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**‘The Murder of Norbert Zongo:
A history of investigative journalism in
Burkina Faso’**

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Table of contents

Acknowledgments.....	4
Introduction.....	7
Chapter I: The Beginning of Free Press and the “La Baule” Speech of 1990	10
1. Burkina Faso Learning Democracy.....	10
2. The Blossoming of Media.....	14
Chapter II : How much Freedom for Investigative Journalism?	19
1. What is Investigative Journalism or Committed Journalism?	19
2. What is Investigative Journalism in Burkina Faso?	22
3. What are the Limitations of this Kind of Journalism?	24
Chapter III: The Risks Associated with Investigative Journalism	29
1. The Murder of Norbert Zongo	29
A. From the Time He Started his Job to His Death	29
B. The Political and Social Impact of the Assassination.....	36
C. Consequences for Media	38
2. A Perpetual Fight for a Free Press	42
Conclusion.....	44
Bibliography.....	46
1. Books.....	46
2. Internet sources	47
3. Interviews	47

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In memory of all journalists killed during and for their job.



“After the murder of my son, the authorities sent the chief of our city to talk to me. He told me that the authorities wanted me to forgive them. I replied that I could not forgive them. I’m very old, and it was the first time I had seen this kind of horror: to kill a person and burn him. Usually, after an assassination, the gangsters left the corpse for the family to take care of. Whenever I can, I will pay respect to my son’s grave in Ouagadougou, but I will never agree to forgive the authorities. Never”. Augustine Zongo, the mother of Norbert Zongo. Ph. Norbert Zongo’s burial on 16 December 1998. Auth. Fred. Bac.

Introduction

The idea for this research arose out of my observation of the environment in which the Burkinabe journalists work. The political atmosphere, resulting from many years of instability and military rule in Burkina Faso, coupled with the lack of a real democracy and freedom of the press, has made the work of the journalist unimaginably difficult. Among other incidents, the journalist Norbert Zongo, before being assassinated, had received many threats in the course of his professional life. The political journalist, Newton Ahmed Barry, editor-in-chief of the bimonthly *L'Événement*, has been threatened on many occasions.

In an attempt to bring to light many “obscure dossiers”, Norbert Zongo, 49, the managing editor of the weekly *L'Indépendant*, that was founded in 1993, distinguished himself by his ability to enlighten the public by exposing “affairs” relating to open prosecution files against the Burkinabe elite.

One of the “dossiers” he dealt with was related to David Ouédraogo, one of François Compaoré’s employees. It is noteworthy that François Compaoré is the president’s brother. David Ouédraogo was arrested for theft and questioned by members of the Presidential Guard in December 1997. He died under torture. Norbert Zongo rose up against the intervention of the military in a procedure which should have remained legal. On Sunday 13 December 1998, his burnt-out car was found on the road to his ranch: his body and those of three of his companions had been burnt to cinders.

This horrific act provoked the pertinent question among the public: did the government and the president wish to silence a journalist who fought for democracy using only his pen? There were immediate reactions to the event, including student demonstrations, meetings, and international protests. In addition, the distressed Burkinabe media world became far more incisive. Among those who became activated by the situation, some have been able to found new organs of the press, such as *L'Événement*, a bimonthly newspaper that is appreciated for its rigour and was masterminded by a former national television journalist, who produces files on national and international subjects.¹ Thus, the assassination of Norbert Zongo moulded the media scene and strengthened journalists’ commitment to investigate any kind of wrongdoings. This is the context of the tension that urged the investigative journalists in Burkina Faso to deepen their questioning activities.

¹ <http://www.courrierinternal.com>, December 2008.

The democratization imposed on Burkina Faso has established a multi-party system and pluralist information context. This situation gave rise to a profusion of private newspapers, and a wave of liberalism, as new radio and television stations were established.

The freedom of the press imposed by the speech at La Baule in the 1990s, especially in the African French speaking countries, has been subject to repeated violations. Thus, *“the space of freedom for critical power of the press becomes much narrower in Africa, the continent which has the biggest number of journalists in jail, even though there remains some really independent medias in a few countries”*.²

The private press in Burkina somehow continues to exercise its function as a critical, anti-establishment force. It harasses the government, which is badly in need of legitimacy. It monitors the regime and its elites; it denounces certain political practices, and brings any contradictions to the public stage. It succeeds in fighting against illegitimate decisions, mismanagement, corruption, and social unrest. Thus, the private printed press brings to light the opinions of political groups, as well as serving to be the voice of the voiceless. As Albert Camus puts it, journalism is *“an authority that directs a play and, if need be, questions the actors of history”*.

This critical function leads some governmental elites to “brutalize” the media world by using legal, institutional regulatory instruments. This legal (codes, laws...) and institutional (Higher Communication Council) system also oppresses the press and sometimes questions its freedom. Journalists and, notably managing editors are constantly summoned by the National Security to defend articles that they have published. The last summons concerned the editor of *Bendré*, managed by Cheriff Sy, in September 2007.

The weight of the penal code against libel is frequently invoked by the government against the press. In 2006, the newspaper *L'Événement* was condemned for libelling the character of François Compaoré, president Blaise Compaoré's young brother. The newspapers *L'Indépendant* and *Le pays* were both condemned in 2007 also. The height of the oppression of the press was the assassination on 13 December 1998 of the editor of *L'Indépendant*. This situation reflects the serious tensions existing between investigative journalism and its environment. We will also investigate the great danger associated with undertaking investigative journalism in Burkina Faso by bringing into focus the famous case concerning Norbert Zongo.

² <http://www.rsf.org>. December 2008.



On 16 December 1998, about 20,000 people accompanied Norbert Zongo to his final resting place in Ouagadougou. The funeral cortege was over 10 kilometers long. *“We left the mortuary at 10AM and we are arrived at the cemetery at 4PM”* remembers Abdoulaye Diallo, coordinator of the Norbert Zongo Press Center. Ph. Fred. Bac.

Chapter I: The Beginning of the Free Press and the “La Baule” Speech of 1990

Between the end of 1980 and the beginning of 1990, the debate on democratization in Africa was the main issue in African politics. Many observers paid attention to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the speech by the French President Francois Mitterrand at La Baule. This last event became the turning point for democratization in the French speaking countries in Africa. The speech at La Baule pushed francophone countries like Burkina Faso forward in the democratization process. The speech was a call for democracy in Africa, and people could not miss this opportunity because they wanted pluralism and freedom. They demanded not only the freedom of speech, but also the freedom of the press.

This chapter will focus on Burkina Faso and, specifically, how this country has learnt and evolved into a democracy, as well as how the media has started to blossom in this new era. In this “new world” of media, a few journalists have decided to expand their work into the field of investigative journalism. By opting for this “new route” of journalism in this young democracy, they will quickly learn that their sphere is limited, or, in other words, that their work will be restricted.

1. Burkina Faso Learning Democracy

On June 20 1990, François Mitterrand, the former president of France, delivered “the speech at La Baule” at the 16th Conference of presidents of France and Francophone countries in Africa. During his speech, he said that foreign aid would depend on the African presidents’ engagement in the democratization process. This speech never indicated a date or the correct manner in which to apply democracy, and each country reacted on an individual basis,³ so to get foreign aid from France, Burkina Faso has tried to organize democratic elections, sometimes without any guaranties of transparency, and granted freedom to the media.

For 19 years, Burkina Faso has been in this process of democratization. As Newton Ahmed Barry, an investigative journalist, commented, “*investigative journalism is very sensitive in Burkina Faso because of the absence of a framework for journalism, just like the question of democratization that is still a process. If there is no democracy, we cannot have freedom of the press*”.⁴ This statement is similar to Thomas Paine’s sentiments, an Anglo-

³ <http://www.inwent.org/E+Z/zeitschr/df100-4.htm>

⁴ Interview with Newton Ahmed Barry, an investigative journalist

Saxon political scientist from the 18th century, who stated, “*In a representative system, the reason of any thing must appear publicly. Each person is co-owner of the government. Each person must find it normal and necessary to understand what happens in this government because it concerns his or her patrimony*”. On this basis, talking about investigative journalism makes it possible to consider a political system built on representativeness and accountability. These basic tenets constitute the underlying principles of a free press and investigative journalism. Considering these general rules and in examining the statement issued by Thomas Paine, the question is: are the citizens in Burkina Faso co-owners of the government? There are two responses to this. One concerns what is written in the fundamental law (the Constitution and the law on the press), and the other is about what happens in reality.

First of all, in the Constitution voted in on 11 June 1991, the government has become the symbol of the will of the people. The citizens are co-owners of the government because they voted. They have chosen their president and the members of the parliament. Some laws allow the president to nominate some elites. All of them act to respect the will of the people. Then, there are some institutions that must normally control the government and the actions of its institutions. The parliament is included in this administration, and the parliamentarians are the representatives of the people. It is their responsibility to demand explanations from the government about any issue because they can also conduct parliamentary investigations into any subject, but this kind of inquiry is rarely made. From 1991 to the present, they have conducted at least three investigations. The first was in 1997, concerning the privatization of national companies, and the second was about contaminated products (oil, water, milk, salt, etc.) sold in shops. The latest one concerned the cost of living or “*la vie chère*” in 2008.

The press is a constitutional tool of control. The Constitution and the law on the press (clauses 56-93) state that “*the right to access information*” is one of the fundamental rights of each Burkinabe citizen. This right is guaranteed but not enforced, but, theoretically, the law on information provides the means to enforce this right. The means are: “The regime of the simple declaration”, which allows press creation and grants a press conscience clause to journalists. It prohibits censorship and stipulates the right of journalists to access any source of information. In connection with the status of the journalists and focusing on clause 54 of the information code, the Burkinabe jurist, Abdoul-Karim Sango, states that “*this clause should protect journalists in their office against the detective division of the Burkinabe police force’s searches. These searches would be illegal if the police did it without any judicial*

authorization. In the same way, it would be illegal to ask journalists to reveal their sources when they were summoned to appear”.

The judicial system must be independent of other powers, and is in charge of punishing any dereliction of duty. The institutions of control, like state inspection plus others, are at the ministerial or departmental level. Civil society action is relatively new in Burkina, and it exists within the process of democratization.

After examining what is written in the laws, what happens in practice? The idea of the State in Africa and mainly in Burkina Faso comes from the West. The model of the State in Burkina Faso is of French origin, because it is a former colony of France. The government has been built to serve the interests of the former colonists and the local politicians. Under this condition, the government is not a co-ownership, as Thomas Paine said, because African countries have constitutionally vested all of their power in a single party and a single leader,⁵ even within the process of democratization. In addition, *“every country on the African continent has made constitutional provisions guaranteeing freedom of expression including special legislations safeguarding freedom of the media. This and similar paragraphs in other constitutions are remarkably reminiscent of the free speech liberties of western countries”*.⁶ Based on this statement, the Constitution in Burkina Faso is not a product of the population’s will. It is just a copy of the Constitution from France.

Widespread poverty and illiteracy limit not only the outreach of the media but also the extent to which people can participate in public affairs, but, as Newton Ahmed Barry, an investigative journalist, commented, *“This factor is minor. I think when the Americans had their Revolution during the 18th century, they had not reached the high rate of schooling and literacy tuition that we have here now. Of course, some experts will talk about line parameters. That could be true but I believe that the big issue is within the nature of the national project”*.⁷ If democracy is based on a role being played by a majority of the population in a fair and equitable society, then the democratic institutions must work to empower people to make decisions within that society. The media can contribute to this role.

Above all, a free press is relatively new in Burkina Faso. From gaining independence until the present, the politicians and people think that, *“the media must serve governments, be*

⁵ Michael Leslie and Folu F. Ogunimu, *Media and democracy in Africa*, Goran Hyden, 2002, p.56

⁶ Idem, p. 76

⁷ Interview

and stay the voice of government.”⁸ This idea exists and is a recurring theme in the national media. The national broadcasts and newspaper journalists make comments after each speech by the president, Blaise Compaoré, attempting to report what the president said. In this way, they are becoming the government’s spokespeople, but the private media constantly attempt to criticize any event that happens in the country. They try to balance the news all the time.

The fact remains that, due to clauses 56-93, journalists work in good conditions, but the principle of transparency is difficult to implement. Why is that?

Access to sources of information remains difficult. The information code stipulates that information can be denied to journalists. The absence of regulations that require the filing of public documents and authorize public access excludes the possibility of reporters obtaining official information without help from other sources. Thus, the journalists need to combine their personal efforts and the information supplied by these sources.⁹

From this perspective, the protection of sources is not guaranteed by law. The detective division of the police force can seize any kind of documents and arrest journalists in their offices if they wish to discover the journalists’ sources. This has already happened to the private newspaper *Le pays* on 20 April 2006. Yet “*sources want confidentiality for a variety of reasons. They may, themselves, be breaching a duty of confidentiality. They may have stolen the information. They may fear economic reprisals. They may lose their job. They may fear for their safety. They may fear for the safety of their families*”.¹⁰ The ability of the public to know what its elected leaders are doing is fundamental to democracy. The expectation that the source will remain confidential is often the reason why people feel free to go to the press. The protection of confidentiality serves the best interests of the informant, which thereby serves the interests of society, to an even greater degree.¹¹

Journalists know that they have to preserve the secrecy of their sources if they wish to obtain information from them again in future, although they occasionally break this basic principle. This happened to a journalist who worked for one of the private daily newspapers. The publisher obtained the name of his journalist’s source and passed it on to the police. In this situation, it was difficult for the journalist to raise the conscience clause because it is unknown in Burkina Faso. The law does not mention how journalists can access or invoke it.

⁸ Idem

⁹ Silvio Waisbord, *Watchdog journalism in South America: news, accountability, and Democracy*, Columbia University press, 2000, p.7

¹⁰ Cecil Rosner, *Behind the headlines a history of investigative journalism in Canada*, Oxford University press, 2008, p. 25

¹¹ Idem

Furthermore, the journalists' level of training is insufficient. Many working journalists have never had appropriate training or studied journalism. Due to the media explosion in recent years and the creation of community newspapers and radio stations, many young people began working in these spheres without any kind of training. In this regard, Newton Ahmed Barry commented, *“not everyone can do investigative journalism. In addition to investigation tools, journalists must have a good background about the topics they are working on. Otherwise, they will not do a good job”*.¹² However, journalism meets the quality standards in Burkina Faso. There are now trained professionals, training schools, university courses in journalism, and trainers.

In the process of democracy imposed by the speech at La Baule, the blossoming of the media heralded a flood of new publications.

2. The Blossoming of the Media

Since 1990, Burkina Faso has been living in what experts call 'the blossoming of the media' because of 'the speech at La Baule'. Before 'the speech at La Baule', the freedom of the press that existed at that time in Burkina Faso was a colonial inheritance: the French law on the freedom of the press of July 29, 1881. It gave a kind of freedom to the colonies. Under this law, only French citizens should edit or possess media in a colony.

On 26 August 1944, President General Charles de Gaulle required the nationalization of any media in France, and, at the same time, the State became the guarantor of truth. This inheritance would be smartly applied by politicians in Burkina Faso. They wanted to see the whole country united in order to nip critical media in the bud.

Law 58 A1 of 31 August 1958 about the freedom of the press in Burkina Faso originated in the French law dated 29 July 1881. In Burkina Faso, an independent or private press existed before the speech at La Baule, but it had been oppressed. It was impossible for the different governments to impose the one-party system because they had to face activism from opposition politicians and trade-unionists. Frequently, social mobilization had thwarted the political power monopolization and allowed some freedom to the press. By following these failures in the process of political domination in Burkina Faso from the military regime to the

¹² Interview with Newton Ahmed Barry

democratic one, there are 5 main phases in the evolution of the media¹³ in Burkina Faso with a great specificity in 1998.

-From 1947 to 1966. Since the reconstitution of Burkina Faso territory in 1947, *Carrefour Africain* was the only press that existed, and its first issue was published in March 1960.

-From 1966 to 1980. On 3 January, 1966, the popular uprising removed the first president, Maurice Yaméogo. This movement was led by the trade-unionists. At that time, only *Carrefour Africain*, the national weekly, existed and reported on this issue. In May 1973, the daily newspaper, *L'Observateur*, owned by Édouard Ouédraogo, was launched. The existence of *L'Observateur* was a sign of liberalism because, at that time, only *Carrefour Africain* was being published.

-From 1980 to 1990, the military government and dictatorship systems sought to control the media strictly, but public opinion and other demonstrations conducted debates that livened up the media.

-From 1990 to 1998, the process of democratization continued with the speech at La Baule, as well as the blossoming of the private media.

-Since December 1998, a new tension emerged between the media, civil society and the government because of the murder of the journalist, Norbert Zongo. By analyzing these steps carefully, it appears that 1990 marked the beginning of the freedom of the press in Burkina Faso. With the democratic process, in 1991, the media developed more legal frameworks. The pluralism of the press became a reality with the blossoming of the media, and now there are many kinds of media; some anti-establishment, others moderate, and others satirical. There are 19 newspapers, including four dailies, eight weeklies, one bi-monthly, seven monthlies, and one published every two months, but the press has a turbulent history. “Newspapers had been the tool that have fought for the freedom of the press.”¹⁴ As a result, there is a need to focus on newspapers, particularly following the assassination of Norbert Zongo, an investigative journalist for a weekly newspaper.

In 1990, Blaise Compaoré, who seized power following a coup in 1987, discussed the opportunity for democracy in Burkina Faso. His regime had mobilized the public media, the radio, the television, *Sidwaya* and *Carrefour Africain*. On 3 August 1990, the information

¹³ http://www.cahiersdujournalisme.net/pdf/12/11_Bianchini-Koala.pdf. December 2008.

¹⁴ Interview with Cheriff Sy, the publisher and editor of the weekly *Bendré*. He is also the chair of the Private Press Publishers' Society (PPPS).

code to regulate the media was settled, but, immediately, journalists protested because this code did not allow them to do their job properly.

This code was corrected partially on 30 September 1993. The new code broke up the “prior authorization” or permission to lead the media. Before this change, many applied for authorization by the regional administration. *L’Observateur*, whose premises were burnt in 1984, was one of the first newspapers to apply. Its publisher wished to resume the publication of his newspaper, but Blaise Compaoré’s regime, the so-called *Front Populaire*, refused to allow him to do so. The regime asked him to rename his newspaper, and only on this condition did he obtain a license to publish a new newspaper. In the memory of his former print medium, the publisher, Edouard Ouédraogo named his second one *L’Observateur Paalga* (« *The New Observer* »). Through this smart approach, Edouard Ouédraogo got his newspaper in 1991.

In the same year, Boureima Sigué Jérémie, the former director of the publication *Carrefour Africain* and the person formerly responsible for the presidential press during the period before Blaise Compaoré’s regime, returned from exile and established a daily newspaper called *Le Pays* on 3 October 1991. In 1996, he founded the weekly *Évasion* and the monthly *Votre Santé*. *Le Journal du Jeudi* created in 1991 is a satirical weekly newspaper and is the second after *L’Intrus* that does not exist anymore. *Le Journal du Jeudi*’s cartoons make it successful. Sometimes, politicians are upset because they dislike the way in which they are depicted by cartoonists. The first newspaper to criticize the government was *La Clef*, which first appeared in 1991, but it collapsed in 1993. It was created in 1991 by Saturnin Ki, and Norbert Zongo, a former journalist from the national daily *Sidwaya* was a journalist at *La Clef*. Norbert Zongo who wrote under the pseudonym Henri Sebgo, became known in Burkina Faso when he created his own weekly newspaper called *L’Indépendant* in June 1993. Norbert Zongo chose to investigate government wrongdoings and bad business, so he wrote about the murder, violence, embezzlement, and corruption that were hidden behind the democratization process in Burkina Faso. Many other newspapers were created, like *Bendre*, *Le Journal du Soir*, *L’Express du Faso*, etc., but some of them no longer exist.

As far as broadcasting is concerned, the first free radio station in a Francophone country was *Horizon FM*, created in 1991 by Moustapha Labli Thiombiano. Today, Burkina Faso has 72 radio and TV stations (11 of them are national or public, 4 are international - RFI, BBC, VOA, Deutsche Welle – and the 5 TV stations are -1 national, 3 private, 1

international).¹⁵ The Radio and TV scene is increasing; in February 2007, the Higher Communication Council (HCC)¹⁶ granted broadcast licenses to 33 radio and TV stations. The figure of 72 does not take into consideration these 33 new radio and TV stations because they are not operational yet.

Good democracy has the capacity to tolerate the existence of a counter-power. No democracy can survive without political opposition, a fighting civil society, activists and a critical media. Even in this relatively free media, the local press attempts to act as a social moderator and respect the ethics and deontology of journalism.¹⁷ These media can be called a kind of counter-power press. *“It is good to avoid rejection from people who don’t think like the government because the counter-power with its criticism works to help the government.”*¹⁸

In Burkina Faso, even with the speech at La Baule, the evolution of the juridical press frameworks and media pluralism are not enough to guarantee the existence of the freedom of the press.¹⁹ The real indicator of the freedom of the press can be measured through ordeals. In 2007, François Compaoré, the youngest brother of Burkina Faso’s President Blaise Compaoré, sued the bi-monthly newspaper, *L’Evènement*, for libel. The magazine was received a suspended sentence of 6 months and was fined £396 (300 000 F CFA).

On several occasions, journalists have been arrested by the national police for their publications. The worst case happened on 13 December 1998, with the murder of Norbert Zongo. This journalist believed that with the blossoming of media in Burkina, he would be free to conduct investigations. With his assassination, it became clear that investigative journalism has its limits in Burkina Faso.

¹⁵ The Higher Communication Council (HCC), 2007. The HCC, created in 1995, is responsible for regulating communication and information and monitoring the media in Burkina Faso. It has a board of 12 councilors appointed by the president (four), the president of the National Assembly (three), the president of the Constitutional Council (one), and the communications and broadcast professional associations (four). The president of the HCC is appointed by presidential decree. The HCC issues radio and television frequencies to the private media.

¹⁶ All of the media, except for the public one, is monitored by the HCC, the creation of which is linked to the speech at La Baule. For the process of democratization, the government has been obliged to create several mechanisms that can guarantee, protect and reinforce public freedom to use the media. The idea is to shield and preserve information management from the government because of the principles of information balance and pluralism. This institution needs to promote all kind of expression and opinion in society. This idea allowed the creation in 1995 of the HCC.

¹⁷ Interview with Tiergou Pierre Dabiret, secretary-general, Burkina Faso Journalist Association.

¹⁸ Interview with Cheriff Sy.

¹⁹ <http://www.lefaso.net/spip.php?article24135>. December 2008.



The mortal remnant of a corpse, totally carbonized on the shell of a front seat. This may be Norbert. Three of his colleagues received the same treatment. On December 13 1998, Sapouy. Ph. RS.

Chapter II: How much Freedom for Investigative Journalism?

The aim of investigative journalism is to investigate, to seek truth and, through evidence, bring to light hidden events or issues in order to achieve justice. In Burkina Faso, the press typically avoided watchdog reporting because it was unwilling to endanger its political and economic relations with the holders of power, but the commitment of journalists to “try to find out what is true” will uncover many wrongdoings. The few journalists who dare to show such commitment are subject to many threats, harassment and even death threats. This chapter will discuss the limits of investigative journalism in Burkina Faso.

1. What is Investigative Journalism or Committed Journalism?

Committed journalism and investigative journalism are similar. The first needs a personal commitment and highlights mostly the ethical view of the journalist. The second usually demands that the journalist respects only professional principles.

Before seeking to define committed journalism in detail, it will be beneficial to analyze what investigative journalism or reporting is. For William Gaines, “*investigative reporting is an exciting part of journalism that has experienced growth and enhanced prestige during the later part of the twentieth century*”.²⁰ The term ‘investigative journalism’ did not exist before, argues John Pilger in the introduction to his book.²¹ It became fashionable in the 1960s and 70s, and especially when Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein exposed the Watergate scandal. The Watergate investigations in the *Washington Post* in 1972 began as a follow-up to a routine story and ended in the resignation of President Richard Nixon. It sparked a revival of investigation efforts, and showed the public and, more importantly, reporters and editors how perseverance can reveal truth in the face of a formidable opponent who seeks to hide it.

Investigative reporting did not start with Watergate, however. It had been recognized by any name as good reporting for hundreds of years before the Watergate scandal.²² One could offer an argument that the New Testament contained investigative reporting. It could be categorized as a team reporting effort that was not the official version of the Roman government but what they were attempting to hide. Fiction writers, such as Charles Dickens,

²⁰ William Gaines, *Investigative reporting for print and broadcast*, Nelson-Hall Publishers Chicago, 1994, p.1

²¹ *Tell me no lies: investigative journalism and its triumphs*, edited by John Pilger, 2005, 626 p.

²² William Gaines, Idem.

had written stories that exposed social injustice. He sometimes thinly veiled his characters, but never revealed their real names. Like today's investigative stories, some of these stories first appeared in newspapers. Pulitzer prizes in journalism have usually been awarded to investigative stories. A milestone was reached in 1895, when an award was presented for "investigative reporting".

So, with investigative journalism, journalists do not need to reveal their own thoughts. The news is the product of confrontation and pluralistic views. By analyzing the information, the committed journalist wants to inform, expose fraud and imposters, and intervene to defend a cause that he/she estimates to be just. Jonathan Kaufman is a reporter who achieved professional prominence with stories about people whose rights were being abused. *"I do the kind of reporting I do, in part, because I think newspapers should write for people who otherwise would have no voice"*,²³ says Kaufman, adding, *"If we're not going to write about homeless people and poor people and people being discriminated against, who will? [...] "I love getting people's attention...I want them to respond: "This is an outrage!"*"²⁴ Investigative reporters act like this because they think that journalists, *"endorse the journalistic commitment "trying to find out what it is true"*,²⁵ and that *"a dedicated investigative reporter does the job because he or she believes in its importance. The work provides a constant challenge. The reporter is sure that he or she is on the side of truth and fairness and knows that a job well done will result in public approval"*.²⁶ Sometimes, journalists can issue compelling calls for public moral indignation when the reporting yields stories that are carefully verified and skilfully narrated accounts of specific injuries and injustices. These stories call attention to the breakdown in the social systems and the disorder within the public institutions, and, in turn, implicitly demand a response by public officials - and the public itself - to that breakdown and disorder. *"Thus the work of these reporters call us, as a society, to decide what is, and what it is not, an outrage to our sense of moral order and to consider our expectations for our officials, our institutions, and ultimately ourselves. In this way investigative journalists are custodians of public conscience"*.²⁷

Certainly, the journalists cannot, all by themselves, repair the systematic breakdown in the institutional disorder or clean it up. They are not, after all, the keepers of the legislative and legal machinery to complete the task of civic reform; neither are we to suppose that

²³ James S. Ettema and Theodore L. Glasser, *Custodians of conscience*, Columbia University Press, 1998, p.6.

²⁴ Idem, p. 8

²⁵ Ibid, p. 11.

²⁶ William Gaines, *ibid*, p. 4.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 3.

journalists are moral arbiters who can decide, all on their own, how everyone else ought to behave. *“They are not the guardians of some superior moral knowledge. Rather, these journalists hold the means to report and disseminate stories that can engage the public’s sense of right and wrong. These journalists are, in other words, custodians of exactly what we imagine conscience to be: a morally engaged voice.”*²⁸ Thus, the committed subjects cannot change as a result of the attack. In the process of defending against this threat, journalists seek to justify their behaviour by insisting that they would do the same thing again if given the opportunity and if they had agreed to commit themselves, when requested.²⁹ *“Committed subjects were simply more resistant to the attack. [...] When you attack a committed person and your attack is of inadequate strength, you drive him to even more extreme behaviours in defence of his previous commitment. His commitment escalates, in a sense, because the number of acts consistent with his belief increases.”*³⁰

Moreover, the fact is that journalists think that *“he who has been freely elected to act in some way should certainly contribute to the degree to which he feels committed to the act. Having elected to act in a particular way should make him feel more personally responsible for his behaviour. One’s perception of self-responsibility is the very core commitment.”*³¹ So, by defending virtue through telling stories of outrageous vice, the goal of investigative reporting is to enhance publicity, accountability, and solidarity.³² Publicity refers to bringing to public attention any serious instances of systemic breakdown and institutional disorder that have been mostly unnoticed or intentionally concealed. Then, the journalist can make a call to accountability. Drawing the public’s attention to concerns that might otherwise go unheeded implies paying attention to voices that might otherwise go unheard. At their very best, the accounts of victims and villains that are the staple of this genre of journalism can give voice not only to those who suffer injustice but also to those who work against justice. That is, the call to accountability registered by investigative journalism not only allows the victims to speak but also demands that the villains speak as well. In this way, the value of the publicity-crafted accounts of villainy require the presentation of carefully crafted opportunities for villains to explain, disclaim or try to deny responsibility for the vices attributed to them. That is in part a matter of journalistic protocol, a way of honouring the traditional news values of fairness and balance. It anticipates critics who might otherwise

²⁸ Ibid, p.3.

²⁹ Roger Trig, *Reason and commitment*, Cambridge, Cambridge university press, 1973, p. 86.

³⁰ Idem, p.88.

³¹ Ibid, p.159.

³² James S. Ettema and Theodore L. Glasser, *ibid*, p.189.

complain that the story was biased or one-sided, but is also a matter of accountability, a demand by journalists that violators of the moral order should account openly and candidly for their violations. It serves to reveal that the press, much like the courts, can compel testimony.

Individuals who decline a journalist's call for accountability can be held in contempt of the public, a fate that is often worse than being held in contempt of court. "No comment" becomes evidence of guilt, and no judge can intervene in the court of public opinion to recognize and explain the constitutional protection against self-incrimination. With the explanation by the guilty party, the compassion for the victim increases among the public and might create a sense of solidarity. This sense of solidarity promotes "imaginative identification with the details of other's lives", and thus helps to build the only foundation for life together, an awareness of our "common susceptibility to humiliation" and, in turn, "a sense of human solidarity". To obtain this help from the media, says the American journalist William Gaines, "*newspaper readers and radio and television audiences have grown to accept investigative reporting as a public service. They may see investigative reporting as their champion against the powerful and as a recourse when other efforts to obtain justice fail*".³³ For this justice, some rare investigative journalists in Burkina Faso had tried to be the voice of the voiceless and expose many wrongdoings, wherever these occurred, but, in practice, they encountered many difficulties.

2. What is Investigative Journalism in Burkina Faso?

This is one of the rare studies done on investigative journalism in Burkina Faso. Through my reading, except for newspaper reports on investigative journalism in Burkina Faso, I did not find any academic studies on this topic. From my discussions with journalists, they agree that investigative journalism was first practiced by Norbert Zongo. This journalist is famous in Burkina Faso because of his writing. He exposed embezzlement, corruption, etc. among the national elites and political arena. Since 1996, he investigated fraud to the detriment of the government. Some of these investigations involved a massive gold mining fraud related to a company called Cemob, and a French company holding a monopoly concerning the export of leather given to Alizeta Ouédraogo, the mother-in-law of the president's younger brother, François Compaoré. Some of his investigations concerned land

³³William Gaines, *ibid*, p.3.

trafficking by some elites in the government party, the CDP, while others focused on the dispatch of badly-made products by the textiles and fibre company, Sofitex, etc.

Furthermore, Norbert Zongo's criticism bothered the government. For example, in 1997, the parliament adopted a clause that allowed Blaise Compaoré to stand as a candidate in the presidential election, even though the Constitution stipulated that after two terms, no president could be a candidate, so the president had already played his last chance. About this subject, Norbert Zongo wrote "*how the president will deal with intellectuals who know dictatorship's dimensions and its tragedy for our people? (...) He has only one solution: jailing, killing, gobbling up. There is no other solution. Mr. President is going definitely to be violent. Very soon, he will make many new widows and orphans*".³⁴ With this kind of statement, Norbert Zongo focused his attention on the concerns of the voiceless and the weak.

Concerning journalists' interests in certain issues, John Pilger writes in the introduction to his book, "*People still want to know how and why their loved ones were murdered. Why is journalism like this so important? Without it, our sense of injustice would lose its vocabulary and people would not be armed with information they need to fight it*".³⁵ Because investigative stories are not diarized on the news agenda, journalists get involved in a subject that they have to insist on by saying to themselves, "*Look at this; isn't it shocking?*"³⁶ As Thierry Perret, a French journalist, says, Norbert Zongo "*liked to highlight some «affaires», based on facts that other journalists neglected*".³⁷

In addition to this negligence, in Burkina Faso the majority of journalists avoid watchdog reporting because they are unwilling to endanger their political and economic relations with the holders of power of power.³⁸ Their political sympathies determine the career of these journalists, so it is so easy for them to be, simultaneously, the spokespeople of the government. This situation has never disturbed the guardians of professional principles.³⁹ The running to and fro from ministers' offices to journalists' desks has never put into question the commitment of these journalists because political dependence is tolerated or even encouraged. Ideological independence is intolerable or condemned,⁴⁰ so, by writing on different subjects and criticizing the government, Norbert Zongo's newspaper, *L'Indépendant*,

³⁴ Editorial from *L'Indépendant* issued on 11 February 1997.

³⁵ *Tell me no lies: investigative journalism and its triumphs*, Ibid.

³⁶ Roger Trig, Ibid, p. 12.

³⁷ www.rfi.fr/fichiers/MFI/POLITIQUE/DIPLOMATIE/1133.asp. December 2008.

³⁸ Silvio Waisbord, Ibid, p. 58.

³⁹ Cheriff Sy, Interview

⁴⁰ http://blogs.politique.eu.org/hugueslepaige/20080703_engagement_et_journalisme.

was seen as a critical voice. In this job of watchdog, *L'Événement*, the bi-monthly newspaper, and *Bendré* made concerted efforts to cover community issues, although frequently they give the floor to the voiceless. They are currently targeted, but continue to investigate. Newton Ahmed Barry, an investigative journalist, declared, “*the journalist’s commitment to investigation is not for political reasons but to serve people, to seek the truth, to build our democracy*”.⁴¹ He argues that his commitment is not communism. He is committed “*because I’m sensitive to injustice*”.

In Burkina Faso, this sense of commitment is uncommon. With a few exceptions, the majority of reporters are still badly paid, and journalists refuse to take any risks or to make any efforts concerning their job. They work only day by day to get something that can help them to survive.⁴² The result of this attitude, mainly after Norbert Zongo’s murder, is to be highly sceptical about the ability of the media disclosures to crystallize effective change. That happens because the institutions are largely inattentive to the press denunciations and are infective or uninterested in conducting further investigations. Individuals reportedly involved in wrongdoing are rarely investigated or prosecuted: if found guilty, they receive minor sentences; if jailed, they often receive reduced sentences.⁴³ The denunciations only have limited political consequences. In this case, noble words and concepts like ‘democracy’, ‘freedom’ and ‘liberation’ become emptied of their true meaning.⁴⁴ Even worse, when journalists allow this corruption of language and ideas, they disorientate, rather than inform; or, as Edward S. Hermann writes, they “*normalize the unthinkable for the general public*”.⁴⁵ At least with Bernstein and Woodward’s legendary efforts to expose corruption in the Nixon White House, investigative reporting has come to mean journalism of the highest order. It evokes the respect of journalists themselves because it signifies a special enterprise, an extraordinary confluence of time, talent, and resources,⁴⁶ but, in Burkina Faso, that is another matter; many limitations do not allow journalists to conduct their investigations freely.

3. What are the Limitations of this Kind of Journalism?

The response to this question has two main points, necessarily linked to the previous chapter about “*Burkina learning democracy*”. So, first of all, owing to the right of people to be informed concerning the Constitution of June 11, 1991 and reaffirmed by the information

⁴¹ Interview.

⁴² Dabiret Pierre, Interview.

⁴³ Newton Ahmed Barry, interview.

⁴⁴ *Tell me no lies: investigative journalism and its triumphs*, Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ G. Stuart Adam, Roy Peter Clark, *Journalism: the democracy craft*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006, p. 126

law, investigative journalism is like an institution. By taking inspiration from the Constitution, the information law, through clauses 56-93, institutes two principles. The first concerns access to information sources and the second the limits of investigative journalism in practice.

With the information law, the professional journalist has the right to access information sources, but the main problem is how to define “information sources”. The law does not mention this, but this subject can be handled by taking examples from France, the former colonizer, and largely the European Commission as well. The Commission explains that “information sources” means essentially administrative documents. In France, the specific law about information access has created the Commission for Access to Administrative Documents (CAAD). Thus, this Commission ensures that the freedom to access administrative records is respected. Also, another law allows journalists to protect their sources, and they cannot be obliged to reveal the identity of their sources except in certain exceptional circumstances, and then only by a judge. Without these legal measures, it is difficult to conduct investigations, because the European Court of Human Rights considers source confidentiality the cornerstone of journalism. The absence of this protection would dissuade citizens from talking to journalists. In Burkina Faso, by using clause 54 of the information law, the police can search for documents in media buildings if they possess a search warrant. In France, the legal proceedings searches (1993) of media buildings can be made only if the police are accompanied by a judge or state prosecutor. He or she “*must be sure that their inquiries will not destroy the unrestricted discharge of their job and do not hinder or cause an unjustified delay in the delivery of information*”. If this law existed in Burkina Faso, the police could not have searched the *Le Pays* building on 20 April 2006.

Furthermore, clause 51 stipulates that information can be refused to journalists under the information code if this information could undermine the internal or external security of the State. Any information that concerns publishing a military secret, or a strategic economic policy, causing it to fail, deflecting or compromising an investigation or legal proceedings; undermining someone’s dignity and his or her privacy... this clause transforms all subjects into taboos. Also, state secrets justified by “State reasons” are quickly hushed up. Even though some journalists have written about soldiers and powerful leaders, most of them are still afraid to write about “*business concerning the president, that relating to the army*”

hierarchy being involved in the laundering of drugs, money...’’⁴⁷ To this list, powerful leaders or the president’s illness,⁴⁸ handicap, HIV status, sexuality, etc., can be added. After this first step of limiting investigations, the second point is related to the restrictions in practice.

In reality, the freedom of information is limited to the political tradition. *“Transparency is still a big challenge in Burkina Faso. Opacity is the rule. Since Independence until now, the administration and several political regimes have been built on the secret principle. Thus, it is very difficult to get information in some institutions. People will tell you, “I cannot give you information because I don’t have the authorization from my boss”’’.⁴⁹ This attitude is legitimated by the law (clauses 13-98) about civil servants in public administration: “Information that can be or must be released to citizens is clear for each civil service by a competent hierarchical authority”. This legal measure is too vague and allows civil servants to remain silent about some issues.*

Journalists cannot oblige the administration by using the law to access information. There is no deadline to get a response, and no obligation to motivate any refusal from the institutions. Contrary to the Commission for Access to Administrative Documents (CAAD) in France, the administration is obliged to reply within a certain period of time (two months) or justify their refusal of any requests by journalists. This legal measure allows journalists to bring the matter to court if they wish. In Burkina Faso, there is nothing like this kind of legal measure regarding the access to information. The weakness and even absence of an awareness and strong public opinion do not help journalists to obtain any rights about collecting information.⁵⁰ *“Without a dynamic public opinion, an investigative journalist is useless and confined to the dangerous role of a martyr or an isolated, single fighter.”⁵¹ This statement raises the issue of the role of justice regarding what happens next, mainly when the journalists demonstrate, with proof, some wrongdoing. “A journalist who conducts investigations in a country where Justice is not independent cannot do anything,” declares Sib Eric Kam, jurist and activist for the freedom of the press.⁵² Because of the lack of law, journalists cannot get information about any subject. Thus, “each person quoted in a story could sometimes sue the journalists. If the judge uses laws 56-93, it is hard for a journalist to*

⁴⁷ Interview, Pierre Dabiret.

⁴⁸ The bi-monthly newspaper, *L’Événement*, conducted this year an investigation showing that President Blaise Compaoré was sick. The HCC demanded that the newspaper stopping writing about this subject, since issues relating to the president’s health are very sensitive and can have some negative impact on the country, but the newspaper and others continued to write about it.

⁴⁹ Interview with Newton Ahmed Barry.

⁵⁰ Interview with Tiergou Pierre Dabiret.

⁵¹ Interview with Newton Ahmed Barry.

⁵² Interview with Sib Eric Kam, jurist and activist for the freedom of the press.

*win a proceeding about libel. What helps us until now is the discernment of some judges. They analyze the best intentions of the journalists,”*⁵³ reveals Newton Ahmed Barry.

According to him, if Justice is invested with a right to follow what happens next, the reporters will not run any risks because the judge can continue the investigations started by the journalists. About this complementary job, Jean Montaldo, a French investigative reporter, testifies that, “*the role of the journalist is to start a game and bring it back but not to kill it*”. “*It is the role of justice,*” points out Newton Ahmed Barry, but, to achieve this duet, journalists must have a solid background in journalism and a good encyclopaedic knowledge in order to track his or her subject. At the same time, judges have to be independent from the holders of power in order to preserve their integrity. All of these conditions combined could give good value to the journalists’ activities and help democracy to grow.

⁵³ Interview with Newton Ahmed Barry.



On December 13 2008, about 3000 people took to the streets of Ouagadougou to demand the reopening of the investigation into the murder of Norbert Zongo. They paid tribute to him. **Ph. Abdoulaye Diallo**

Chapter III: The Risks associated with Investigative Journalism

In Burkina Faso, the relationship between journalists and the government is sometimes contentious. A journalist who praises the government is viewed as loyal, trustworthy and respected, but one who seeks to investigate the government's behaviour in all aspects is viewed as manipulative, a traitor, a partisan or even an enemy. In the government's eyes, such a journalist is considered as an agent of the opposition party because his or her goal is to work hand-in-hand with the opposing party in order to discredit them.

In this context, the journalist is exposed to the risk of harassment or even death, as in the case of Norbert Zongo, who was savagely killed and burnt. To understand the full meaning of his brutal assassination, it is important to know who Norbert Zongo really was. Why did he take the risk of continuing his investigations, despite the many death threats that he had received? One thing is certain: not only did his assassination spark off one of the biggest, most important protests and demonstrations nationwide, but it also provided a wake up call for the people of Burkina Faso. The population still wants to know who is behind this murder.

This assassination has changed the face of the media. Despite this, frequent, relentless intimidation and oppression against journalists continues to happen every day. This chapter aims to demonstrate this and discuss how the media can play a great role in protecting journalists, either independently or in connection with the government.

1. The murder of Norbert Zongo

On 13 December 1998, Norbert Zongo, a journalist, was killed and burnt in his own car. This murder shook the country very deeply. Ten years later, nothing has been done to find and punish the murderer(s), and the fight for this continues.

A. From the Time he started his Job to his Death

Norbert Zongo was born in July 1949. He was the owner, publisher and editor of a weekly newspaper called *L'Indépendant*. He was also the chair of the Private Press Publishers' Society (PPPS) in Burkina Faso.

In 1964, while still at school, he published his first newspaper, called *La Voix du Cours Normal* (The Voice of the High School), written on sheets from his exercise books. Early each morning, he used to listen to the BBC, RFI and other international radio stations

and then wrote his own news bulletins. *La Voix du Cours Normal* was targeted because he raised political issues, and it was subsequently banned.

After high school, Norbert Zongo became a teacher in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in 1971. He then studied law at the University of Abidjan in Cote d'Ivoire. In 1979, he studied journalism at the University of Lomé in Togo. He was dismissed from there because of his novel, *Le Parachutage*. This novel talked about an African dictator, and the president of Togo Gnassingbé Eyadema found some similarities with himself. When he returned to Burkina, he was imprisoned for a year. After he was freed, he continued his studies in journalism at the University of Yaoundé in Cameroon. He returned to Burkina Faso and started to work as a journalist on the national newspaper *Sidwaya*, and for *Carrefour Africain*. He regularly wrote articles for private newspapers like *Le Journal du Jeudi* and *La Clef*. Because of his criticism of the government, for the first time, he was posted far from Ouagadougou, the capital. The second time, when the Burkina News Agency wanted to transfer him to Banfora, in the south-west of the country, he refused, preferring to resign from his post.

In June 1993, he created his own newspaper, the weekly *L'Indépendant*. With a circulation of around 16,000 a week, almost everybody read it. Furthermore, Norbert Zongo was one of the founding members of the Movement for Human and Peoples' Rights, a pioneering human rights organization in Burkina Faso. He was committed to protecting human rights, but, unfortunately, on Sunday 13 December 1998, he was killed together with his younger brother, Ernest, his driver, Ablassé Nikiema, and one of his employees, Blaise Ilboudo, on a road about 4 miles from the village of Sapouy (located 60 miles south of Ouagadougou). Norbert Zongo was going to his ranch, Safari Sissili. The bodies of Norbert, Ernest and Blaise were found badly burnt inside the cab of their four-wheel-drive vehicle. The fire had destroyed the inside of the Toyota Land cruiser, although the registration number '11 J 6485 BF' was still readable.

According to the national channel, TNB, and mainly a report in the daily *Sidwaya*,⁵⁴ the driver's body lay "in a shallow channel to the left of the vehicle (...) the lower part of his body licked by flames and covered by only the tattered remnants of a pair of jeans". The state daily went on to add "the vehicle (...) was parked on the left-hand verge. There were no tyre marks to indicate that it had braked sharply. The doors were still closed and all traces of

⁵⁴ http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=727

paintwork had been destroyed by the flames, as well as all inflammable accessories". These observations were confirmed by the Burkinabe Human Rights and Peoples' Movement, which sent a team to the scene on Monday 14 December 2008. From the initial observations made on the spot, the delegation noted the following facts "no sign of skid marks on the road; the vehicle had not struck an obstacle; it had neither overturned nor left the road. From the outside, it seemed to have burned from the top downwards and the tyres were intact. There were bullet holes in the rear right-hand door. Four bodies were found at the scene: one outside the vehicle and three burnt inside." The Human Rights organization concluded "in the light of the elements noted, [we have] serious reason to believe that this was not an accident but an odious crime which was apparently carefully planned and carried out",⁵⁵ and the watchdog NGO, Reporter Without Borders (RWB),⁵⁶ after talking to some experts, confirmed that the theory about an accident did not stand up. "Speculation that a fire may have started due to an electrical short-circuit was refuted by the various people who examined the vehicle."

RWB did not believe it possible that a four-wheel-drive vehicle could catch fire so suddenly and violently. Only the driver managed to get out. The RWB added, "*one of the employees of Norbert Zongo's ranch, who visited the scene of the blaze the next day, said: one of the bodies was bent as if there had been an explosion. The lower parts of the legs were severed. It might have been an incendiary grenade. It was the work of experts. It was not possible that it was an accident*". The report made by Dr Guira Oumar⁵⁷ noted that the driver's body had many injuries with second- and third-degree burns, mainly located in the lower half, covering an estimated surface area of 27%. He also mentioned the traumatism of the bones, probably done by a sharp object. "*It is very unlikely that the burns on Ablassé Nikiema's body were sufficient to explain his death. In the case of the three other bodies, whose lower limbs were severed, it is hard to say if that was due to the fire or if there was another reason. Nothing could be excluded,*" wrote the doctor.

A witness from the village of Sapouy,⁵⁸ who asked to remain anonymous, explained what a shepherd from one of the local ethnic groups had seen: "*on Monday 14 December, at around midday, I met a Peul who told me he had seen what had happened. Two men in a car fired their guns at the vehicle, set fire to it. They were wearing civilian clothes. The driver*

⁵⁵ http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=727

⁵⁶ http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=727

⁵⁷ <http://www.cnpress-zongo.org/pages/rapnorbz.htm>

⁵⁸ <http://www.cnpress-zongo.org/pages/rapnorbz.htm>

gave a shout. Then they went back to Sapouy". An eyewitness,⁵⁹ also from Sapouy, said: "I was in my field which is about 400 yards away from the road. I heard a car engine - it was very loud. The noise frightened me, so I didn't go and look. I saw some smoke. I was afraid people would say it was me that had caused the accident." Two more people⁶⁰ in Sapouy said that there had been some strange events that day. The manageress of a village bar said: "a blue Toyota, with a tarpaulin over the back, went past at full speed about 15 minutes after Norbert and his friends stopped here. It had no number plates. It went past again about 15 minutes later, still going very fast. It seemed suspicious". Her account was corroborated by a neighbour: "We were playing cards about 100 yards away from the road. I noticed the vehicle because it was going so fast. There was a sign on the front door saying "State property"".

Based on these testimonies and the autopsies of the rest of the burnt corpses, it may be concluded that Norbert Zongo was murdered⁶¹ because of the investigations he conducted as a journalist. Indeed, he was investigating the death of François Compaoré's driver, David Ouédraogo. In December 1997, François Compaoré handed David Ouédraogo over to members of the military barracks, alleging that the driver had stolen money from him. David Ouédraogo was reportedly tortured to death, and his body was never found. François Compaoré was due to be charged with "murder and concealing a corpse", but he was out when an official came to give him the papers and he failed to turn up to answer a court summons. Norbert Zongo had denounced this breach of the justice rules. This situation reminded him of the deaths and tortures of two people from the opposition parties: Guillaume Sessouma, a professor at the national University, who was kidnapped from his home in 1990 at 2am, and the student, Dabo Boukary, who was kidnapped in the street the same year. This led to serious threats against him. On this point, Germain Nama, a member of the Unesco National Commission and chair of the National Human Rights Organization's arbitration committee, who is now a journalist but was a professor of philosophy in 1998, said, "*I knew he was severely threatened, but, by the time he took the threats seriously, it was too late. They even went to see him, saying they had been sent to bump him off. As proof, they recounted his schedule in such detail that Norbert was afraid. The plan was to get rid of him and arrange for his body to be found in the bush a few days later. The men said that they had been sent by François Compaoré. He saw them at least twice during October. The man who*

⁵⁹ <http://www.cnpress-zongo.org/pages/rapnorbz.htm>

⁶⁰ <http://www.cnpress-zongo.org/pages/rapnorbz.htm>

⁶¹ <http://www.cnpress-zongo.org/pages/rapnorbz.htm>

was to kill him, known as D., belonged to the militaries that murdered the opponent Valentin Kinda in Abidjan, at the time of Thomas Sankara's government".⁶²

Geneviève Poda,⁶³ Norbert Zongo's wife, confirmed the threats against her husband: "As far back as 1997, he had been followed by a car when he was on his motorbike. In October 1998, Frank Alain Kaboré, with whom he had business dealings, visited see him at home. He said he had been sent by a minister, who had been asked by François Compaoré to warn Norbert".⁶⁴ S., a close friend of Norbert Zongo, remembered a quotation by Frank Alain Kaboré "I don't understand why he [Zongo] insisted on talking about that case [David Ouédraogo]. I had protected him in the past, but now I could do nothing more for him".⁶⁵ Bénéwendé S. Sankara, the Ouédraogo family's lawyer, specified: "On several occasions, he told me there was a chance he would be killed. I could discern his anguish as a hunted man". As the lawyer said, when Norbert Zongo was starting to take an interest in this case, Oumarou Kanazoé, a wealthy businessman, met with him. His idea was to get Norbert to drop the story about David Ouédraogo's murder, but Norbert never did. In *L'Indépendant*, his newspaper, Norbert included stories on this topic in the last 15 issues. He even wrote about his premonition of the tragedy in his editorial dated 8 December 1998: "Let us suppose that *L'Indépendant* ceases publication definitively for one reason or another (the death or imprisonment of its publisher, or a ban on publication...). We would remain convinced that the David Ouédraogo issue must be faced, and sooner or later resolved". The inevitable happened on 13 December 1998. Norbert Zongo was murdered. On December 15 1998, some demonstrations and riots broke out in almost every place in Burkina Faso, mainly in December 1998 and in 1999. People wanted to know who was behind the assassination and why it had happened.

To calm people down, the authorities set up an independent committee of inquiry. It had the task of making all of the necessary inquiries to determine the cause of death of the journalist and three of his friends.⁶⁶ On the committee, the government had 10 members out of the 14. Because of that, the opposition, trade unionists and human rights organizations rejected the proposal, suggesting instead an international committee involving international organizations, such as Amnesty International, the International Committee of Jurists and RWB. Amnesty International was very happy about this committee and thought that "in the

⁶² http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=727

⁶³ <http://www.cnpress-zongo.org/pages/rapnorbz.htm>

⁶⁴ http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=727. December 2008.

⁶⁵ http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=727. December 2008.

⁶⁶ <http://www.cnpress-zongo.org/pages/rapnorbz.htm>. December 2008.

past, this type of investigation had never reached a conclusion above all with the deaths of Guillaume Sessouma, Boukary Dabo, Clément Ouédraogo and David Ouédraogo. The deaths had never been officially explained".⁶⁷ Even though the committee had been established, the police inquiry did not start immediately after Norbert Zongo's death. A national police chief tried to explain this situation by noting that, "*We were confused. Should the police continue with their inquiries when the government had decided on 18 December 1998 to set up a committee of inquiry? Although we didn't specifically tell the local superintendent to call off the investigations, we did think it was unwise to have two inquiries going on at the same time*".⁶⁸ Other officers pointed out that a more thorough investigation outside the scope of the independent committee of inquiry might have been regarded as biased, but an official legal investigation, with examining magistrate Wenceslas Ilboudo in charge, was not opened until 24 December 1998.

On May 7 1999, the independent committee submitted its report to the Burkinabe Prime Minister after hearing the testimonies of more than 200 witnesses. It confirmed that the murder of Norbert Zongo could be traced to his investigations into the death of David Ouédraogo, the driver of François Compaoré, the brother and the adviser of the president. The committee added, "*with regard to the authors of the crime, the committee does not have definite proof that will lead to unravelling the riddle*".⁶⁹ However, it highlighted the contradictions in the statements of some of the suspects in relation to their schedule of duty on 13 December 1998. So, for the committee, Christophe Kombacere, Ousseini Yaro, Wampasba Nacoulma, Banagoulo Yaro, Edmond Koama and Marcel Kafando, all soldiers attached to the presidential guard regiment, were "*serious suspects*" although "*this does not make them guilty*".⁷⁰ President Blaise Compaoré reacted to this conclusion by making a speech, in which he announced the reorganization and the reallocation of the barrack quarters in the presidential guard regiment, which might facilitate the course of justice, according to him. He also promised to ensure social security cover for Norbert Zongo's widow and children, as well as for those of his companions, including David Ouédraogo. Even with the committee conclusion and the presidential resolutions, the calm was very far from won. Thus, President Blaise Compaoré decided to set up "A college of sages".

⁶⁷ http://www.rsfo.org/article.php3?id_article=727. December 2008.

⁶⁸ <http://www.cnpress-zongo.org/pages/rapnorbz.htm>. December 2008.

⁶⁹ <http://www.cnpress-zongo.org/pages/rapnorbz.htm>. December 2008.

⁷⁰ <http://www.cnpress-zongo.org/pages/rapnorbz.htm>. December 2008.

On 1 June 1999, this college of sages was put in place. Its aim was to bring about reconciliation and consolidating peace in Burkina Faso.⁷¹ The college, headed by the Bishop of Bobo-Dioulasso, Mgr. Anselme Sanou, had 16 members; three of them were former heads of state, the others were religious and traditional leaders. On 17 June 1999, the college demanded the arrest of all of those who were implicated in the death of David Ouédraogo. The next day, three members of the presidential guard, Yaro Ousseini, Edmond Koama, and Marcel Kafando, were jailed in Ouagadougou and charged with the murder of David Ouédraogo, but François Compaoré, the president's brother, who had sent his driver, David Ouédraogo, to the military camp, was not affected.

Although deeply implicated in the case, François Compaoré was only questioned once by the judge, in January 2001. Two weeks later, the public prosecutor, Abdoulaye Barry, charged Marcel Kafando, a senior member of the presidential guard, with "murder" and "arson" in connection with the case.⁷²

To end the national crisis, the report by the college of sages submitted to the president on 2 August 1999 made the following recommendations: to set up a government of national unity, establish a truth and justice commission for national reconciliation, constitute an ad hoc committee charged with the review of certain articles in the nation's constitution, etc. About the death of Norbert Zongo and other crimes, the college proposed an accelerated hearing relating to other murders. Referring to that, Blaise Compaoré announced that he would take all of the necessary measures in the best interests of Burkinabè. On 11 June 1999, a joint ministerial decree was issued by the Economic and Finance Ministry and the Ministry of Social and Family Affairs. The decree gave £5,148 (3 900 000 f cfa) to Norbert Zongo's family, £5,544 (420 000 f cfa) to Ernest Zongo's, £1,425 (1 080 000 f cfa) to Ablasse Nikiéma's, £950 pounds (720 000 f cfa) to Blaise Iboudo's and £1,848 pounds (1 400 000 f cfa) to David Ouédraogo's. The amounts were decided by considering the number of dependents of the deceased persons as well as their income. The decree clause 2 emphasized that the expenditure should be charged to the state budget. For Norbert Zongo's family, it was not just a question of the state taking care of them. It was said that they would not touch the money inasmuch as the authors of the assassination were not known and brought to prison.

⁷¹ http://www.cnpress-zongo.org/pages/rap_sages.htm, December 2008.

⁷² http://www.cnpress-zongo.org/pages/rap_sages.htm, December 2008.

The investigating judge, Wenceslas Ilboudo, finally ruled on 19 July 2006 against “Marcel Kafando and any other unidentified person” for the murder of Zongo. This meant that the disciplinary action should be abandoned. The prosecution witness had withdrawn a statement he had made eight years before. The ruling was confirmed on appeal. Conclusion: no further attempt would be made to find out who murdered Zongo.⁷³

The investigation could only be reopened if “new evidence” were produced. On 20 October 2006, RWB tried to give to the state prosecutor a copy of the original draft of the independent inquiry committee report. In this report, the passages about the contradictions in François Compaoré’s statements and the attempts by the businessman Oumarou Kanazoé to silence Zongo had been completely deleted. The conclusions of the original report were also much more positive and detailed, and much more specific when identifying the “six leading suspects”, all of whom were members of the presidential guard, but RWB failed. The state prosecutor rejected RWB’s “new evidence”, so, after 11 years, nobody has been arrested and jailed for the murder of the journalist Norbert Zongo.

Without international or local pressure, it would be naive to hope that the Burkinabe authorities would clear up the issues. Eleven years later, journalists and human rights organizations are fighting to help the justice system to find the murderers and instigators of the crime. In memory of the journalist, many thousands of demonstrators still go out on the streets.

B. The Political and Social Impact of the Assassination

The people reacted violently to the death of Norbert Zongo. Riots and demonstrations blossomed almost everywhere in Burkina Faso. On 15 December 1998, many thousands of students from the University of Ouagadougou (the only university in the country at that time) and other schools demonstrated in the streets, raising many issues relating to the Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP). They also burnt one of CDP’s headquarters. They threw stones at the courthouse, and the national police arrested many of them.

On 16 December 1998, around 20,000 people accompanied Norbert Zongo to his final resting place in Ouagadougou.⁷⁴ The funeral cortege was over 10 kilometers long. “*We left the mortuary at 10AM and we arrived at 4PM at the cemetery*”, remembered Abdoulaye Diallo, coordinator of the Norbert Zongo Press Centre. Two days later, on 19 December 1998, over

⁷³ <http://www.rsf.org>, December 2008.

⁷⁴ Interview with Abdoulaye Diallo, coordinator, Norbert Zongo Press Center, December 2008

1,000 people attended a meeting at the Trade Union Centre. They wanted to know why and by whom Norbert Zongo had been killed. On 21 December 1998, the opposition declared 48 hours of national mourning. Concerning all these demonstrations, the elites of the CDP tried to justify themselves by saying, *“it is by no means in our interests, just after we have won the elections brilliantly with a transparent candidate, that such a situation should occur. The false remarks and gratuitous statements of the opposition group, alleging that we are in some way responsible for this tragedy, are only the visible parts of a coldly calculated plot by politicians on the way down, who are willing to fish in troubled waters”*.⁷⁵ In fact, in November 1998, President Blaise Compaoré had recently been elected for a second term after his first term that ended in 1991. This justification by the elites never convinced anybody.

For over a month, there were demonstrations, riots and meetings throughout Burkina Faso. Finally, the government ordered the release of all imprisoned demonstrators, and lifted the sanctions against protestors who had been arrested. Also, it agreed to discuss the crime with the Collective of the Democratic Organizations of Mass and Political Parties of Burkina Faso.⁷⁶ On 23 January 1999, the Collective agreed to become a member of the independent committee of inquiry into Norbert Zongo’s murder. When, on 21 May 1999, President Blaise Compaoré delivered his moderate national speech, he stated that the dossier on Norbert Zongo would be assigned to an examining magistrate, the demonstrators would be freed, and the schools and university would reopen, but the leaders of the president political party, the CDP, became more violent. They had targeted the final report produced by the committee for being partial, and had also sent some people on 10 May 1999 to attack Halidou Ouédraogo, the president of the Collective, and a human rights activist’s residency.⁷⁷

Among the people who were still fighting for justice for Norbert Zongo, *“Les Femmes en Noir,”* or the Women in Black, set themselves apart with their constancy and determination. According to Rouamba Georgette, a member of the Women in Black, their group is called like that, *“because black is the symbol of mourning, and only women know and feel the great pain of losing a child”*. Her group has fought since the first day of the assassination. In addition, they defy stereotypes and pressures.

⁷⁵ <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1999/08/JAFFRE/12317#nb1>, December 2008

⁷⁶ Immediately after the assassination, this institution was established. It unites human rights NGOs (MBDHP), lawyers, trade union institutions (CGT-B), journalists’ associations (AJB), student unions (UGEB), and opposition associations (Groupe du 14 février) that called the other political parties to boycott the presidential election in 1998, etc.

⁷⁷ <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1999/08/JAFFRE/12317#nb1>, December 2008

On the first Sunday of each month, they go to pray at the graves of Norbert Zongo and his three friends. By acting in this way, they want to “say “no” to injustice in Burkina Faso”, says Martine Zongo, the sister of Norbert Zongo and the president of the Women in Black. Their fight is for everybody, but mainly for people who were killed for no apparent crime. Thus, these women also visit Thomas Sankara’s grave. Thomas Sankara was president from 1984 to 1987. He was killed in 1987 during a coup by Blaise Compaore, the current president. The aim of this association is to find justice for Norbert Zongo and for other victims of political crime. The Women in Black know that their task is hard. For example, they wished to meet Monique Ilboudo, the former minister of Human Rights, and an activist for women rights, but the former minister never replied to their request. The national TV refuses to cover their activities. However, the Women in Black have won the support of some politicians and religious organizations. These difficulties, added to the social reasons, make their fight very hard. Today, there are only six people; at the beginning, they were about a hundred. The others are gone because of the social pressure. *“Their husbands want to see them at home taking care of them and their children,”* said Noëlie Zongo, an activist. In fact, those men do not want their wives to be involved in political activities. Furthermore, Tara Nacanabo, the president of the Association Kebayina of Burkina, argued that, *“we can mobilize women only if their interests are in jeopardy. This is a shame”*. Nevertheless, those women also want to tell people that *“everybody has the right to demand justice”*.

All the demonstrations by the people of Burkina Faso were expressive of their thirst for justice, the desire to put an end to unpunished crimes. They wanted change among the powers holders, but their effects have only been slight. Unfortunately, the establishment remains in place, but they know they will have to answer for any crime that happens. To this end, the media are increasingly trying to play their part in watching the government and informing the public about issues of general interest. It is necessary to contribute to the formation of the democracy. Probably, the killing of the journalist helps them to dare write about wrongdoings.

C. Consequences for the Media

The press in Burkina Faso has become stronger than in the past, with this death. Eleven years later, there are still some signs of this. According to the French journalist, Thierry Perret,⁷⁸ *“inevitably, the Zongo affair has contributed to free media in Burkina Faso”*.

⁷⁸ www.rfi.fr/fichiers/MFI/POLITIQUE/1133.asp, December 2008

The media has participated in some demonstrations. On 24 December 1998, the press organized a stoppage; it wanted truth, and some journalists clearly expressed their stand. In May 1998, the National Press Centre was founded by the Burkina Faso Journalist Association. In 1999, this Centre was renamed the Norbert Zongo National Press Centre. The Journalists' Association, from December 1998 until now, is carrying on the struggle to find the murderers and the masterminds. It also acts to maintain Norbert Zongo's memory, and each year they hold conferences, awards, etc. related to investigative journalism, but these activities moved many journalists from the Centre. "*They refused to be seen as a partisan for the Norbert Zongo case,*" said Abdoulaye Diallo,⁷⁹ but, 11 years later, almost all journalists are trying to deal with this affair. Some have changed their mind and moved into the Centre.

For the 10th year of commemoration, faced with this denial of justice, the Journalists Association asked people to sign the petition at <http://norbertzongo10ans.net> or directly at <http://www.lapetition.be/petition.php?petid=3229> for the reopening of the dossier. Moreover, the Norbert Zongo National Press Centre, the Collective and Reporters without Borders had marked the anniversary by organizing a protest. During this protest, stickers renamed one of the capital's avenues after Zongo. They laid a wreath on the journalist's grave and a huge concert was held with committed musicians, asking for justice for his case. Following these activities on 15 December 2008, President Chrysogone Zougmore of the Collective, Vice-President Tolé Sagnon, the spokesman Jean-Claude Méda, and the lawyer Bénéwendé Sankara, were summoned to the headquarters of the national gendarmerie in Ouagadougou. They had been questioned by the chief of staff, Colonel Martin Zongo, and two other officers. The summoning featured the symbolic renaming of the Avenue de la Nation to "Avenue Norbert Zongo", and the handing out of stickers to demonstrators, but no charges were brought against them. They were all released one and a half hours later. The police told them that a report was being prepared on the case.⁸⁰

Among the journalists who fought for Norbert Zongo 11 years ago, Newton Ahmed Barry was a journalist for the state television. In his column, he wrote, "*if the government is not guilty, it is responsible*",⁸¹ because he was not convinced by the accident theory proposed by the minister of justice when Norbert Zongo's corpse was discovered. So, in order to be free to express himself, he gave up his job in national TV and went to work at Norbert Zongo's newspaper, *L'Indépendant*. Like him, some people spontaneously went to work for

⁷⁹ Interview.

⁸⁰ <http://norbertzongo10ans.blogspot.com/>, December 2008

⁸¹ Interview

free for this newspaper. They wanted the newspaper to live after the death of its owner. “*We did it for free because we think that Norbert Zongo has defended some noble causes*”, claimed Germain Nama, co-owner of the fortnightly *L’Événement*, Professor of Philosophy, member of the Unesco National Commission, and chair of the National Human Rights Organization’s arbitration committee.

After 3 years at *L’Indépendant*, Newton Ahmed Barry left. He created a new bi-monthly newspaper entitled *L’Événement* in June 2001 with two other journalists. In 2008, *Le Reporter* was created. Those two and *Bendre* conduct investigations and criticize government actions. However, if Norbert Zongo’s elimination has reinforced the media, it has also divided it into two camps.⁸² One camp supports the government and tries to be the spokesperson of the holders of power; the second is called the “opposition media” by the first camp. *L’Événement* is targeted for being an “opposition newspaper”. This newspaper, in addition to covering general subjects and the government, reports on and investigates Norbert Zongo’s murder, even though this remains a sensitive issue.

On 22 January 2007, the Ouagadougou High Court found Germain Bittiou Nama, the publisher of the privately-owned fortnightly *L’Événement*, and Newton Ahmed Barry, its editor, guilty of libelling François Compaoré, the younger brother of President Blaise Compaoré. Both were given a three-month suspended prison sentence and fined £396 (300,000 F CFA). They had been obliged to publish the conclusions of the judgments in three leading daily newspapers: *Sidwaya*, *L’Observateur Paalga* and *Le Pays*. In this way, the judge expected the “*libellous news*” of François Compaoré’s alleged involvement in the Zongo killing to be cleared among the people. In fact, the dispute arose after an article appeared featuring a photo of François Compaoré in connection with the Zongo assassination, with the title “*So it is him. Until now, we had not been able to say the name. RWB has finally done it*”, but the newspaper was clearly referring to the original statement of guilt by RWB. This NGO held a conference presenting new evidence that pointed out François Compaoré to the people, the press and Burkina Faso’s public prosecutor. RWB had asked the prosecutor to reopen investigations on the basis of this “new evidence”. Several newspapers carried out the same stories on this “evidence”. RWB issued a statement voicing stupefaction at the judgment and its “total solidarity” with the editors, and still stands behind its accusation of François Compaoré. “*We reaffirm that François Compaoré lied in his statement to the Independent Committee of Enquiry and that it is therefore legitimate to voice suspicions about his role in*

⁸² Cheriff Sy, interview

the Zongo case.”⁸³ RWB had given the public prosecutor the original version of the 1999 independent committee of inquiry report. The one the committee drafted before was toned down due to the insistence of two of its members, who represented the government. The final version completely eliminated passages about the contradictions in François Compaoré's statement and the businessman Oumarou Kanazoé's attempts to silence Norbert Zongo.

On top of that, to date, many journalists are being harassed and threatened. In February 2009, Newton Ahmed Barry, and Herve Taoko (*Le Reporter*), both editors-in-chief, received anonymous death threats by email because they wrote about embezzlement by the elites. In 2005, the Minister of Security, Djibril Bassolet, received an anonymous letter, detailing a plot to kill Halidou Ouédraogo, the president of the Collective and a human rights activist, and Newton Ahmed Barry, the investigative journalist. In issue n°68 of his newspaper, published on 25 May 2005, Newton Ahmed Barry wrote an article entitled “*Halidou or Newton: who will be sacrificed?*” No one reacted, not even the journalists' associations. This situation reminds Abdoulaye Diallo of the attitude of journalists when Norbert Zongo was killed. “*I was so disappointed by the attitudes of the journalist corporations. Instead of reacting, they did nothing. Other people, mainly students, were the first to protest*”,⁸⁴ deplored Abdoulaye Diallo.

Some reporters, like Pierre Dabiret, think that it would be difficult for the government to shoot journalists again and even he recognizes that “*the power has refined its methods of control about the media and opinion*”.⁸⁵ With this new method, journalists are even summoned by the national police or threatened by people from the army. Aboubakar Zida, known as Sidnaaba, a journalist with the privately-owned radio station, Savane FM, was threatened by soldiers several times during 2001. He is known for his press reviews in Moré, the local language. “*If he translates, he'll be burned*”, warned one of the soldiers, under cover of anonymity. In October 2001, Sy Cheriff, managing editor of the publication Bendré, received telephone threats from soldiers, because the weekly had published an article criticizing a raid performed by soldiers to avenge one of their colleagues, where they were beaten up during an altercation with the inhabitants.

Liermé Somé, after the death of Norbert Zongo, became the editor of *L'Indépendant*. He was detained at Ouagadougou police station on 14 May 2002 and questioned about an

⁸³ <http://www.rsf.org>, December 2008

⁸⁴ Interview, Abdoulaye Diallo.

⁸⁵ Interview with secretary-general, Burkina Faso Journalist Association, and journalist.

article that quoted a human rights NGO's statement referring to the "suspicious death" of a person detained by the station. Christophe Koffi, the correspondent of *Agence France-Presse* and *RWB*, was detained on 7 August 2002 by four plain-clothes police officers who took his computer and documents. Without mentioning any charge, they said that they wanted to question him about the murder a few days earlier of Balla Kéïta, a former minister from the Ivory Coast in Ouagadougou. The police released Christophe Koffi two days later and returned his belongings. However, immediately afterwards, the security minister, Djibril Bassolé, accused Christophe Koffi on 13 August 2002 of operating an information network and of having "intelligence" contacts with "a number of foreign powers". As always with these affairs, Newton Ahmed Barry, editor of *L'Événement*, was accused on August 2002 by the security minister of being a spy in the pay of the Ivory Coast. The minister also accused *L'Événement* of being "a nest of communist subversion".

Newton Ahmed Barry is a Burkinabe journalist who is familiar with the police station. He is summoned by the national police almost every year. In 2003, he was arrested for publishing an interview concerning Sergeant Naon Babou, who was involved in the alleged coup against President Blaise Compaoré. Sergeant Naon Badou also gave him some information about Norbert Zongo's assassination. In 2004, he wrote an article stating that the head of the national army, General Lougué, would be sacked, causing the police to summon him in order to learn the source of his information. "*When the government reacts, that means journalism is still a 20 year-old foetus without some legal measures. We journalists have to fight for better conditions for us and for the others*", argued Newton Ahmed Barry,⁸⁶ but now the big issue is how to achieve good conditions for Burkinabe journalists. In my opinion, the only way for them to get better conditions is to fight.

2. A Perpetual Fight for a Free Press

Press freedom is not guaranteed anywhere in the world, but definitely not in Burkina Faso. The threats of arbitrary actions and others extra-legal measures used against journalists are serious. "*Journalists have to fight to do their job safely. Protesting, exposing and condemning the violations of the press are good, but not sufficient to stop the killing of journalists. People from the media themselves have to fight, with the help of the population, because they are working for them.*"⁸⁷ Before starting this fight, the media, either independently or in collaboration with the government, could work together to monitor its

⁸⁶ Cheriff Sy, Interview.

⁸⁷ Cheriff Sy, interview.

own performance. The independent media councils can serve the purpose of adjudicating disputes between the media, its representatives, the public, and the government. This self-monitoring mechanism can have the effect of reducing the interference of the state, the elites, and the politicians in the media's business. This self-monitoring could also allow the media representatives to improve their professional standards by themselves. By improving their performance, the media and justice can be partners, although, *"the judiciary has to establish its authority vis-à-vis the government. People in Burkina Faso don't trust justice. For them, voiceless or poor people can never have rights in front of the rich"*.⁸⁸ This situation exists because many judges are close friends of the politicians, wealthy elites, etc., which contributes to the low confidence in the judicial system. Furthermore, it is important to mention the need for greater civic consciousness among the public at large. Poverty and illiteracy limit not only the outreach of the media, but also the extent to which people can participate in public affairs. *"Enhancing popular participation in politics is not going to be an easy matter, given the loss of credibility that politicians and politics as an activity have suffered. People who are more conscious about what is going on in their country can help put pressure on the government. And then the government can continue to liberalize and democratize political relations."*⁸⁹ The media freedom in Burkina Faso is therefore critical to the establishment and continuity of democracy. This freedom will be a primary indicator of the existence of a democratic society.

⁸⁸ Prosper Farama, lawyer, interview.

⁸⁹ Abdoul-Karim Sango, politician.

Conclusion

The murder of Norbert Zongo needs further study. However, this event revealed the relative power of social movements. This situation has shown that the government is fragile because it is based on violence, yet the population needs to think about how to live in a democratic society. The reason why Norbert Zongo wrote about criminal offences, corruption, and any kind of fraud done by businessmen and politicians was to force them to commit to transparency. *“The press withdraws its force, its respectability and responsibility from the public opinion...The Washington Post did not oblige Richard Nixon to resign from his term. But, when facing his people’s disapproval about fraud, he was obliged to resign. Thus, the power of the press came from public opinion.”*⁹⁰

To achieve this strong public opinion in Burkina Faso, the way is still long and hard. Within this process of democratization, the media suffer from a lack of support from society about delicate, hot topics. Regarding malpractice, *“the disapproval of people is only on their lips. Worst, some citizens with the newspaper in their pocket would meet the politicians and congratulate them. Both of them disregard and consider the story as the ‘pen pusher’s rag or vulgar tract done by a coarse journalist”*”, revealed Newton Ahmed Barry.⁹¹ This situation is unfair because journalists work for the people, so the journalists and the population need to support each other. Their efforts could change Burkina Faso overnight. They have to fight the erosion of press freedom and resist the abuses of the authoritarian regimes. Notwithstanding this gap between the people and the press, Norbert Zongo showed the population that they had the right to criticize because they were citizens. Then, step by step, these populations would be looking for a democratic society. To bring about this change, Norbert Zongo used his newspaper. Thus it became a counter-power since 1993, and the locomotive of opinion to criticize wrongdoing everywhere. When Zongo was shot, people said, *“enough is enough”*.⁹² Public opinion began to exist. It dares to protest and show its disapproval, but investigative journalists can thrive and be useful, as well as for the citizens, if the laws and each person allow it. Without legal measures, the journalists who conduct investigations take big risks for a very little impact. Like Robin Hood, they will act alone against the politicians who have no consideration for democracy. Besides, one MP Dim Salif loves to use this statement *“you, journalists, you can write on your back, nothing will*

⁹⁰ Interview, Newton Ahmed Barry.

⁹¹ Interview with Newton Ahmed Barry.

⁹² This statement is the motto of demonstrators since the killing.

happen". This means the journalists can denounce all kinds of wrongdoing but nothing will happen to the villains. That declaration by a parliamentarian is very rude, but it expresses the reality. It is the responsibility of journalists to fight in order to obtain extensive, unquestionable power if she or he works in a democratic society. Thriving investigative journalism needs journalists who take risks to do their job, but it is better to have a democratic environment.

Without democracy, as John Pilger wrote in the introduction of his book, it is amazing to read that "*the writer Simon Louvish recounts the story of a group of Russians touring the United States at the height of the cold war. They were astonished to find, after reading the newspapers and watching television, that all the opinions on the vital issues were more or less the same. 'In our country,' they said, 'to get that result, we have a dictatorship, we imprison people, we tear out their fingernails. Here you have none of that. So what's your secret? How do you do it?'*"⁹³ Certainly, the secret is democracy.

⁹³ *Tell me no lies: investigative journalism.*

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