



WHAT'S NEW?

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Radio Tunisienne reporting in Metlaoui, June 2015.

Photo : © Fondation Hironnelle / Gwenn Dubourthoumieu

True or false news?

The question is not new. The Age of Enlightenment in Europe brought the idea of knowledge for the greatest number of people through reason, factual accuracy and freedom to question things. It came at the time of opposition to the dogma of church and tradition. Throughout history, people have tried through political and ideological propaganda to define and impose the "truth", notably at the height of the Cold War. At the same time as the development of this movement promoting facts and scientific evidence, the profession of journalism was born. Essential duties of a journalist include "respecting the truth" (Declaration of the Duties and Rights of Journalists, European Federation of Journalists, Munich, 1971).

Journalism and the media thus associate themselves with the idea of truth. Journalists, including those of Fondation Hironnelle, propose to their audience a kind of moral contract: We will investigate and verify the facts, and you can "believe" what you read, hear and see. It is a relationship of trust, based on facts being put to the test. This relationship is constantly under pressure, internal and external, political and economic. Today, these forces are growing in strength and in shape. But for each of us, it is a question of knowing, understanding and being able to act, not on the basis of beliefs or rumours but reliable, verified news and information.

Caroline Vuillemin,
CEO of Fondation Hironnelle



Washington Post newsroom, 2016. Photo : © Getty Images/AFP

A REALITY CHECK FOR JOURNALISM

At a time when there is growing distrust of the media among authorities and the public, the media need to convince people of the specific value-added that their work brings.

The White House decision of February 24, 2017, to deny several well-respected media access to presidential press briefings marks a historic low point in the relationship between the authorities of a democratic country and the journalism establishment. For example the Washington Post, which is known internationally for its code of ethics, was one of those excluded. The blow is all the harder because the public are also questioning the credibility of traditional media. There are more and more people getting their notions of reality from social media. However, on Facebook everything looks the same whether it is verified information, a comment from a "friend" or a propaganda message. "Alternative information" sites for whom ethics are not a top priority broadcast their vision of the world widely. They are sometimes connected to political and diplomatic interests, and apply digital strategies of individualized messaging aimed at drawing people through emotion.

Given this unprecedented questioning of their purpose, journalists need to react if they are not to be excluded from narrating what is happening in the world. They have several options: return to basic ethics to produce news and information that is more faithful to reality than ever; partner with other complementary actors (documentary specialists, scientists, etc.) to boost their credibility in establishing facts; win new readers by taking to social media in a way that is both ethical and efficient. In the mid-20th century when the world was in the grip of totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt wrote that "freedom of opinion is a farce unless factual information is guaranteed and the facts themselves are not in dispute". In a world where democratic debate seems under threat, it is the duty of the media to reinvent themselves, so as to rekindle public desire for facts.

(1) *The Washington Post Standards and Ethics*, last edition 1999
(2) in "Between Past and Future", 1961

News and information that saves lives

“Two examples spring to mind that show how public trust is of major benefit to news and information on Radio Ndeke Luka (RNL).

In April 2015, a fire broke out in a displaced people’s camp in Bambari (centre-east of the Central African Republic) from a match lit by a child to prepare the family meal. The fire spread quickly among the straw huts of this camp housing 600 people, leaving 180 people injured and significant material damage. But the toll could have been much higher if the camp’s residents had not immediately informed RNL, which broadcast it on the radio, bringing rapid intervention by the government and the UN mission (MINUSCA) to put out the fire, treat the injured and provide tents and food for the people affected.

A year later, a cholera epidemic broke out in a village in Ndjoukou, near the Congolese border, 100 km north-east of Bangui. We do not have a correspondent there. It was a local priest who told us about cases of people who had died in the same way. Nineteen cases were recorded, of which about ten were fatal. Once again, broadcasting the news on RNL got it out quickly, which led to efficient intervention by the WHO and the government, which took steps to end the epidemic.”

Sylvie Panika



Radio Ndeke Luka journalist reporting from a school in Bangui. Photo : © Marc Ellison / Fondation Hironnelle 2017

ETHICS, DIVERSITY OF SOURCES AND EMPATHY

Sylvie Panika, Director of **Radio Ndeke Luka**, analyses the reasons for the trust inspired by this Fondation Hironnelle radio, which has in 17 years become the benchmark of journalism in the Central African Republic (CAR).

The CAR has in the past 20 or so years seen regular outbreaks of conflict. What are the needs of the population in terms of news and information?

Sylvie Panika: In this context of recurring violence, people mainly want to know what the government and others are doing to provide them with protection and security, as well as humanitarian assistance (food, health care, education). This is the case especially for the hundreds of thousands of displaced people forced to flee fighting.

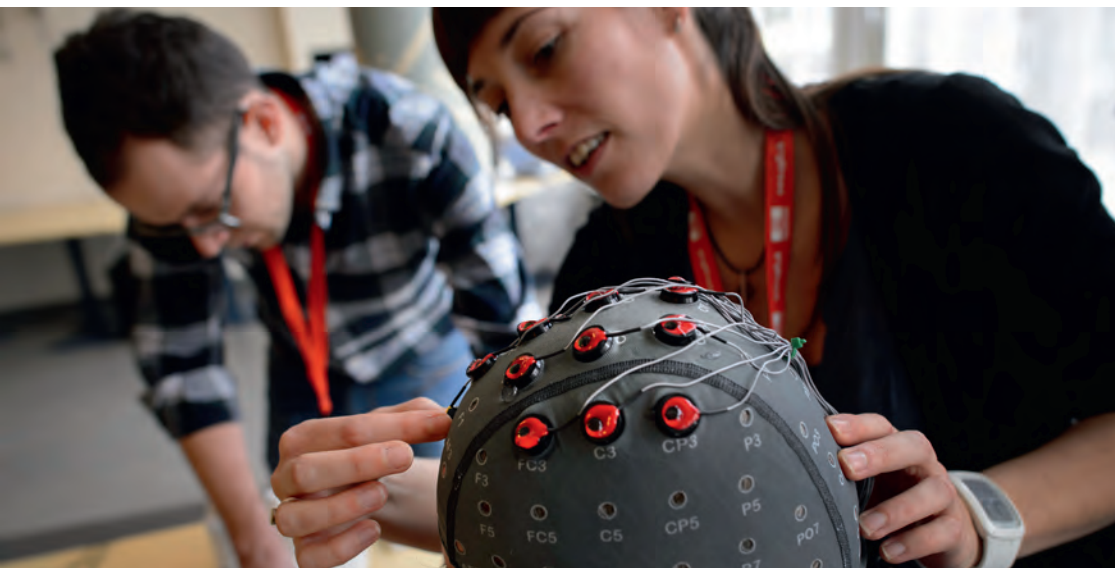
How do Radio Ndeke Luka (RNL) journalists cover the reality of the conflict?

We follow some well-known ethical rules of journalism, like giving priority to fact-finding, verifying facts, using multiple sources, refraining from commentary. These rules are among the principles enshrined in the Charter of Radio Ndeke Luka – neutrality, impartiality, fairness –, which has been further detailed for electoral periods. In the chronically polarized context of the CAR, where parties to conflict try to impose their own view, we are especially careful to use multiple sources: governmental

via the prefects, rebel groups via their military leaders and spokespeople, NGOs, the UN mission (MINUSCA). These are the main formal sources for our network of correspondents throughout the country. But our key source, although more informal, is the population.

What value-added do you see in the news and information produced and broadcast by RNL?

In this context of violence, it seems to me that our work is based a lot on the quality of relations we maintain with all our sources of information. It’s the same with regard to the population: our journalists are Central Africans who also live in conflict zones, are subject to stress, and are sometimes victim of violence themselves. That creates empathy with people who come spontaneously to talk to them. Even if RNL broadcasts nationwide, it is perceived as a neighbourhood radio. That certainly helps boost our audience – RNL is the most popular radio in the CAR – and our reputation, as reflected in a saying that is now popular in the country: “If Radio Ndeke Luka says it, it is true”.



Presentation of the brain-machine interface by the Federal Polytechnic School in Lausanne (EPFL) in Sion (Switzerland), January 2013.
Photo : © Fabrice Coffrini / AFP

REBUILDING READERS' TRUST THROUGH PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN JOURNALISTS AND RESEARCHERS

Marius Burgat is a scientific advisor at the Federal Polytechnic School in Lausanne (EPFL), in charge of the MOOC ("Massive Open Online Courses") focussed on Africa.

Is science teaching and research now facing, like the media, the issue of "alternative truths"?

Marius Burgat: Absolutely. The EPFL is fundamentally an institution of exact sciences, where attachment to the accuracy of a scientific statement is key. This rests on three principles: Can it be verified (is it supported by concurring experiments)? Can it be reproduced (can the experiments be conducted by a third person and produce the same result)? And its degree of veracity (has it passed sufficient accuracy tests)? In training, the exactitude of content is also essential. EPFL's "Massive Open Online Courses" (MOOC), which are produced by teacher-researchers, are systematically verified by the authors and their colleagues before they are published.

But in the last ten years or so, it has happened that these principles have been transgressed, and that researchers cheat by publishing results too soon, or even deliberately publishing false results, owing to economic, productivity or ideological pressure. There are also a lot of controversies within the scientific community, in other words opposing theories which do

not rest on the same experiments or the same terms of reference and cannot be reconciled. Prominent examples are climate change, life on other planets and the Earth's capacity to feed the human population...

Do you think the current debate about the relation between truth and facts can bring the academic and media worlds closer?

First of all we should note that for the leading media, at least in Western Europe and the United States, the scientific community is a respected point of reference. In my opinion, the media should continue to strengthen their links with the scientific community. Having a regular audience depends on building trust. Readers become loyal only when they can see over time the pertinence of the news and analysis produced by a media outlet. If media have lost readers' trust, it is up to them to rebuild it. Producing programmes or special sections in partnership with scientific institutes – that is, with organizations that are known for their faultless attachment to discovering the truth – is no doubt one of the ways the media can rebuild this trust.

The dangers of psychologically targeted communication

The last US election produced two singularities with regard to the media: the result took both the pollsters and the media by surprise; and the winner used communication technology to send individual, targeted messages on social media to voters whose psychological profile had been previously established and selected. According to Zurich daily *Das Magazin* Polish academic and psychologist Michal Kosinski concluded in 2012 that analysing 68 "likes" by a Facebook user was enough to establish with at least 85% accuracy their psychological profile, according to five main criteria (tendency to be open, conscientious, extravert, agreeable, neurotic). On the basis of this research and by buying databases of poorly protected personal information, London-based company Cambridge Analytica was able to draw up a "psychological map" of 220 million US voters and target them with personalized messages that were incitements to vote for Donald Trump rather than verified information. "Mass communication no longer exists", according to Cambridge Analytica CEO Alexander Nix. "Big Data now allows individualized, psychologically targeted communication".



An RTB journalist reporting during the November 2015 elections in Burkina Faso. Photo : © Fondation Hironnelle / DR

SUPPORT TO THE NATIONAL BROADCASTER OF BURKINA FASO

How can we best support the state broadcaster of a country undergoing a democratic transition? That was the question Fondation Hironnelle's 18-month mandate with the National TV and Radio of Burkina Faso (RTB) sought to answer.

More than 160 journalists and technicians trained, 23 documentary reports produced, 4 public seminars on the future of public broadcasting and 4 audience surveys carried out. These are some of the results of Fondation Hironnelle's support to the RTB from August 2015 to December 2016 in Burkina Faso. This partnership, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, aimed to provide support for coverage of the historic elections at the end of 2015, and improve RTB programming in line with the expectations of the population after the revolution of 2014.

Support from two Fondation Hironnelle experts in Ouagadougou during the election period led to the establishment of an editorial Charter to guide the work of RTB journalists, and the training of 30 correspondents throughout the country. In 2016, the two experts trained and supported teams of journalists at the radio, TV and website on how to cover problems in the daily lives of the country's citizens, such as malnutrition, managing conflicts between livestock and agricultural farmers and migration. Fondation Hironnelle's collaboration with the RTB was scheduled for a period of 18 months. It has therefore come to an end, but possibilities for further collaboration remain open.

IN UKRAINE, A VITAL NEED FOR INFORMATION

Since 2014, Fondation Hironnelle has been working to develop a journalism project that promotes understanding between Ukrainians.

The conflict in eastern Ukraine, which broke out in April 2014, also affects the media. Fondation Hironnelle has been engaged since autumn 2014 in dialogue with journalists and media in the country on how to develop a journalism project covering the realities of Ukraine in a way that promotes peace. Producing reports outside of major cities and dealing with issues that affect the daily lives of citizens in different regions has seemed a useful contribution to improving mutual understanding between Ukrainians. Thanks to support from the Swiss-Ukrainian NGO Vidrodgenia, a first

project was launched in September 2016 producing an online series entitled Ukraine: Towards (de)centralization? It is composed of four multimedia reports by six young, independent Ukrainian journalists and two international correspondents on a subject much talked about by national politicians. Fondation Hironnelle is now working to further develop partnerships with Ukrainian media to produce and broadcast throughout the country other reports of this type on issues such as security, the economy, employment and education.

Fondation Hironnelle wins Ousseimi tolerance award

The Fondation Ousseimi has awarded its 5th Award for Tolerance to Fondation Hironnelle. The award ceremony will take place on March 29, 2017, in Geneva. This award, according to the words of founding president Khaled Ousseimi, recognizes "truly unique work, including selfless, impartial, neutral action for truth and liberty through the media, which has in several countries helped to promote a more tolerant world that is less full of hate and more tolerant, because it is better informed. In this way, Fondation Hironnelle has directly - and sometimes indirectly - helped to heal wounds and prevent new ones. Through the quality of news and information it has provided, it has encouraged people in the same country to live together, to be more tolerant and accepting of others, and aspire to a better life together."

It is with much pride and humility that the management and staff of Fondation Hironnelle receive this award, which comes at a turning point in our history after 21 years of existence. We are currently faced with many challenges, like all media and NGOs working in complex situations. The Fondation Ousseimi award is a strong encouragement to pursue our work promoting independent news and information for populations facing the deepest and most violent crises of our times.

Impressum

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