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Abstract

This article examines the impact of emotions on the professional realities and practices of Burkinabè reporters working in conflict-ridden regions of Burkina Faso. To achieve this, it adopts an innovative theoretical perspective that links the emotional turn in journalism to the sociology of risk. Using an original "fieldwork in delegation" methodology involving three focus groups and 37 interviews with Burkinabè journalists, the study closely investigates the specific realities of these volatile areas. The results highlight four main forms of professional adjustment that are emerging in the current context of crisis: 1) individual adjustments - to secure both physical and mental security, 2) professional adjustments - to secure working and employment conditions, 3) media adjustments - to secure the practical and economic functioning of the media companies; and 4) values adjustments - to reflect the core values underpinning the profession in conflict-situation. The article demonstrates that the Burkinabè journalists' current attempt to manage risk and emotion is rooted in their traditional role, but also in the new responsibilities they wish to assume in the current security context. This innovative and significant research provides a useful foundation for reflection for those interested in the experiences of local journalists operating in other global conflict zones.

Keywords: Burkina Faso (Africa), conflict, emotion, risk, community radio, radio journalism

Since 2015, Burkina Faso has witnessed a rise in terrorist attacks perpetrated by Islamist groups in the "three-borders" zone joining Mali, Niger, and Burkina. As a result, the whole population, including journalists, has been living in a country in conflict where all their usual activities are at risk. 2015 constituted a moment of rupture between a "before", characterised by the cohabitation of different religious communities and peace, and an "after" marked by terrorist violence, community-based conflict and instability (Ouedraogo 2020). The terrorist threat has destabilised the whole country, from the successive governments to the daily life of villagers. Within just a decade, national institutions have been overthrown by a popular uprising in 2014 and by two coups d'état in 2022. One also failed in 2015. Each time, the putschists justified overthrowing a regime because of the latter's failure to manage the terrorist threat. Today, the extremist armed groups reportedly control about 40% of the country. "Hundreds of attacks on civilians and military targets by armed groups in 10 of Burkina Faso's 13 regions markedly intensified a humanitarian crisis and brought the total number of people internally displaced since 2016 to nearly 2 million, or just under 10 percent of the population."[1] While also encompassed by the extensive literature on media in conflict (see Cottle 2006; Frère 2007; Thussu and Freedman 2003; Seib 2005; Williams 2016; Høiby and Ottosen 2019; Gonen and Hoxha 2019), this article focuses on emotions and journalism. By doing so, it aims to explore how an individual's and a group's emotional competences in handling risks affects their professional life and practices as journalists.

Burkina Faso merits investigation not only because there is little research on this new state of insecurity but, importantly, because this same state of extreme risk is also new to the journalists themselves, marking a strong contrast with the situation of peace they had worked in prior to 2015. In Burkina Faso, radio, the most listened to, and trusted, source of information in the country (CDAC 2022), remains the gateway to local violent extremism. Moreover, in the regions covered by the research, community radio is the only dominant and accessible medium for the population. Also, the local radio journalists under analysis are from these very localities themselves and are thus particularly exposed to extreme levels of risk and emotion. To fully understand this new security and emotional context, the broader situation affecting journalist safety in conflict zones must be considered, a topic which has been widely explored in recent years (Jamil 2018 & 2019; Ogunmefun & Akeem 2020; Høiby & Ottosen 2019).

'Threats to safety drive journalists to self-censorship and to use extreme caution' (Waisbord 2022), and these attacks are becoming increasingly complex. They are obviously physical (fear for their lives, physical harm), but also very largely psychological (Feinstein and Nicolson 2005; Feinstein, Owen and Blair 2002). War zones are evidently a place of significant danger for journalists who risk abduction or death (Bizimana 2006). Research has largely centred on war correspondents (Bizimana

[1] https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/burkina-faso

2006; 2014; Pedelty, 2020; Murrell, 2019). However, recent work has shifted the focus to local and national journalists who experience long-term risk situations on a daily basis (Cottle, Sambrook and Mosdell, 2016; Relly, Zanger and Fahmy 2015). This goes beyond physical risks to include those of associated emotions. Heightened feelings of anxiety, excitement, guilt and fear amongst war correspondents have been widely discussed (McLaughlin 2016; Rentschler 2007; Thompson 2019; Tumber and Webster 2006), with emotional trauma amongst journalists in conflict and the resulting post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), according to Feinstein et al. (2002), being comparable to that of combat veterans. Others have discussed various coping strategies to combat such emotions, which, according to Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen (2011), are often perceived as a form of irrationality. These can include detachment (Ahmed 2014: 64; Wetherell 2012: 27), professionalism (Gregory 2019), and being part of journalists' 'practical ethical reasoning' (Stupart 2021: 270), all suggesting that emotions are a self—or culturally—imposed interference into reasoned decision-making.

This research aims to understand the forms of physical and psychological violence to which news sources, media, local journalists and others working in security-challenged areas are exposed or subjected, the psychological and professional implications of this, and the coping mechanisms, resilience and resistance they develop to deal with it. To achieve this, it explores the contemporary and emerging *assemblage* of emotions and risks (Lupton 2013), as feelings, constraints and the need for personal and professional adjustment. It uses an innovative methodological approach, discussed below and brings together the contributions of the emotional turn in journalism studies (Wahl-Jorgensen 2020) and studies in the sociology of risk (Lupton 2006), particularly the calculation of risk in individuals (Harris & Williams 2018). By linking these two research streams, the article questions how journalists and local and community radio hosts in conflict-affected regions in Burkina Faso not only express but importantly manage their emotions and their relationship to their daily journalistic and media work.

This article is structured in three parts: the first section is a synthesis of academic work on emotions and risks; the second presents the methodology based on three focus groups and 37 interviews with Burkinabè journalists; and the third highlights four forms of professional adjustment, which have emerged inductively from our analysis of the interviews and focus groups. These are: 1) individual adjustments - to secure both physical and mental security, 2) professional adjustments - to secure working and employment conditions, 3) media adjustments - to secure the practical and economic functioning of the media companies; and 4) values adjustments - to reflect the core values underpinning the profession in conflict-situations.

Risks, emotions and their assemblage

This literature review is organised into three parts: first, it examines the "emotional turn" (Kotišová 2019; Wahl-Jorgensen 2019) that enabled journalism studies to take an interest in the emotional aspect of journalistic work; second, it summarises research analysing how journalists and media outlets manage risk (Harris & Williams 2018); and third, it outlines the theoretical concept of the emotion-risk assemblage (Lupton 2013) that frames this analysis.

Perspectives on emotions and the emotional turn

The interrelationship between journalism and emotions has been studied widely for example by psychiatrists, who have investigated mental health illnesses suffered by journalists (e.g., Aoki, et al., 2013); the psychological distress they faced during the Covid-19 pandemic (Osmann, Selva and Feinstein 2021) and the psychological impact that constant exposure to uncensored material has on them (Feinstein, Audet and Waknine 2015). The role of emotions in the contemporary production and consumption dynamics has also been explored by media specialists (Beckett & Deuze 2016). In a previous study (Le Cam and Ruellan, 2017), we explored the concept of 'emotricity' to describe the way emotions are not only felt, but how they serve the journalist, and are, in some ways, the driving force behind the commitment to, or discontinuance of, journalism practice.

Maintaining an emotional distance when reporting on conflict or traumatic events is far from simple given its varied, complex and contextually defined nature (Stupart 2021). Knight (2020), as just one example, discussed how UK journalists reporting on cases of genocide managed their emotions in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. There has been a softening of approaches with regard to emotions and reporting and a highlighting of the intersection of emotionality and journalistic professionalism. As Wahl-Jorgensen notes, norms are being 'collaboratively constructed in ways that blend conventional facts-based information with personal experience, subjective opinion and emotion' (2016: 20). However, this is often more prevalent in countries where emotions, mental health and well-being are recognised within the society where a journalist works. Foreign correspondents working in war zones, for example, may be provided mental health support before, during and after missions. Further are the personal attributes of journalists and whether, in order to manage their emotions, they are 'cool-detached' and 'cynical' when facing traumatic situations (Kotišová 2017a, 2017b) or whether they display 'rugged masculinity' in a stoic culture (Palmer and Melki 2018). In the context of patriarchal Burkina Faso, societal norms define clear roles for men and women. Whilst it is widely assumed, stereotypically, that women, of all ages, classes and locations, are emotional, this is not the case for men who are caught within hegemonic masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). As Buchanan & Keats (2011) and Pedelty (1995) note, PTSD, for example, has been widely considered a taboo topic which journalists should not express for fear of appearing weak and not capable of doing the job, but how do they deal with the rupture between, and the inseparability of, their personal and professional identities? As Zinn (2016) points out, practices and emotions

are shaped by their social context and the norms and structures that exist within it. This contextual order therefore determines the range of relationships and emotions that can arise and be expressed within a particular setting, or Burkina Faso, in our case. In other words, emotionality must be made viable as an occupational norm but to achieve this changes are required on individual, organisational and society levels (Schmidt 2021: 1174).

Few studies have directly observed the relationship that local journalists (and not foreign correspondents or special envoys) build with emotions, when reporting from their own region, and on the destruction of their own towns or massacres of their own communities do not live the same situation as foreign correspondents. Our aim here is to examine the case of journalists working in their own communities—in Burkina Faso in this case—where conflict dominates and where emotional well-being is scarcely acknowledged as a reality with little support being available (Heywood, Fierens, Niaoné and Le Cam, 2024). This research draws on the analyses carried out by researchers who have been interested in the media and journalists in this region of the continent for decades. They have highlighted the importance of radio for the continent as a whole (Willems and Mano 2017; Mabweazara and Mare 2021) and for Burkina Faso in particular (Fierens, Heywood and Yameogo, 2025, Capitant 2008), the way journalistic ethics and political debate interact (Frère 2000), the socio-economic functioning of the media in Burkina Faso (Balima and Frère 2003), and the impact of the internet and social networks on the circulation of information in Burkina Faso (Frère 2014). It also draws on studies of the links between media and conflict in Central Africa (Fierens and Mukomya, 2024, Frère 2005; Frère 2022) to address a gap in the existing literature concerning the place of radio in the current conflict in Burkina Faso.

Calculation of risk

Whilst emotions are pivotal in conflict reporting as discussed above and are garnering greater scholarly attention, risk calculation and management also remain integral to the professional culture and organisational structure of journalism (Harris & Williams 2018). Compared with other high-risk professional groups, there is little research into how journalists manage risk in their day-to-day work (Hughes & Márquez-Ramírez 2017). However, some studies have examined the challenges, risks and practices of war correspondents in the field (Seib 2006). Others have addressed risk mitigation practices that include group working and working with local journalists (Tumber & Webster 2006; Tumber & Palmer 2004). Qualitative studies in Mexico reveal that journalists working in high-risk areas make calculated choices to self-censor, avoiding certain dangerous street reporting or withholding information from suspicious colleagues in their own newsrooms (Hughes & Márquez-Ramírez 2017). Other studies show that newspapers operating in high-risk regions in Mexico have instituted policies to censor coverage of drug cartels and affiliated government corruption (González de Bustamante & Relly 2014). Recent scholarship (Urbániková & Haniková 2022; Waisbord 2022) has

explored various risk management strategies employed by media professionals to deal with the risks they are increasingly exposed to different global contexts

When discussing the topic of risk calculation and risk management by journalists working in violent contexts, a further question surrounding journalists working in violent areas is whether threats to their safety cause them to self-censor and ultimately give biased or limited information to the public (Walulya & Nassanga 2020). In response to the various threats, research shows that journalists do not necessarily turn to silence but may adapt their journalistic practices by choosing other methods and routines, using alternative sources, reporting without a byline (Westlund, Krøvel & Skare Orgeret 2022). Nevertheless, some journalists stop covering certain topics or even abandon their journalistic career altogether (Stahel & Schoen 2020) when faced with certain risks.

Research also indicates that traumatic events often trigger denial and avoidance among journalists. When facing attacks, threats, or witnessing violence against colleagues, many instinctively distance themselves emotionally. Operating on 'autopilot,' they control their emotions and memories to distance themselves from the situation (Urbániková & Haniková 2022: 1931)

The assemblage between emotion and risk

The interplay between risk and emotion is significant, especially when individuals are unaware of the risk they are in, making them reluctant to commit to changes in habitual practices (Wardman and Lofstedt 2020). While risk and emotions are well-studied domains, scholarship rarely intersects these two concepts. However, a bridging perspective is emerging around the notion of *emotion-risk assemblage*. The concept of assemblage has been mobilised in both the risk literature (Van Loon 2002, Lupton 2013; Giritli et al. 2020) and the emotion literature (Blackman and Venn 2010). By combining the two concepts of 'emotion-risk', we consider that emotion and risk interact with each other. In doing so, they configure each other. Thus, emotions create risks and risks create emotions (Lupton 2013). The concept of *assemblage* incorporates ‘a constellation of many other elements: ideational and material, human and non-human, living and non-living (Marcus 2006)” (Lupton 2013: 640). This framework connects place, space and emotions which are ‘constantly brought into being in relations’ (Larsen et al. 2023: 7). Without subscribing to the new materialism that feeds this perspective (Giritli et al. 2020), we consider this concept to be advantageous as it allows us to understand that risk is what could happen but has not yet happened, and that its understanding is fluid depending on people, contexts, etc. Risk can therefore be conceived of as collective and not just individual, since it is understood as a constant interaction with others and its environment. In this context, emotions, too, enter into constant interaction with what is perceived as a risk, and with the way in which others experience it too. Emotion plays an important role in guiding judgements or decisions, acting as a form of 'mental shortcut' to make these judgements or decisions quickly (Slovic et al. 2006).

We consider this terminology of 'emotion-risk assemblage' a useful entry point for thinking about the complexities of risk and emotion in journalism practice in the context of terrorism in Burkina Faso. While seeking to understand local radio journalists' responses to the new context of terrorist risk in Burkina Faso, we also want to better understand the way journalists live these situations on a daily basis, how they manage their emotions and those of others and how these emotions and perception of risks affect their professional practices and behaviours in areas of high security deficit. We hypothesise that this new situation will lead to a twofold movement: risks act on emotions and vice versa, and the result could be that these 'assemblages' "do" *things* to journalism as a profession and a practice.

The article therefore addresses the following research questions:

> RQ1: How do Burkinabè journalists express, manage or control their emotions in high-risk situations?
>
> RQ2: How does it affect their professional realities and practices and has an impact on their conception of risk?

The methodology used to explore emotions and risks

The research team comprised a researcher and two doctoral students from Burkina Faso, two researchers from Belgium and a researcher from the UK. To meet our objective, interviewing media actors working in conflict and terrorism contexts was crucial, but for security reasons, we were unable to physically go there. These constraints informed our methodology. We developed an original, exploratory and collaborative methodological process in the form of a co-research approach (Binet, Rullac and Pinto 2020; Maréchal et al. 2022). Through close collaboration with Burkinabè field journalists, we overcame two main challenges. First, at the time of the research, the five high security zones in Burkina Faso were inaccessible to both local and foreign researchers; second, the situations encountered by journalists in these areas were, and continue to be, violent and conducting interviews there without deep knowledge of daily living conditions would negatively impact individuals (Gaujelac and Laroche 2020).

A three-stage methodological design

This co-research is based on a three-stage methodological design: a) identification of the targeted radio b) fieldwork in delegation, and c) collective feedback workshop.

a) Identifying the radios

Radio was selected for study as it is the main source of trusted information in the country and is often the only one accessible due to poor connectivity, low literacy skills, and poverty (Heywood and Yaméogo, 2022). We first identified the 11 main community

radio stations in the five regions with the highest insecurity levels in Burkina Faso: Sahel, North, Centre-North, Boucle du Mouhoun, and East. Since 2015, all have faced varying degrees of exposure to violence and terrorism.

b) Fieldwork 'in delegation'

The research team individually contacted managers of the 11 community radio stations across the five above-mentioned regions. They were asked to identify individuals, amongst their journalists, who themselves would be responsible for contacting and interviewing colleagues from the targeted radio stations. For the purposes of our original methodology, we called the journalists responsible for interviewing colleagues 'journalists-interviewers'. 11 journalists-interviewers were eventually recruited and paid for the research's purpose. All the journalists-interviewers identified by their hierarchy were men. The absence of women is due, on one hand, to the limited presence of women in leadership positions in the media and, on the other hand, to the patriarchal system that characterises both Burkinabè society as a whole and the social organisation of the Burkinabè media that gives more authority and speaking opportunities to men than to women (Orgeret 2016; 2018). As the recruitment required approval from managers, it was impossible for us to correct this bias.

The research team developed an interview guide for the 11 journalists-interviewers to use during the interviews with community radio journalists in order to understand, in the context of the terrorist attacks perpetrated since 2015, the forms of violence suffered, and the risks incurred, the psychological and professional traces of this violence and these risks on journalists. During an online meeting, the journalists-interviewers and the research team discussed this interview guide. The former were also trained in the research interview technique. The 11 journalists-interviewers conducted 37 interviews, between February and May 2022, either face-to-face or remotely via phone call or WhatsApp, for security or travel reasons. They were all recorded and transcribed by the interviewers. The average duration per interview varied between 45 and 90 minutes. The interviews conducted by journalists-interviewers were variable in nature. Accelerated interview training was indeed beneficial, but not sufficient.

c) Collective feedback workshop

In May 2022, following these interviews, the journalists-interviewers and the research team gathered at a two-day workshop in Ziniare, a city near the capital Ouagadougou. The president of the Burkina Faso journalists' association was also invited. This workshop had two objectives: first to collectively debrief and discuss the interviews conducted in the field by the journalists-investigators; and second to allow the latter to share their own experiences and representations and, in so doing, to further the reflection. Three methodological tools were used during these two days:

- Plenary sessions that allowed collective feedback and sharing
- 3 simultaneous focus groups, comprising 4 to 5 journalists-interviewers and facilitated by research team members. Each focus group was dedicated to one

theme: the consequences of the security crisis on the daily work; the professional management of violence; the emotions experienced.

- Individual interviews with volunteers (4) from the workshop participants, conducted by members of the research group with the interview guide used by the journalists-interviewers.

The interviews and focus groups were then analysed according to the usual principles of qualitative and thematic analysis of stakeholder discourse. This material was coded and cross-analysed in order to bring out the way in which journalists experience and adapt to the situation. This approach is inductive in that it brings out the meaning that the actors deploy in their discourse, in line with the interactionist work of the Chicago School.

Added value of the collective research

Co-opting the journalists-interviewers into the process granted the research team access to the voices of people working in the five risk areas. It became possible to interview them through colleagues living in the same personal and professional conditions, about the emergence of issues that might have remained invisible without co-option. Moreover, the collective exchanges were much more than moments of sharing and discussion. They provided opportunities for both the research team and the journalists-interviewers to engage in methodological reflexivity. This methodological approach, which the research team was deploying for the first time, will be the subject of a subsequent article to extract insights and lessons from the choices made.

Results

The interviews detailed the simultaneous management of risks and emotions and demonstrated that feeling emotions in a context of risk enables professional actions and behaviour to be adjusted. As mentioned in the introduction, four forms of specific professional readjustments emerged, revealing traceable consequences resulting from changes in the profession and in the relationship to the profession, and were reported in detail by the journalists interviewed: 1) individual adjustments; 2) professional adjustments 3) media adjustments and 4) values adjustments.

1) individual adjustments - to secure both physical and mental security

The first form of adjustment of the journalists' experience comes from the individual themselves and the traces that the journalists' feelings leave on themselves. Community radio journalists have been living with the security crisis since 2015, experiencing it on a daily basis at various levels of the job: production, processing, broadcasting, and also outside of working hours. The terror manifests itself in various forms: fear, psychosis,

stress, anxiety, nightmare and all the traces on the individual (stomach ache or insomnia) in a state of shock or trauma. These feelings prompt the journalist to make decisions to avoid or circumvent risks: to say this or that, to take or not to take a particular road for example. The interviews highlight this consubstantial or interdependent relationship. Risk management and emotion management are intertwined. Emotions therefore condition a certain representation of risk. For example, one of the journalists warned of the risks, distancing himself from the need to encounter them, while showing the emotions that some people might feel:

> As we're not war journalists. And nothing is worth a life. That's what I keep telling people. There is no glory in being murdered by these men, I wouldn't say lawless, but still. There is no glory in that. (FG1)

The ultimate risk all the journalists interviewed run is death. The feelings, fears and stress they continue to experience are expressed in the form of a risk, and not the least of which is losing one's life. This physical risk does not only affect the journalist, but can also affect their media, colleagues, and relatives. Journalists must adjust to their personal emotions, but also to those of their colleagues, and to the risks they run and those who run them. Working as a journalist in the context of Burkina Faso's current security means being in constant anxiety. Insecurity is a source of emotions, but emotions enable the security of the individual, the group and the family. Risks appear as a socially constructed relationship between the journalist, their colleagues and family. Thinking about being kidnapped by armed terrorist groups, for example, is like predicting that you will no longer be alive and becomes a source of strong emotions and anguish.

> Once I was coming back from a report and had to go through a village that had become a terrorist headquarters. That day, the terrorists were checking everyone as they passed and people were killed. I arrived just after they left. When I think that it could have been me, I feel sick. I think about it all the time, it traumatises me, I find it hard to forget. (E1, 15 years in the profession)

In addition to this physical risk, emotions generate changes in the journalist's relationship to his or her profession and professional practices. As we shall see, they give rise to a recontextualisation or even a reconceptualisation of professional issues resulting in self-censorship and/or a modification of professional routines and cultures.

2) professional adjustments - to secure working and employment conditions

The second form of adjustment concerns working and employment conditions. Working in a high-risk environment has practical implications for journalists' daily lives. If they are paid per article produced, or if they receive a 'small envelope' from sources, any drastic reduction in the opportunities to cover events and the events themselves has

direct consequences on the journalists' pay. Moreover, high-risk areas sometimes drive away international or humanitarian organisations, along with any advertising revenue, which means that journalists and media can no longer be financially supported by traditional donors such as NGOs who use media partners to disseminate information and serve as conduits of communication, in contexts where the circulation of information is crucial to peace or at least to preventing the situation from deteriorating:

> If there's no production, it's difficult to continue getting paid. The journalist's job has become difficult. They're no longer employed. If there's no income coming into the media, it goes without saying that what remains will go on electricity and water charges and we may run out of resources. (E4, 8 years in the profession)

These employment conditions underpin the need to find alternative sources of income. They create an uncertain environment, which in turn can leave a mark (including an emotional one) on the journalist without the ability to support themselves or their families.

Field practices are also changing. The risks incurred, or the anticipation of risks to be incurred or avoided, the fear of taking a particular route, of expressing an opinion about the situation, of overstepping the role of the moderator or journalist, condition the way in which journalists work. Journalists describe these constraints both in terms of their perception of danger and their daily experience, which manifests itself in lack of sleep, fears and anxieties as we saw in the previous section. However, most of the journalists describe these difficulties in a more roundabout way by talking about the daily practices of handling information, which range from the difficulty of making contact with sources and their audiences to the consequences of feeling insecure:

> Nowadays, it must be said that it's difficult because people are afraid to express themselves, because they're really insecure. So I can say [...] that insecurity has had an impact on the processing of local information. The second point that needs to be made is that information creates insecurity, so we have to be very careful about giving out information so as not to glorify terrorist groups. So at this level, we really need to be careful [...] to see if the angle we use for this information can really provide information. Without also apologising for terrorism. (E15, 13 years in the profession)

These conditions lead to a relatively shared practice, which is a question of language. The fear of reprisals, the knowledge that they are being listened to, and the explosive nature of certain situations or events lead to self-censorship by journalists who do not wish to use a particular term or name, and to constantly adjusting their discourse to the situation. No general rule seems to have been imposed by the hierarchy or others, but 'red lines' have been drawn by the terrorists, more or less explicitly. Journalists know, for example, that they are putting themselves in danger if they use the word "terrorist",

instead of the acronym HANI for "Hommes armés non identifiés" [unidentified armed men]; if they deal with subjects related to reproductive health, women's rights, or the Burkinabè state—considered an enemy by the terrorists—or education outside of Islam, and if they offer live interactive broadcasts during which these subjects could be discussed by listeners.

Journalists talk about the caution with which they have to express themselves, and with which they can let others express themselves. This foresight is linked to the risks involved and to protecting themselves and others:

> So, here are a certain number of precautions that journalists take, in addition to processing of information, and where you have to choose the right words. You mustn't say things at random. [...] There are terminologies or expressions like 'man without faith or law', we see that in the Ouagadougou media, we don't know those terms. We don't know these terms. So we don't use judgmental terms because we say to ourselves that we only have one weapon, and that is the pen, the microphone. It's not up to us to make a direct attack. We're not, we don't have a kalashnikov. That's for the police, the gendarmerie. (FG1)

3) media adjustments - to secure the practical and economic functioning of the media companies

Two perceptible forms of media readjustment emerge: that related to the journalistic and editorial collective; and that related to the organisation of the media system itself.

Several journalists stressed the need for professional solidarity, which consists not only of sharing information (on locations, attacks, risks incurred), exchanging information on channels such as Whatsapp, etc., but above all of offering a potential space for exchanges on the way journalists experience risks. It is therefore not simply a question of circulating information on the conditions of the practice, but of creating spaces for conversation around feelings and emotions:

> Because I myself, as the person in charge of the radio, find that radio, the colleagues, is the most important family. If you don't have trust between colleagues, I don't think you can develop together. So this state of mind has encouraged people to trust each other. They even prefer to confide in each other within the editorial office than to go and confide in someone else in town. Being used to working together, they have developed a family atmosphere. So the editorial meeting and the meetings within the radio station are the frameworks to discuss the security issue, to give each other tips and to persuade each other not to live their fears alone, but to share their fears with others. (FG3)

However, these statements should not hide the fact that individual situations can be very varied, depending on editorial offices, the risk context and the individual. However, the situations themselves echo each other. Loneliness weighs heavily on some, and psychological help is either absent, little sought after or unknown. And yet, in their testimonies, the journalists leave marks not only of the way they try to deal with their emotions, but also of the marks that these leave on their lives.

> You're there, during the night, you see that they've said that there are 100 terrorist groups already positioned in such and such a place and that they're planning to attack the city. You can't sleep. We're in a constant state of stress [...]. So it's feelings like that we permanently experienced at local level. And that leads to self-restraint. So we tend to be a bit reserved. We don't want to show ourselves. We're even afraid to put our voices on air often, to avoid giving our location in real time. (FG2)

The media world itself deals with emotions and risks. The insecurity has forced journalists and media companies to suspend programmes (especially interactive ones). For some radio stations, it led to journalists suspending certain programmes, mainly interactive ones, to synchronising with international or national radio stations based in Ouagadougou, or to using journalistic subtlety in the form of positive or neutral words to describe the crisis. For others, the risk was so great that it forced journalists to resign, move or retrain (Haywood, Fierens and Yameogo, 2023). It is worth noting that risk and emotions lead journalists to make a variety of decisions: to readapt in order to survive the crisis or to give up the profession in order to live. Many journalists no longer live in the localities where their radio stations are based. Some are now temporarily based in Ouagadougou, hoping to see the country regain security before returning. Others have migrated to neighbouring provinces that are relatively less affected, adding to the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The permanence of the crisis leads journalists to absorb the risks and emotions. But, at the same time, it also makes it possible, in a false paradox, to reassure certain values and to rebuild their attachment.

4) Values adjustments - to reflect the core values underpinning the profession in conflict-situations

In this context of psychological and physical insecurity, the discourse of all the journalists we met revealed the values that underpin their attachment to the profession and the job. While some admitted to being demotivated, the majority affirmed their desire to continue practising journalism and claimed to be able to adapt (E33, 14 years in the profession).

Their discourse was articulated around notions such as pride—that of pursuing a profession that they consider useful for the Burkinabè population, or pleasure—that of being a source of hope for the public. For one of these media actors, a journalist is a

person capable of 'distilling good humour, hope and life' to people in distress (E4, 8 years in the profession). Many regions are totally isolated from the rest of the country and their inhabitants are cut off from all social relations. The journalists considered that their productions compensate for the lack of contacts and prevent these people from becoming despondent:

> Imagine, then, when a curfew is announced, everyone's at home, with their doors closed. Who's there to accompany the people, if not the journalist through his productions? That he can accompany people in their daily lives, that he can show them that, despite everything, there's life, that he can show them that on the other side of the world, there's something positive going on to give them a taste for life. (FG1)

> It's said that the journalist's family is up there with the military family. We just don't wear the uniform. (FG2)

'Love of the job' (E8, 4 years in the profession), 'passion' (E33, 14 years in the profession), 'pride' (E11, 28 years in the profession), 'nobility' (E5, 12 years in the profession), 'feeling of usefulness' were some of the reasons given by journalists to affirm their dedication, despite the physical and psychological risks involved.

Journalists' commitment is based on their relationship with their audiences. The crisis has highlighted their social utility, which they considered to be indispensable. This is symbolic when it comes to informing isolated citizens and fighting against the feeling of abandonment (E3, 26 years in the profession).

> Sometimes there are people who say, 'this morning you brought me out of my sadness', and I know I've had a useful day. (E7, 14 years in the profession)

But their usefulness can also take very practical forms. The information they circulate warns the population of imminent dangers (E1, 15 years in the profession), in local languages (E4, 8 years in the profession) and can therefore save lives (E13, 7 years in the profession). Their networks and knowledge of the terrain also enable them to reunite families who have been dispersed throughout the country because of the conflict (FG1).

The crisis, with all its risks and emotions, therefore, makes their professional values even more pronounced, enriches their discourse on commitment and fuels their determination. For, as one of them put it, 'if we are committed, we must go all the way and nothing should stop us, neither the difficulties nor the criticism' (E6, 16 years in the profession).

Discussion and conclusion

The ‘new security situation’ has created new professional realities for Burkinabè journalists, which have not yet been widely investigated. We interrogated this ‘new order’ through the prism of the risk-emotion assemblage. The interconnectedness of risk and emotions, as demonstrated theoretically, is significant and innovative, because one cannot be comprehended without the other, as the results have shown. Equally crucial is the exploration of where and by whom these emotions and risks are encountered. This is because space and place shape the way emotions are expressed and dealt with, and it is the reality in which the professional habits or representation are transforming according to the ‘risk-emotion’ assemblage. We have shown that this assemblage leads to personal adjustments for journalists in the way they approach their day-to-day work, the news production, their choices to travel, to manage their safety or chances of survival. This assemblage also transforms the professional skills they need to mobilise, and even has an impact on their broadcasts, and the way their media outlet and their workgroup operate. It also results in value adjustments which, far from diminishing the importance of their attachment to journalism, seem on the contrary to reinforce it.

This assemblage does not emerge in isolation but is intricately linked to existing realities. Our innovative method - fieldwork in delegation - allowed us to closely look at these realities to consider: 1. The ‘normal’ professional context of Burkinabè journalists; 2. The ‘emotion-risk’ encountered by journalists; 3. The impact of this assemblage on their ‘normal’ professional context. Examining these ‘local’ realities is more challenging than the more frequently analysed realities of international journalists, leading us to advance three central features.

The first feature is the focus on local journalists working in conflict zones—i.e. individuals who are culturally and socially integrated into the geographical area affected by the conflicts in which they work. This is in stark contrast to studies focusing on war journalists and correspondents (Bizimana 2006 and 2014), or on the emerging topic of humanitarian reporting where foreign journalists parachute in (see Scott et al. 2023), and whose exposure to violence on the ground is temporary. The back and forth between war and non-war terrain is a specific configuration, which does not work or mobilise emotions and risk perceptions in the same way. The assemblage is specific. Here, the reality is similar to studies conducted in Mexico or Iraq, for example (Cottle et al. 2016; Relly et al. 2015), but with a strong particularity: the economic and working conditions diverge from those of other countries.

And this is the second feature. In Burkina Faso, as in many countries in French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa, community radio stations and their journalists are in an extremely precarious situation. These journalists not only lack fundamental training in journalism but also contend with deplorable employment conditions—absence of contracts or fixed salaries, inadequate equipment, and challenges in travelling, to name but a few. The conflict situation in Burkina Faso is not only synonymous with risks to journalists’ lives and safety, but also with risks which range from a drop in or lack of income to the transformation of their relationship with the public, when, for example, they are forced

to suspend interactive programmes. Emotional security is as important as financial security, both of which can have serious consequences for the individual. Furthermore, and this is another distinctive feature, journalists here experience the same situations as the public, in a form of affective proximity (Al Ghazzi 2021: 2) that has effects on themselves and their work.

Expressing emotional distress and possible trauma, or even post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), remains relatively unheard of in public, particularly amongst male voices in Burkina Faso (Heywood, Fierens, Niaoné and Le Cam, 2024). Studies show that journalists are susceptible to PTSD (Buchanan & Keats 2011), and that mental health problems (Aoki, Malcolm et al. 2013) are also significant (Lee et al. 2018). Yet, talking about violence, reporting on it, and continuing to be a journalist in these contexts also contributes, as our results show, to strengthening journalists' attachment to their profession, legitimising and consolidating their roles, and making certain values stronger, visible and defensible (Anderson 2019; Bolton & Boyd 2003).

Our third feature is related to the unavoidable cost of this assemblage. This cost is both personal and professional for journalists as, certainly in security-affected situations, one cannot be separated from the other. It is a cost to the media business, to the ways in which it is organised, and to the survival of the media. But it is also a cost for information, its quality, its distribution, its reception, and therefore for the production and circulation of information of public interest and for the capacity of citizen audiences to understand events. These results are specific to a geographically and temporally situated social microcosm but are part of a long-term political and media evolution. The specificity of the subject invites us to continue to reflect on this assemblage, but this time from a gender perspective to see how the articulation of risks and emotions manifests itself among women journalists and what this entails in terms of professional, behavioural and psychological changes.

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