareholder profit and hence introducing cost-cutting measures in the form of precarious employment of journalists. Moreover, this affects journalists' professional norms, as well as their

work, because they have fewer resources and opportunities to do investigative reporting and are not covered by insurance should they be sued for doing their sometimes tricky job. Precarious working conditions negatively influence journalists in several ways, including increased stress, financial insecurity and lack of predictability (Ryan, 2009: 447-464), work–life imbalance (Lukan and Čehovin Zajc, 2022: 1-17), and they dishearten their motivation and emotions associated with the journalist profession (Lukan and Čehovin Zajc, 2023: 1-16). Such conditions affect journalists’ freedom of expression (Čehovin Zajc and Poler Kovačič, 2021: 151-164), because the latter do not have accessible legal aid should they be sued for their work (Lee-Wright, 2012: 21-41). Consequently, the culture of job insecurity in the news industry hinders changes in the journalistic practice (Ekdale et al., 2015: 383-398), leading to the decline of investigative reporting as newsrooms are shrinking (Deuze, 2007: 23-50).

A rare study into the career trajectories of journalists under various types of contracts yielded important results. Exploring the life histories of Israeli journalists, Davidson and Meyers (2016 a: 193-211) found that the inability to voice occupational concerns, long hours, burnout or lack of money prompts journalists to leave their profession for a career in public relations or retire early. In a similar vein, the present article investigates career trajectories, but specifically focuses on journalists working under precarious contracts. As Gollmitzer (2014: 838) stated, the “appropriate response to flexibilization of journalistic labour should include research that goes beyond exploring working conditions at one point in time, following career trajectories that allow us to capture and understand transitions”. We seek to address this research gap by answering the following research question:

RQ: What are the career trajectories and structural context of precariously employed millennial journalists?

A Typology of Journalism Careers

In order to examine the career trajectories of precarious journalists, we draw on the typology of journalism careers presented by Davidson and Meyers (2016 a: 193-211). Furthermore, we seek to detect transitions among these types of careers in precarious millennial journalists. Everett Hughes (1997: 389-397) defined career as a person’s path through working life in which they attain a certain amount of profit, authority and prestige. Hughes added that the examination of careers requires a search for the sequences that emerge in people’s working lives. Drawing on Hughes’ (ibid.) definition of career, Davidson and Meyers (2016a: 193-211)

proposed a typology of careers in journalism. The authors distinguish between five types of careers: 1) a bureaucratic career is characterised by formalised work procedures, a steady income and a stable work environment, and is often found in public and government-dependent media; 2) an entrepreneurial career involves starting businesses and working on multiple creative projects simultaneously. Personal risk is an individual choice and a desired work style; 3) a professional career in journalism is more about professional identification, the way journalists perceive themselves, and synonymous with doing valued work. It is often found in stable media bureaucracies or in entrepreneurial contexts; 4) a non-professional career in journalism refers to people who are not paid for their journalistic work but pursue journalism in digital industries; and 5) involuntary entrepreneurial careers are characterised by a lack of job security and benefits, and low autonomy due to the asymmetrical employee–employer relationship. Unlike in entrepreneurial careers, personal risk is not desired by the worker. The figure of the full-time freelance journalist embodies this career type (ibid.: 201). In order to explore career trajectories of precariously employed millennial journalists, we shall draw on the typology of journalism presented above.

Method

With the purpose of exploring career trajectories and structural context of precariously employed millennial journalists in post-socialist Slovenia, this article combines two research projects: the longitudinal study of journalists' careers conducted by the authors and interviews with stakeholders from the project called Segmentation of Non-Standard Employment in Slovenia – SEGNEED (Vobič and Bembič, 2021), so as to gather organisational insights.

In order to explore their career trajectories, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with nine precarious millennial journalists (two men and seven women) in Slovenian national news media. The interviews took place in 2017 (in-person), and was repeated with the same journalists in 2021 (all but one attended the Zoom meeting, due to the COVID-19 epidemic), allowing us to obtain a longitudinal perspective. In total, we conducted 18 interviews with 9 journalists. Interviewees were selected using criteria for precarious employment: unpredictable work or uncertain continuity of employment (Kalleberg, 2013: 700-706; ILO, 2016); minimal control over working conditions, wages, or the place of work; work not protected by law or collective agreements (ILO, 2016); none or limited social benefits and legal rights (Kalleberg, 2013: 700-706; Standing, 2016). Atypical long-term work was another selection criterion for respondents.

When selecting interviewees, we used a combination of the nonprobability method of snowball and expert sampling, where we asked journalists for recommendations and conducted several months of consultations with academic media/journalism experts. All interviewees had a high level of education (no less than a bachelor's or master's degree). They all started their careers off as student interns and continued to work in atypical employment (copyright license agreements or self-employed). At the time of the first interview, their careers were precarious and focused exclusively on journalism, lasting more than 7 and up to 15 years, while at the time of the second interview, some were seeking career opportunities in public relations or similar corporate communications professions (see Table 1). In this article, all precariously employed interviewees are given aliases so as to protect their identity.

Various questions were asked during the interviews with journalists in order to gain insight into the history of their employment, working conditions, collective or individual struggles along the way, as well as motivational drivers. The objective was not to create one master narrative encompassing career trajectories at hand, but to provide a thick description and unique insights into the careers of journalists and their perceptions of precarity as it follows them over the many years of their professional journey. The interviews lasted between 47 and 76 minutes, and were transcribed and coded in Nvivo. Content analysis was conducted so as to provide results with a special focus on the career trajectories.

A career is formed by an individual's desires, motivations and abilities, as well as the economy in a given social context (Hughes, 1997). To explain the latter, we rely on in-depth interviews with stakeholders in Slovenian media conducted within the SEGNET project. The data sources for this project comprise a combination of 25 interviews conducted with journalists, photographers, editors, managers, middle managers, and representatives of the journalists' union in Slovenia. In order to provide the macro-level context in which the career trajectories of precarious millennial journalists unfold, this article draws on the findings and themes emerging from five selected interviews (with a head of the finance department, middle manager, two labour union presidents and an editor-in-chief).

Table 1 Journalists' profile and their career trajectories / *Tablica 1. Profil novinara i njihovi poslovi*

Alias, Age	Interview Date	Type of employment contract and employer			At the time of the second interview in 2021
		Before the first interview in 2017	Between the two interviews (2017–2020)		
Andrea, 37	8/3/2017 5/4/2021	Student contract for cooperation with various news media companies Self-employed for cooperation with a single news media company	SER with the same news media company	SER in PR in the public sector	SER in Public relations
Brooke, 33	15/3/2017 18/3/2021	Student contract for cooperation with various news media companies Copyright license contract for cooperation with a single news media company	Copyright contract for cooperation with a single news media company	SER in PR with an NGO	
Cynthia, 38	25/4/2017 10/2/2021	Student contract for cooperation with various news media companies Self-employed for cooperation with a single news media company	SER with another news media company	SER in PR and corporate communications in the public sector	
Faye, 36	4/5/2017 2/2/2021	Student contract for cooperation with various news media companies Copyright contract for cooperation with a single news media company	Copyright contract for cooperation with a single news media company	SER in PR in the public sector	
Georgia, 37	29/6/2017 28/1/2021	Student contract for cooperation with various news media companies Self-employed for cooperation with several news media companies	Self-employed for cooperation with several news media companies	Self-employed for cooperation with a single news media company + writing PR articles	Simultaneously working in news and PR journalism
Daniel, 34	24/4/2017 26/5/2021	Student contract for cooperation with various news media companies Self-employed for cooperation with a single news media company	Self-employed for cooperation with a single news media company	SER with the same news media company	
Emily, 36	27/4/2017 22/4/2021	Student contract for cooperation with various news media companies	Fixed-term contract in a single news media company SER with the same news media company	Copyright license contract for cooperation with various news media companies	Continuing to work in journalism with a SER news media company
Henry, 35	21/7/2017 12/4/2021	Student contract for cooperation with various news media companies Self-employed for cooperation with several news media companies	Self-employed for cooperation with several news media companies	Self-employed for cooperation with several news media companies	
Ivy, 36	21/9/2017 29/1/2021	Student contract for cooperation with various news media companies Self-employed for cooperation with a single news media company	Self-employed for cooperation with a single news media company	Self-employed for cooperation with several news media companies	

(SER – Standard employment relationship, PR – Public Relations, NGO – non-governmental organisation)

Table 2 The profile of media companies' stakeholders

Tablica 2. Profili medijskih kuća

In-text reference	Position	Year of the interview
PUJ	President of the union of journalists at a news media company	2020
RUJ	Representative of the union of journalists at a news media company	2020
HFD	Head of the finance division at a news media company	2021
ECPMO	Editor-in-Chief of a print media company	2021
ECRA	Editor-in-Chief of a broadcasting company	2020

Results

In this section, we present the main findings of the content analysis of the in-depth-interviews with journalists (concerning their career trajectories) and stakeholders (to provide structural context). The results are categorised chronologically. The first subsection, *Hope Labour in an Involuntary Entrepreneurial Career*, describes the careers of the precarious journalists prior to the interviews. The subsection titled *Disillusioned Watchdogs in an Involuntary Entrepreneurial or Bureaucratic Careers*, deals with their careers at the time of the first interviews, followed by the two main career trajectories that were detected in the second round of interviews; one leading to a job in public relations (subsection *Leaving Journalism for Public Relations: Journalism Never Leaves You*) and the other to entrepreneurial careers in journalism (subsection *Entrepreneurial Career: Passionate Journalists without Economic Interests*). At the start of each of the four subsections containing results, we present the structural conditions from the perspective of the key actors from media companies (management, union representatives and editors-in-chief), then describe the types of employment contracts and analyse career transitions of the interviewed millennial journalists in Slovenia.

Hope Labour in an Involuntary Entrepreneurial Career

Millennial journalists entered the job market during structural changes in the media industry, after the economic crisis that commenced in 2008. The head of the

financial department of the leading news media company in Slovenia stated, *“The economic crisis that began in 2008 had a drastic impact on the media business /.../ the younger generations of journalists no longer live as comfortably as their predecessors. It is a difficult job now. You have to work a lot for little money, while the older generations enjoyed a relatively nice and comfortable life with much less working hours and better wages.”* (HFD, 2020)

All of the journalists we interviewed had begun their careers in atypical employment as student interns in various national news media. Thereafter, they worked primarily under copyright license contracts or as self-employed individuals. The following statement illustrates the different atypical working arrangements of journalists: *“I started off as an intern. Then I signed a copyright licensed contract. In 2013, I had to change my status to self-employed, otherwise the newspaper would have terminated the cooperation. I was forced to change my status.”* (Andrea, 2017) All the interviewees faced precarious working conditions, without the benefits and protections that come with a normal employment relationship: *“I do not have paid holidays or sick leave, my lunch and commute expenses are not covered.”* (Brooke, 2017) Such quotes go to show that the journalists started their careers of as involuntary entrepreneurs, with a lack of job security and benefits, low autonomy, and asymmetrical employee–employer relationships.

While the journalists described exploitative working conditions, they also reported high motivation and passion for their work, *“Maybe I’m way too idealistic, but I still see the point of informing the public and protecting those who cannot protect themselves other than through the media.”* (Georgina, 2017) Journalists used the word “love” to describe their work, *“I love journalism. I think it’s a life mission. It requires passion, and I got that. I love this work so much that I am not sure I can even call it work.”* (Andrea, 2017) Their passion for journalism meant they were willing to work overtime: *“I have always dreamed of this profession as something extraordinary, vibrant. Something is happening all the time, and you are always on the alert. You control the situation in the society you live in. If you are a good journalist, if you want to be a good journalist, you have to occupy this profession 24 hours a day.”* (Daniel, 2017) The journalists emphasised the hope they held at the beginning of their careers, *“I sincerely believed in the idea that if you perform well, the system will take notice of your effort and abilities, and eventually your employment status will improve.”* (Emily, 2017) Daniel gave a similar, but more pragmatic statement, *“You cannot force the CEO to hire you. They are giving you the opportunity to be here, and if you do not like something, go try somewhere else. You have to make do with what you have and hope that things change for the better in the future. In the meantime, just try and earn as much as you can, work as much as you can and*

be satisfied with what you got". Journalists pointed out their employers' promises of future employment as a means of entertaining their hopes: *"Editors have promised me that I was next in line for employment. I have been listening to this promise of a job for several years now, but it has never come true."* (Cynthia, 2017)

Disillusioned Watchdogs in an Involuntary Entrepreneurial or Bureaucratic Careers

After many years of hoping to obtain a steady employment contract and accepting precarious working conditions in involuntary entrepreneurial careers, journalists generally have not climbed the ladder in media organisations and companies. The latter have been unable to hire journalists on a permanent basis because of shrinking profits from advertising and newspaper sales. As the editor-in-chief of a print media outlet stated, *"We had no choice but to lower the rates for freelance journalists because of the drastic decline in revenues from advertising and newspaper sales."* (ECPMO, 2020) The president of the journalists' union at a print media company described how they wanted to protect journalists from losing their jobs, while hiring was completely off the table: *"Now it's about how many people are not fired. Not that anyone will be hired. No one at all will be hired."* (PUJ, 2020)

After many years of hoping, six journalists have continued working under atypical employment contracts. Two journalists have meanwhile signed standard employment contracts with news media companies, shifting from *an involuntary entrepreneurial* to *a bureaucratic career* in journalism, with more formalised work procedures and a more stable work environment. Despite the differences in their employment relationships, all the journalists have become cynical about journalism in the legacy media. When describing their change in attitude towards journalism, the participants offered a variety of reasons. For some, the censorship of their articles exposing prominent public figures or organisations had added to their disenchantment with journalism: *"At that point, I just lost faith in journalism, basically in the profession in general. All these games that were going on behind the scenes disillusioned me more than anything."* (Daniel, 2017) The interviewed journalists pointed out the problem of legacy media ownership and the inability to write investigative articles, *"I have been thinking about how to tell the kids how great journalism is, but I am not sure if I want to promote something in which I do not believe anymore at all. Because real journalism is lost to commissioned articles and mixing PR with journalism."* (Andrea, 2017) In fact, her disappointment with journalism had only grown stronger in the last round of the interviews: *"The owners of the media outlets are certain corporations that do not understand that the media should be in service*

of the people, not their internal newsletters. Unfortunately, capital rules the world, and it also owns the media." (Andrea, 2021) The journalists expressed the view that journalism in media organisations and companies has been reduced to public relations (PR): *"Often you have to finish a piece within the 9-to-5 timeframe. And I have a problem with that, because I like to immerse myself in the topic. Instead, you do PR or summarise content written by other people and prepared in advance. Then you conduct some interviews with certain authorities. Very rarely can you uncover anything problematic."* (Emily, 2021) The journalists observed that neither the editors nor the owners of media companies want investigative journalism: *"The space for professional, serious, in-depth journalism is shrinking because neither editors nor owners allow it or want it."* (Cynthia, 2021)

As the above comments suggest, the journalists were very disappointed with the current state of journalism. For example, 6 out of 9 journalists took a legal route in order to fight for their labour rights – by suing news media companies for having violated labour laws by keeping them in disguised employment. Cynthia stated that she hoped it wouldn't come to that, but unfortunately she became jaded by an unpredictable career in journalism, *"I am already sick and tired of everything. It is now up to them to take an action in my favour. I have been asking them for a job for three or four years now, and I am waiting all too patiently for their goodwill."* (Cynthia, 2017) This eventually led her to decide to sue her employer. *"I told them I had filed a lawsuit and that I knew they would not be rolling out the red carpet for me, but for the past 9 years I had given this media outlet everything I could."* (Cynthia, 2017) Two journalists took the issue to court, which declared their cases as disguised employment. The other four agreed to settlements offered by their respective news media companies before going to court. Brooke described the process of negotiating with her media company and listed her demands, *"I filed a lawsuit; then the negotiations took place and they proposed employment for the future and nothing else. However, I wanted compensation for all the previous years of precarious work. Finally, they acknowledged my trouble and we found a good halfway house."* (Brooke, 2021) After the settlement, Brooke and other journalists who had sued their media companies eventually resigned.

Four out of six journalists who had filed lawsuits against media companies found full-time jobs in public relations or corporate communications. Andrea, who had a standard employment contract at a news media company, later went on to work in public relations. Georgina started working concomitantly as a journalist, writing PR and search engine optimisation (SEO) articles, and ended up being very cynical about journalistic practice. Cynicism is what led Emily, who also had a standard employment contract in a news outlet, back to an entrepreneurial career in journalism.

In the following sections, based on the most recent interviews, we describe the career trajectories that lead journalists to public relations and entrepreneurial careers in journalism.

Leaving Journalism for Public Relations: Journalism Never Leaves You

A representative of the printers' union commented on young journalists leaving the profession due to uncertain career prospects, saying, *"They were waiting to get employment, and then they realised that our media house could not give them what they wanted, so they left."* (RUJ, 2020) The withdrawal of young journalists from the profession had also become a problem for editors in news media outlets: *"We lost many excellent journalists, which also caused damage to us, because we invested money and time and basically trained these people."* (ECPMO)

Four out of nine interviewed journalists had found full-time jobs in public relations or similar corporate communications fields. Andrea, Cynthia, Brooke and Faye explained that they left journalism behind primarily because of the precarious working conditions. Brooke explained the relief she felt when she first experienced the benefits of a standard employment contract: *"I still remember my first sick leave as a full-time employee at PR. I was so grateful to have the opportunity to take it easy when I was sick, without the constant pressure to write."* (Brooke, 2021) The participants working full-time in PR placed great importance on having time off: *"For me, it's important that I can balance my work and free time. So, when I come home from work, I rarely get phone calls from the office. Evenings are free, weekends are free, holidays are free. I do not feel any pressure whatsoever."* (Andrea, 2021)

As evidenced by such comments, they left journalism behind because their personal preferences regarding leisure and other activities besides work became more prominent. *"I can devote more of my time to the people I love and the things I like to do."* (Faye, 2021) The interviewees also emphasised that they had left their jobs in journalism because the working conditions in the legacy media structures had prevented them from taking on a watchdog role. Consequently, they went on to work in public relations, yet maintained their idealistic views of journalism, cherishing from afar. All of the respondents who were working full-time in public relations still identified as journalists. Andrea (2021) noted, *"I still love journalism immensely. I still define myself as a journalist, and I will continue to see myself as such. No matter what profession I work in, I will always have a journalist's point of view"*. Faye

(2021) also stated that she is still a journalist despite having left the profession, *“In short, journalism is still a great love of mine, even though I have left the practice a long time. I feel like once you become a journalist, journalism never lets go of you”*.

An Entrepreneurial Career: Passionate Journalists without Economic Interests

With many journalists leaving the profession, the editors in media companies have noted that there is still a small number of motivated journalists who haven't given up on journalism. *“If there were no passionate and dedicated journalists, we could not survive on these resources and with so few staff members.”* (ECRA, 2020)

Five respondents who kept working as journalists turned out to be simultaneously idealistic and realistic. They held idealistic beliefs regarding the ideology of journalism. On the other hand, they were realistic when it comes to journalistic practice, having scaled down their ambitions and minimised their economic interests and needs in order to hold the fort of journalism and do what they are passionate about. Henry's career has been of entrepreneurial nature since the beginning, and he has no intention of changing course. He values freedom and attaches great importance to his profession. *“When things get too difficult, a man feels forced to do something more secure, but I hold my principles in highest regard. I do the best I can, and I can contribute to society and public discourse. I just want to make a living out of it, doing something that fulfils me and maybe even has some impact. It would be hard for me to find something like that anywhere else.”* (Henry, 2021) At the same time, he claimed that he had to reduce his economic standards to a minimum: *“The rates for writing articles are the same as in 2017 /.../ and there's this constant uncertainty; I do not own anything except a computer and books. I live in a rented apartment and I carpool /.../ In terms of my values, I think it's the right thing to do, but in this system, it's not the safest thing to do in the long run.”* (Henry, 2021)

Only one journalist, Daniel, had entered into a standard employment relationship at the same media house where he started. However, he was very disappointed and looking for new opportunities that would allow him to write more in-depth investigative articles. He expressed interest in an entrepreneurial career in journalism: *“As journalists, we know how to write /.../ then the only reasonable way to go is PR. However, the journalist is at the service of the truth, and PR is perhaps more inclined to lies. So far, I am looking for good projects in journalism. I keep in touch with people, I am always on the lookout, /.../ I am keeping my eyes open for something really good.”* (Daniel, 2021)

Emily, however, left her full-time job in legacy news media for an entrepreneurial career. She founded a web portal for independent journalism: *“I went back to freelancing; me and a small group of colleagues run a web portal, everything is on a voluntary basis, there’s no money involved. And I am sticking with what I want to do, which is journalism.”* (Emily, 2021) She indicated that media companies looking for non-problematic content had motivated her to quit her full-time job in journalism: *“They’ll tell you that they are happy with everything. But they are most pleased with the articles that are unproblematic, where you do not engage with the content, where you follow a fairly established route, quote statements from important political figures, and don’t rock the boat.”* (Emily, 2021) She also expressed her frustration with certain portals’ implementation of paywall upon visiting the website. *“I could not access the articles or send them to the people who had participated in the interviews. I believed I was working in the public interest, for the right to information and all those nice things. Then that argument fell flat because, if my work was not accessible, I could no longer fool myself that these are the unassailable reasons why I am still in journalism.”* (Emily, 2021) Therefore, she took the risk, knowing that an entrepreneurial career comes with economic instability: *“If I had a family and a husband, I would probably make different choices. But I think it’s problematic to perceive journalism as a 9-to-5 job, and that simply typing out 3500 characters and then another 200 in one workday suffices. Journalism requires a personal drive. If I needed money to survive, I’d rather walk dogs or work in a shop. Staying in journalism because you need money is not okay because then the quality of your work pays the toll.”* (Emily, 2021)

Ivy embarked on an entrepreneurial career and adopted the lifestyle of a digital nomad after suing the legacy newspaper media where she had worked for many years. She shared Emily’s belief that a one cannot be a good journalist if they are just sitting in the newsroom and typing: *“You can only be a good writer by reading, listening, and being open.”* (Ivy, 2021) This was the key impetus for her to pursue a digital nomad lifestyle: *“It helps me escape problems at home and get a better perspective on domestic issues because I get to look at them from a distance /.../ everything I write eventually finds its way into Slovenian newspaper because I can offer a different perspective in comparison to journalists who live in Slovenia.”* (Ivy, 2021) She indeed offered a different perspective by suggesting that precarity increases productivity in journalism and that it plays an important role in society:

“Precarious work manifests itself as journalistic potential. If everyone could be as independent as I am, we’d have much better journalists. How would that work for people who have children and loans? I don’t know. But I have a solution that goes beyond the issue of journalism, which is journalism embedded in free arrange-

ments, as opposed to being involved in editorial work that becomes a routine and subject to power structures in the media and business.” (Ivy, 2021)

She pointed out the importance of intrinsic motivation, *“Being under the pressure of intrinsic motivation is a pleasant feeling. Being under the pressure of an existential situation is a different story”* (Ivy, 2021).

Taken together, the statements of the interviewees working in entrepreneurial journalism and the one journalist interested in an entrepreneurial career seem to suggest that the future of quality journalism lies in entrepreneurial and freelance working arrangements, even if it means scaling down one’s ambitions and economic interests.

Discussion and Conclusion

“We call journalistic freedom precarious work, which is another term for the victimisation of journalists. What we refer to as precarious work manifests itself as journalistic potential. Regular employment is not necessary for us to have good news outlets. I see quite the potential in freelance employment.” (Ivy, 2021)

This study has explored the career trajectories of precariously employed millennial journalists and it has provided answers to the research question – *RQ: What are the career trajectories and structural context of precariously employed millennial journalists?* Although the relatively small sample limits the extent of insights, the interviewees were carefully selected through expert sampling and we can deduce common career trajectory characteristics from their narratives. We have discovered several types of careers over the years. In the beginning, it was the ideology of journalism that drew young people into the profession. All of the journalists we interviewed started off in involuntary entrepreneurial careers characterised by a lack of job security, benefits, and little autonomy (Davidson and Meyers, 2016: 193-211). They were willing to accept precarious working conditions in the name of intrinsic motivation because they saw journalism as creative, dynamic, and important to society. Kuehn and Corrigan (2013: 293) call this “hope labor”: *“un- or under-compensated work often performed in exchange for experience and exposure in hopes that the future work will follow.”* For young journalists, hope was a viable coping strategy to navigate the rough seas of the journalism job market.

Hope labour has an expiration date. Over time, the journalists realised that what they love implies long hours and exploitative working conditions. Then, the careers of precarious millennial journalists mainly divided into two trajectories: public relations and entrepreneurial careers. In the former case, journalists chose to work in public relations for the sake of greater security and a better work-life balance. In-

terestingly enough, their commitment to the ideology of journalism remains firmly in place, and they still consider themselves journalists. They share a critical attitude towards legacy news organisations, but their loyalty to the ideals of journalism does not fade.

The second career trajectory implied switching to entrepreneurial endeavours. In this case, journalists have adopted entrepreneurship as a core element of their identity with the aim of protecting their professional autonomy and acting in accord with the democratic objectives of the press. One journalist, for example, started her own web portal posting in-depth journalistic articles. Journalists with this career trajectory adapt their needs and lower their economic ambitions. Another journalist's comment that "*regular employment is not necessary for us to have good news outlets*" (Ivy, 2021) suggests that the ideology of journalism is alive and kicking, albeit not within legacy media structures, but rather in atypical employment. Passionate and precarious journalists in entrepreneurial careers maintain a traditional understanding of the ideology of journalism and this is where the "*ideology of journalism comes back to life, not necessarily sustained by a news industry, but by a passionate army of precariously working, underpaid reporters /.../, most of whom only rarely set eyes on a newsroom*" (Deuze, 2019: 2). The entrepreneurial careers of journalists have historical roots and are reminiscent of freelancing in journalism, which developed as bottom-up protection for journalists trying to resist top-down, owner-driven news production (Cohen, 2016; Pickard, 2019). This may be seen as a grounds for hope for journalism. However, it is important not to downplay and overlook the precarious dimensions that are also present in entrepreneurial careers. Although these journalists take a personal risk as their own individual choice and desired way of working, they experience precarious working conditions. While freelancing gives them greater independence, it can also make them dependent on multiple employers and more likely to take legal risks as independent journalists. In this vein, labelling a career type as entrepreneurial, like Davidson and Meyers (2016) do, is problematic because it obscures the precarious characteristics and risks these journalists face, even though the risk is their own choice. This is so because, as Bulian (2021) rightly observes, at the end of the day it is media companies and corporate shareholders that profit from journalists' commitment to professional autonomy in the name of which they lower their economic standards and willingly accept precarious working conditions.

Results from Slovenia have shown that journalists there, as well as in other parts of the world, are experiencing similar conditions of precarity and asymmetrical power relations. Along the same lines of the findings of Davidson and Meyers (2016 a),

when unable to have their voice heard in a media company, journalists go on to work in public relations. Where our findings diverge from theoretical expectations is that they revealed another group of journalists who remain passionately committed to the ideals of journalism and have adapted their economic interests and aspirations.

The evidence from our empirical study suggests that journalists' careers tend to be disorganised and ambiguous. In liquid modernity (Bauman, 2002), careers are becoming liquid as well: "Long-term planning and 'moving up the corporate ladder' have been replaced by job-hopping and a portfolio work life as news professionals increasingly get contracts, not careers in journalism" (Deuze and Witschge, 2018: 171-172). Therefore, it is somewhat difficult to capture journalists' careers with the typology presented by Davidson and Meyers (2016 a: 193-211) due to the presence of constant negotiations, transitions and changes. To apprehend this complexity, it is worth discussing "patchwork careers" in journalism (Michel, 2000 in Deuze and Witschge, 2018), whereby individuals find permanence in impermanence and are perpetually flexible, both outside and inside news institutions, moving on from one project to another and shifting careers.

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Od rada iz nade do nade za novinarstvo: karijere prekarnih novinara milenijske generacije u Sloveniji

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SAŽETAK

Karakteristike novinarstva od samog početka bile su nepredvidljivost, poslovanje u svojstvu slobodnjaka i prekarni rad, a manje je poznato što se događa s nesigurnim zaposlenjem u novinarstvu tijekom vremena. Kako bi popunili tu prazninu u istraživanju, cilj je studije proučavanje tijeka karijere i strukturnoga konteksta novinara milenijske generacije u Sloveniji u prekrnim uvjetima rada. Uvid u strukturne uvjete slovenskog novinarstva dobili smo analizom dubinskih intervjua s predstavnicima medijskih organizacija. U svrhu razumijevanja njihovih karijernih tranzicija, pomoću longitudinalnog istraživanja pratili smo karijere prekarnih novinara i provele dubinske intervjue s njima 2017. godine, a zatim smo ih ponovile 2021. Rezultati ukazuju na to da je mlade na početku karijere u profesiju privukla profesionalna uloga koja novinare prikazuje kao pse čuvare, a poduprla je i takozvani rad iz nade. Novinari su bili motivirani i voljni raditi prekovremeno jer su očekivali da će ih stabilan posao čekati odmah „iza ugla“. Nakon godina rada iz nade, strukturni su se uvjeti novinarstva pogoršali, a novinari su shvatili da im rad iz nade neće omogućiti stabilan radni odnos u medijskim organizacijama. Uslijed te spoznaje jedna se grupa prebacila na odnose s javnošću, ali i njezini predstavnici i dalje sami sebe smatraju novinarima, a ideale novinarstva cijene takoreći izdaleka. Druga grupa prilagodila je svoj način života i ekonomske interese mogućnostima koje im nudi nastavak rada u novinarstvu, makar i izvan medijskih struktura i u prekrnim uvjetima rada. Na temelju proučavanja te druge grupe saznajemo da prekarni i nedovoljno plaćeni, ali izrazito motivirani novinari održavaju novinarske ideale.

Ključne riječi: karijera, novinarstvo, ideologija, prekarizacija, emocije, rad iz nade, milenijska generacija

