

## International symposium

Université Toulouse Capitole, 14 and 15 November 2024

IDETCOM, GRER

### **From COVID-19 to armed conflicts: radio faced with a multiplicity of crises**

Crisis is the consequence of a disruption, the origin of which is external or internal; it is marked by disorder, instability and uncertainty and blocking and unblocking phases (Morin, 1976). In the field of politics, it is a “sudden rupture or an aggravation of a pre-existing political and security situation” (Mongin, 2014). Whether they are of a health, environmental, natural, social, economic, political and/or military nature, crises challenge journalistic practices, the positioning of media organisations, editorial productions and interactions between other key players. This symposium proposes to address these various situations through the lens of radio media, live media, attachment (Glevarec, 2017), as a source of daily support, and media in times of crisis. During this symposium, several questions will be posed: how do radio stations approach and deal with these contexts ? How does the media itself shift, act and interact during times of crisis ? In addition, this symposium will address these issues from the perspective of radio studies and compare their specific features and similarities to other forms of media. The approaches will be historic and contemporary, interdisciplinary in the human and social sciences and developed at the local, regional, national and international level.

### **Theme 1 National and international armed conflicts: radiophonic approaches**

Political and military powers have long feared media narratives, while at the same time seeking to use them. After print media, these fears continued with radio in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The uses of this media are diverse, serving resistance movements as well as oppression and propaganda, as demonstrated by the Second World War. These various uses were repeated in the conflicts mentioned below, particularly during decolonisation conflicts often linked to the Cold War. During the Algerian War (1954-1962), the radio, initially considered as a tool of colonial domination, became a means to communicate with the Revolution (Fanon, 1968). Radio is, on the other hand, useful to populist nationalist movements and movements emerging from revolutionary socialism in Latin America as well as to national liberation movements located in sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe .

Faced with diverse demonstrations calling for freedom, independence and improvements to institutions, governments provide surveillance and use repressive methods (transmission monitoring, the destruction of transmitters, interference to services, the suspension of certain programmes or prohibition of transmitting, condemning or imprisoning journalists) and occupy the airwaves (propaganda, personalisation of power during normal periods and times of crisis).

This instrumentalisation of the radio operates not only within countries, but also from the outside via foreign radio and remote clandestine radio thanks to media globalisation. International radio has been developing in conjunction with national radio (Wuillème, 2007). Their editorial freedom varies and is more or less impacted by the political views of the countries providing the funding. They may be subject to government intervention in broadcasts (Radio France Internationale suspended during Gabon's elections, August 2023)

The associated benefits (low costs, simplicity, rapidity, mobility), intrinsically linked to radiophonic media, will generate numerous human initiatives worldwide demanding the broadcast of the voices of the voiceless (Cheval, 2006).

Does the presence of a multitude of local, national and international radio stations in certain territories still guarantee the pluralism of information ? In certain conflicts, operators can ambiguously vacillate between the role of firefighter and that of pyromaniac (Abdoulaye Seyni, 2021). Could the funding of radio by NGOs offer a solution to ensure editorial freedom, or is it yet another form of subjugation ? These questions are particularly relevant in Africa, where, for technical, financial and educational reasons, radio is a key media outlet, playing a role in people's daily lives and having been tested by numerous crises (Frère, 2016).

In their coverage of crises, are radio journalists mandated with one or more missions, or do they feel that they are ? What narratives of these crises and conflicts do they produce ? How do journalists represent the "other-foreigner" and do they contribute to the portrayal of barbarian, persecutor, resistant, victim or hero figures, particularly in their coverage of conflict in former Yugoslavia (Charaudeau, 2001) ?

## **Theme 2 From health and environmental crises to social and political crises**

Radio, as others medias, covers crises of varying lengths, both as part of its traditional role of providing information and in the defence of particular interests. More than any other media outlet, it has, outside the confines of dominant media, developed "a long tradition of radioactivism in which subjectivity is more openly embraced" (Poulain, 2016). Free radio stations developed in France (Radio Lorraine Cœur d'Acier, Radio Quinquin, etc.), and in other countries (Radio Caroline, Radio Alice, the numerous radio stations resulting from the liberalisation of the airwaves in Africa during 90's) before and after audiovisual authorities were created to regulate them.

In addition to these grassroots movements, there have been temporary periods of crisis. During the civil unrest of May 1968 in France, radio played a key role in the social crisis (Cheval). "An event decided on at 3pm brought together 20,000 people two hours later, without a single leaflet, thanks to radio," said one of the movement's leaders, Daniel Cohn-Bendit (quoted by Tudesq, 1987). Radio can serve as a witness or play an active role in these events of revolt (Tudesq, 1987). In such cases, is it able to identify the early warning signs of social crisis (e.g., the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia in 2010-2011) ? More recently, in protests linked to the Nuit Debout social movement, yellow vests and pension reform protests in France, in a context of growing mistrust of traditional media and the development of social media, does radio continue to play an active role in covering and encouraging participation in the events ? Have web radio initiatives, such as, for example, Radio Debout, which organizes public debate related to the Nuit Debout movement (from 2016), increased, or are other means of expression preferred ? How did radio cover a multi-faceted movement like the "yellow vests" without any identifiable leaders ?

In addition to social and political crises, there are those linked to the particularly deadly attacks that have occurred over the last 30 years (Louxor in 1997, New York in 2001, Madrid in 2004, Nairobi in 2013, Paris in 2015, Garissa in 2015, Nice in 2016 and, more recently, numerous attacks in Africa and Asia). How have radio stations covered the attacks over the past thirty years ? How do they cover these events, especially in the context of live reporting ? Do the high expectations for information associated with a highly competitive environment allow for sufficient verification of facts and analytical hindsight ? Do differences between media outlets lead to different editorial approaches, in particular between radio and television (Bizien, 2023) ? Do radio stations move more quickly from the stage of coverage focused on emotion to the development of more analytical information ?

In another recent and more specific context, that of the COVID-19 global health crisis, marked by a deprivation of freedom, a high risk of contamination, a social climate triggering anxiety (given the lack of treatment and number of victims), how were journalists able to cover the events? Did they help establish a social connection with an audience locked down at home ?

### **Theme 3 Crisis management by radio operators governed by regulatory bodies**

Journalists and technicians visit crisis and armed conflict areas in the field, either after being sent by their editorial staff or on their own initiative in the case of independent journalists. Crises often produce complex situations, greatly disrupt the norms and usual practices among media outlets, and therefore weaken the production of information (difficulty in accessing sources to produce verified and pluralistic information, difficulty monitoring events, possible pressure) and sometimes jeopardize the safety of journalists (armed conflicts, attacks, protests, etc.). In this last case, certain media organisations have established specific procedures or have their journalists complete training events, such as France Médias Monde, which uses this type of training to prepare journalists for assignments in dangerous areas since the murder of two RFI journalists in Mali. This was the case in the coverage of the war in Ukraine. There are significant costs involved in organising on-site protection and hiring a fixer to accompany and guide journalists. These conditions, combined with the increased risk of kidnapping for political or financial reasons, lead to arbitration within the branches. These considerations, added to what is referred to as the hierarchy of death, explain the current shortage of coverage of armed conflicts that are not directly related to national political issues.

Trade unions and non-governmental organisations (Human Rights Watch, Fédération Internationale des Journalistes, Reporters Without Borders, Amnesty International) take steps to publicly speak out against attacks on the profession and take action for their protection.

The role of audiovisual regulatory bodies is at stake in this type of crisis. Are these authorities independent from the governing powers and do they succeed in maintaining this independence when a national crisis breaks out ? In these contexts, do they intervene in frequency management and the content of information ? ARCOM, French regulatory authority, arbitrated on the distribution of Russian media such as Russia Today and Sputnik. Should frequencies be suspended or revoked ? If so, under what conditions ? Do the production of fake news and, more generally, breaches of ethical principles, which are common in crisis situations, trigger interventions by regulatory authorities ? Do the networks (ERGA, GOSRN, PRAI, RIARC, RIRM, REFRAM) address these issues, which could have implications for the national interest ?

In conclusion, we will have the opportunity to reflect on radio stations and their unique properties, their potential and their limitations in times of crisis. Can they still create unique and original crisis stories ? Do they have the capacity to know about and understand them, to solve or at least overcome them ? Is the position of this media outlet changing within the overall media environment in relation to socio-digital devices, among other things ?

There will also be a specific focus on the various stakeholders providing coverage (local journalists, permanent correspondents, special envoys), as well as media practices and framing, which require close attention. Gender issues will be included in our study. It will also be interesting to observe interactions with digital comments, analyse how these comments are moderated, and the role of new web formats, such as podcasts.

The context in which organisations and journalists take action must also be analysed: the action of numerous stakeholders, whether it be sources of information (political, military, other), regulatory bodies or non-governmental organisations that defend journalists.

## TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Proposals must be submitted in French, English or Spanish no later than 25 April 2024. Proposals must include a heading (and subheading), a summary, between five and seven key words and the relevant theme or themes for the call. They must develop the issue, hypotheses and include bibliographic references without exceeding 5,000 characters. Personal information (first and last name, associated institution, status, postal and email addresses, phone number) must be provided on the first page. Proposals must be sent to the following two email addresses: [sylvie.laval@ut-capitole.fr](mailto:sylvie.laval@ut-capitole.fr) / [secretariatgrer@gmail.com](mailto:secretariatgrer@gmail.com)

Authors of the proposals will receive acknowledgement of receipt. The organising and scientific committees for the symposium will assess the projects.

During the symposium, the papers may be presented in French, English or Spanish. If the papers are presented in English or Spanish, they must include a visual presentation in French (PowerPoint or similar), outlining the key points.

Responses (acceptance, rejection, requests for changes) will be sent to the authors starting on 15 June 2024. At the end of the symposium, the final papers which are received and presented will be selected for publication. The journal's review board will perform another selection based on a double-blind process according to the common rules for scientific journals.

*IDETCOM* : <https://idetcom.ut-capitole.fr/>

*GRER* :

*Page Facebook* : <https://www.facebook.com/greradio>

*Carnet de Recherche RadioGraphy* : <http://radiography.hypotheses.org/>

*Revue RadioMorphoses* : <http://www.radiomorphoses.fr/>

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**Scientific committee (law, history, information and communication sciences, language sciences, political sciences, sociology) :**

Frédéric Antoine, Professeur émérite, Université Louvain-La-Neuve (Belgique)

Henri Assogba, Professeur titulaire, Université Laval, Québec (Canada)

Thomas Atenga, Professeur des Universités de Douala (Cameroun)

Robert Boure, Professeur émérite, Université Toulouse 3 (France)

Franck Bousquet, Professeur des universités, Université Toulouse 3 (France)

André Breton, Professeur honoraire, Université du Québec à Montréal (Canada)

Laurence Calandri, Maîtresse de conférences-HDR, Université Toulouse Capitole (France)

Jean-Jacques Cheval, Professeur émérite, Université Bordeaux Montaigne (France)

Bruno Domingo, Maître de conférences, Université Toulouse Capitole (France)

Marlène Coulomb-Gully, Professeure émérite, Université Toulouse Jean-Jaurès (France)

Etienne Damome, Professeur des universités, Université Bordeaux Montaigne (France)

Christophe Deleu, Professeur des universités, Université de Strasbourg (France)

Séverine Equoy Hutin, Professeure des universités, Université de Franche-Comté (France)

Anne-Caroline Fiévet, Docteure, CNRS, Laboratoire de Sciences Cognitives et Psycholinguistique (France)

Béatrice Fleury, Professeure des universités, Université de Lorraine (France)

Angeliki Gazi, Professeure assistante, Université Panteion, Athènes (Grèce)

Pergia Gkouskou-Giannakou, Maîtresse de conférences, Université Clermont d'Auvergne (France)

Hervé Glevarec, Directeur de recherche au CNRS (France)

Julie A. Gramaccia, Professeure adjointe, Université d'Ottawa (Canada)

Isabel Guglielmona, Maîtresse de conférences émérite, Université de Compiègne (France)

Sylvie Laval, Maîtresse de conférences, Université Toulouse Capitole (France)

Laurence Leveneur, Maîtresse de conférences-HDR, Université Toulouse Capitole (France)

Marc Lits, Professeur des universités, Université de Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgique)

Tristan Mattelart, Professeur des universités, Université Paris VIII, (France)

Arnaud Mercier, Professeur des universités, Université Paris-Panthéon-Assas (France)

Belén Monclús Professeure, Université Autonome de Barcelone (Espagne)

Madalena Oliveira, Professeure, Université du Minho (Portugal)

Albino Pedroia, Maître de conférences associé - Sorbonne Paris 1 Panthéon (France)

Carmen Peñafiel, Professeure des universités, Université du Pays Basque (Espagne)

Sébastien Poulain, Docteur, Université Bordeaux Montaigne (France)

Martine Regourd, Professeure des universités, Université Toulouse Capitole (France)

Serge Regourd, Professeur émérite, Université Toulouse Capitole (France)

Pascal Ricaud, Maître de conférences, Université Bordeaux Montaigne (France)

Denis Ruellan, Professeur des universités, Sorbonne Université (CELSA) (France)

Brigitte Sebbah, Maîtresse de conférences-HDR, Université Toulouse Capitole (France)

Nozha Smati, Docteure – enseignante, Université de Lille (France)

Derek W. Vaillant, Professeur, Université du Michigan à Ann Arbor (États-Unis)

Nelly Valsangiacomo, Professeure, Université de Lausanne (Suisse)

Isabelle Veyrat-Masson, Directrice de recherche Cnrs, Le Cerlis. Université Paris Cité (France)

Bernard Wuillème, Professeur honoraire, Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3 (France)

#### **Steering Committee :**

Direction du colloque : Etienne Damome (Université Bordeaux-Montaigne, GRER), Sylvie Laval (Université Toulouse Capitole, IDETCOM).

Avec la participation de Christophe Alcantara (Université Toulouse Capitole, IDETCOM), Martine Regourd (Université Toulouse Capitole, IDETCOM), Séverine Equoy Hutin, (Université de Franche-Comté, GRER), Anne-Caroline Fiévet, (CNRS, GRER), Rachel Delpierre (Université Toulouse Capitole, IDETCOM), Nicolas Peyre (Université Toulouse Capitole, IDETCOM), Judicael Prigent (Université Sorbonne-nouvelle, GRER), Claire Rossi (Université Toulouse Capitole, IDETCOM).