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Gender and Media: An Autopsy of Women's Journalism in Burkina Faso

Lassané Yameogo

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4 **INTRODUCTION**
CLÁUDIA LAGO, SONIA VIRGÍNIA MOREIRA AND
FÁBIO PEREIRA
- Dossier*
- 8 **INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL
ISSUE:**
*Journalism in Brazil and Africa:
Cross-influences, Developments, and
Perspectives*
MARIE-SOLEIL FRÈRE, ANTONIO HOHLFELDT, VIOLA
MILTON AND SUSANA SALGADO
- 12 **NEWS CIRCULATION IN THE
PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING SPACE:**
*News Exchange between News Agencies
of Brazil and Lusophone Africa*
PEDRO AGUIAR AND JULIANA COSTA LISBOA
- 36 **JOURNALISM AND THE TALE
OF THE OTHER: *The Invisibility of
Lusophones in Brazil and the Identity
Erasure between Us***
JOSÉ CRISTIAN GÓES AND ELTON ANTUNES

60 **INFLUENCING THE MESSAGE:** *The Role of Media Ownership on the Press Coverage of the 2015 Presidential Electoral Campaigns in Nigeria*
FATIMA IYABO ABUBAKRE

86 **GENDER AND MEDIA:** *an Autopsy of Women's Journalism in Burkina Faso*
LASSANÉ YAMEOGO

Articles

104 **COURSE OF RECOGNITION:** *A Theoretical and Methodological Approach to Understanding Journalism as a Subject in Communication*
ANDRÉ BON SANTO DIAS

126 **PORTUGAL DEMOCRÁTICO:** *An Exiles' Newspaper*
ISABEL TRAVANCAS

146 **BRAZIL IN SPAIN:** *Agenda-setting in the Newspaper El País during President Lula da Silva's Second Government Term*
DERVAL GOLZIO

162 **POLICE CASE OR PUBLIC HEALTH
ISSUE?** *Printed Journalism Frames on
Crack Use in São Paulo*
GIULIA SBARAINI FONTES AND PAULO FERRACIOLI

188 **DO UNDERGRADUATE JOURNALISM
STUDENTS TEND TO WRITE
REPORT-BOOKS ON HUMAN
RIGHTS?**
MARCOS ANTÔNIO ZIBORDI

Essay

214 **TOWARD A DEFINITION OF
INTERNATIONAL LITERARY
JOURNALISM**
JOHN S. BAK

GENDER AND MEDIA: an autopsy of women's journalism in Burkina Faso

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Brasileira de Pesquisadores em Jornalismo

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ABSTRACT - This article, using a qualitative research, analyzes the gender stereotypes present in Burkina Faso media. It will show that gender is a social construct around which journalistic activities are organized and realized. It adapts on an informal level within the microcosm of media and strengthening the subtle inferiorization of female journalists. Both the vertical level of organized labour and the horizontal scale of repetitive duties hinder opportunities for female journalists and give them a bad name. They are restricted to subaltern functions referred to as being “cute” or “easy”. This gender segregation integrates a dynamic that occurs within the universe of journalism. It is also the result of a social dynamic outside of journalism characterized by prejudgments and a priori that portray female journalists as a symbol of emancipation, insubordination, and infidelity.

Keywords: Gender, journalism, Burkinabé women journalists, sexual stereotypes.

GÊNERO E MÍDIAS: Autópsia de um jornalismo feminino em Burkina Faso

RESUMO - Este artigo analisa, a partir de uma pesquisa qualitativa, os estereótipos de gênero presentes nas mídias burquinenses. Demonstra que o gênero é um construto social ao redor do qual se organiza e se realiza a atividade jornalística. No interior do microcosmo midiático, desdobram-se acomodações informais, atuando para reforçar uma sutil inferiorização da mulher jornalista. Tanto no nível da organização vertical do trabalho quanto na escala da repetição horizontal das tarefas, a jornalista não goza de uma boa visibilidade e de uma boa imagem. Ela permanece restrita a funções subalternas e a temáticas “doces” ou “leves”. Esta segregação determinada pelo gênero integra uma dinâmica que ocorre no interior do universo jornalístico, é também o resultado de uma dinâmica social para-jornalística, caracterizada por pré-julgamentos e a priori apresentando a mulher jornalista como símbolo de emancipação, de indocilidade, para não dizer, também, infidelidade.

Palavras-chave: Gênero, jornalismo, mulheres jornalistas burquinenses, estereótipos sexuais

GÉNERO Y MEDIOS DE COMUNICACIÓN: autopsia de un periodismo femenino en Burkina Faso

RESUMEN - Este artículo analiza, a partir de una investigación cualitativa, los estereotipos de género presentes en los medios burkineses. Demuestra que el género es un constructo social alrededor del que se organiza y realiza la actividad periodística. Al interior del microcosmos mediático, se despliegan acomodaciones informales, actuando para reforzar un sutil engranaje que pone a la mujer periodista en un lugar de sujeto inferior. Tanto a nivel de la organización vertical del trabajo como en la escala de la repetición horizontal de las tareas, la periodista no disfruta ni de una buena visibilidad ni de una buena imagen. Ella permanece restringida a funciones subalternas y a temáticas “dulces” o “livianas”. Esta segregación determinada por el género, que integra una dinámica que ocurre al interior del universo periodístico, es también el resultado de una dinámica social que corre paralela a la actividad periodística, caracterizada por prejuicios y una serie de a priori que presentan a la mujer periodista como símbolo de emancipación, de indocilidad, por no decir, también, de infidelidad.

Palabras clave: Género, periodismo, mujeres periodistas burkinesas, estereotipos sexuados.

1 Introduction: observations and inquiries

The women in Burkina Faso are poorly represented in the modern or formal world of labour. They represented 23.7% of public service agents in 2002 and 18.6% of higher management (Ouiba, Tani and Touré, 2003, p. 29). In the private sector women accounted for 17.43% of employees in 1998, figures taken from the *Caisse Nationale de Sécurité Sociale (CNSS)*, making the formal, private and public sectors mostly male-dominated. On the other hand, women are well represented in the informal sectors of urban and rural areas, where they account for 69% of activities including catering, arts and crafts, and food processing (Ouoba et al., 2003, p. 30).

Burkinabé women are also under-represented in politics and decision-making processes. A study by Ouoba et al. (2003) shows that more than 80% of political administrative positions are held by men. Female mayors, according to the above-mentioned study, account to no more than 4%. The current government (October 2017) of 27 ministries has only five women in office, two of whom hold the position of State Secretary¹. Ever since 1959, with the exception of two

legislative periods (2007 to 2012 and 2012 to 2014 where women accounted for 15.31% and 18.90% of positions held in the National Assembly, respectively) women have never accounted for more than 10% of positions in government (Hagberg et al., 2017, p. 38). In current legislature (2015-2020), there are only 12 congresswomen out of 127 members of congress, a representative total of 9.44%. The reasons for this invisibility are well-known. All attempts by women to get involved in politics are perceived as being a distraction, an attempt at questioning male dominance (Hagberg and Koné, 2014).

The world of media is no exception. In 2012, women accounted for 18% of newsroom workers (*Institut Panos*, 2013, p. 15). In 2014-2015, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, the journalism school *Institut des Sciences et Techniques de la Communication (INSTIC)* registered 67 students, 15 of whom were women (22.38%); 76 students, 23 of whom were women (30.26%); and 65 students, 24 of whom were women (29.80%), respectively. A recent study of eight online news sites, 43 radio broadcasters, 10 television companies and 23 print media vehicles, a total of 84 public and private media outlets, showed that only 8.5% of positions within these outlets were held by women (*Nanebor Consult*, 2015, p. 14).

This underrepresentation is a paradox as women make up 52% of the population (*Institut National des Statistiques et de la Démographie*, 2006). As a result, there is a national gender policy to guarantee that a minimum of 30% of candidates on election lists be women. This was put in place in 2009 in order to reduce the inequality between the sexes in politics. This underrepresentation is prominent in sub-sahara Africa where girls continue to receive inadequate education. On this part of the continent,

female labour is mobilized extremely ineffectively due to the existing inequalities between men and women in education and employment. More undereducated than men, women, in general, have less-favourable employment opportunities in the labour market, and the jobs they do hold are insecure and domestic in nature (Adjamagbo et al., 2006, p. 4).

These sexual disparities that persist in the world of labour, and particularly in media, have made it necessary to question the issue of gender in journalism in order to better understand the stereotypes and its varying practices in information production. The concept of gender in this study is seen as “an essential analysis of social changes” (Marry, 2006), or as sociological data that “sheds

light on a set of professional practices and representations, social relations and the workings of journalism” (Damian-Gaillard, Frisque and Saitta, 2009, p. 176). This article focuses on describing the gender relations that exist within media enterprises including roles, positions and powers attributed to female employees.

By articulating gender with journalism, this article questions the specific nature of females and responsibility in both decision-making processes and women’s issues in society in order to answer the following questions: how is social division of the sexes translated or reproduced in Burkinabé media? What are the mechanisms and lines of action that maintain gender stereotypes in this field, and how are female journalists represented within it? Where do women fall within the organization and vertical division of journalistic labour in terms of hierarchy and power? Are there editorials, jobs and issues perceived as solely feminine in Burkinabé media newsrooms as there are in France where “the variable of gender is a determining factor that influences job positions and issues between men and women both in publishing and within the actual editorials themselves” (Neveu, 2000)?

2 Methodological procedures

The research used two long-running print press newsrooms (*L’Observateur Paalga* and *Sidwaya*), two radio newsrooms (*Oméga FM* and *Radio Burkina*) and two television newsrooms (*BF1* and *Télévision Burkina*) as its object of study. These vehicles were chosen out of 164 different radio broadcasters, 13 television channels, 60 newspapers (11 daily, 11 weekly, 17 bi-weekly, 20 monthly and one quarterly publishings) and 25 news sites (Conseil Supérieur de Communication, 2015). These were chosen due to their longevity, their audience levels and their editorial direction in the public or private sector. *L’Observateur Paalga*, *Oméga FM* and *BF1* are private and *Sidwaya*, *Radio Burkina* and *Télévision Burkina* are public. The goal was not to look at gender stereotypes through the media’s public/private lens but to see them from a holistic perspective. Both daily newspapers (*Sidwaya* and *L’Observateur Paalga*) were chosen as materials in which to observe the discourse and practices of journalists. Its June 2017 issues were analyzed in order to discuss any sexual dynamics contained within them.

In theory, research has its roots in sociology. It is used

in the sociology of labour and organizations as well as that of gender studies. It uses a qualitative questionnaire with two distinct methodological devices that complement each other. The first device examines the internal organization of newsrooms in order to verify relationships of power and decision-making positions between men and women (management, newsroom manager, editorial manager, editing, etc.). Reading the printed press and its official organizational charts has allowed us to obtain a portion of the data. What's more, by highlighting the issues typically defined as being feminine, the device questions the architecture of journalism. The system of editorials and the content of daily newspapers were analyzed to see what type of feminine content they contained. The second device, using qualitative interviews, questions the mechanisms that lead to gender division in journalism. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with women who are or have been journalists for respected editorials. Nine journalists who were editor-in-chiefs or newsroom directors and 21 female journalists were interviewed in June 2017. All respondents remained anonymous. They were given false initials for the purpose of this study.

The collected data was subject to a thematic content analysis. This analysis took a compilation of verbal and textual expressions on general recurring issues, and subsequently regrouped them first by category, then by similarity, difference and dependence, which ultimately characterizes them as empirical data; elements representative of the studied phenomenon (Paillé, 1994).

3 The results

The analysis revealed that female journalists are not well-represented in media vehicles and the gender stereotypes associated with them stem from the result of many different beliefs, prejudices, and *a priori*s, as well as obstacles, in news production which are all deemed incompatible with the social status of women. The mechanisms that lead to sexual stereotypes are clichés which shed light on the inflexible role of mothers, wives and women in journalistic activity. These observations, built in to the mental framework of both male and female journalists, tend to subordinate women and remove them from decision-making processes.

3.1 Women, the majority a minority in newsrooms

Women were poorly represented in the newsrooms researched for this paper on both a professional scale and in decision-making processes. Four women out of a total of 20 journalists work in the newsroom at *L'Observateur Paalga*. At *Sidwaya* daily, ten out of a total of 30 journalists were women. The weekly edition *Sidwaya Sport* does not have a single woman working in a newsroom of 7 journalists. At *Sidwaya Internet*, two out of a total of four journalists were women. One out of six journalists at the monthly *Carrefour Africain* was a woman. This is a grand total of 13 women out of a total of 47 journalists. At *Radio Nationale*, four of the 20 journalists were women and at *Oméga FM* ten of the 25 journalists were women. 15 out of 40 journalists employed at National newsrooms were women and four out of 12 journalists were women at the TV *BF1* newsroom. Overall, out of a total of 164 journalists working in the six outlets researched, 50 (30%) were women.

In terms of labour management, women are considered to be in what Bourdieu (1993) calls a “position of misery”. In his work *A miséria do mundo* he explains how certain agents in the labour world hold a “position of misery”, which he describes as “the painful experience of all those in the social world who, like a cello in an orchestra, hold an inferior and obscure position within a universe of prestige and privilege” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 11). The position of misery, in contrast with the “misery of condition” – which Bourdieu considers as the kind of misery suffered by workers who lack economic capital or material resources (poverty) – is about agents who hold a position which is less desirable socially. These agents are surrounded by obstacles and laws which are more or less implicit, limiting them to subaltern or executor positions. They do not hold any power yet suffer its effects, as is stated by Hagberg et al. (2017, p. 83): “Power, as the authority, capacity or ability to decide and manage, has always been held by men. Women remain on the sidelines of decision-making processes in Burkina Faso”.

Female journalists in Burkinabé newsrooms live in the “position of misery” or, in other terms, the inability to decide and manage. They are on the outside of decision-making processes, a long way away from more prestigious jobs. There is no female editor-in-chief. They have to settle for subordinate positions as they are offered. In three of the six vehicles researched here (*Sidwaya*, *BF1* and *Oméga FM*) the assistant editor-in-chief is a woman. The only vehicle run by a woman

is *Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina*, a position which was obtained through recommendations from the ministries. The low number of female journalists in organs and decision-making authorities does not pertain to just urban and rural vehicles, but also to public and private, commercial and religious, and community and communal ones. A recent study of 83 radio broadcasters, seven television groups, 32 press outlets and 18 online information sites (59% of media vehicles) revealed that female journalists account for 25.33% of the profession and 5.24% of decision-making authorities (Yaméogo, 2017). The percentage of women holding key positions or strategies (editor-in-chief and newsroom director) is 9.28% and 5%, respectively. This same study showed that only 7 women were media promoters; three in radio broadcasting, three in online media and one in printed press – out of a total of 140 media companies studied. This outside position, which applies to many women interviewed for this study, is a direct result of being female, a trait which media consider to be inflexible with a position in management.

3.2 Femininity, a handicap in journalism

Both male and female journalists describe journalism as a difficult, tiring, absorbing and awkward job. A trade best suited for men as they are considered more resilient than women. Women are seen as fragile, they should work in a job more akin to their mother or wife status. These gender inequalities are legitimized through beliefs that claim journalism is incompatible with the social status of women. Their status as mother or wife is seen as a handicap or a “social inferiority” (Héritier, 2002, p. 11). The vertical division of journalism lies in the differences between the sexes; the supremacy of the masculine sex is viewed as a symbol of resilience. The social inferiority or incapacity of females does not refer to intellectual competence but to social obstacles. Journalists of both sexes study at the same institutions, obtain the same diplomas and possess the same professional competences. They receive the same salaries. Burkina Faso media companies do not have different salaries according to sexes. The interviewees (including the women) believe that women are just as capable intellectually as men, but they think that the trade requirements are such that they are made to be incapable.

The urgency, the unpredictability and the instantness that comes with working with information means journalists work non-

stop. There are no set number of working hours in journalism, and many times there are no weekends off. Female journalists are subject to these obstacles just as their male counterparts are; however, these immeasurable factors seem to become more of an obstacle for women and not for men; “some women try to work it so that their activities occur in the morning and not in the afternoon, while others do not want to work on weekends” (J.B., editor at *Télévision Burlina*, 14/6/2017). This creates disruptions when it comes to organizing work and is accentuated even more when women cease to be single and become wives. The change in their civil status or physical state (pregnancy, breastfeeding...) sometimes means making adjustments to reporting. For example, they stop working on reports that start or finish late at night, or, they feel exempt from doing them. The organization and realization of journalistic activities are based on differentiated representations and expectations according to gender: women are synonymous with unavailability and social obstacles while men with capacity and availability. These representations and expectations are more or less interiorized for the feminine and masculine sexes, and written in journalistic practices. Adaptations unfold in Burkinabé media newsrooms which tend to dichotomize labour according to sex or, put in another way, sexual divisions structure the organization of journalistic work.

In Burkina Faso it is common to hear terms such as *mooré*, “pag-la-yiri”, which express the idea that a woman’s place is in the home. Even when they work outside the home they are to remain prisoners of this apparently ancient doctrine. Preconceived ideas like these place limits on journalists as professionals, restricting directive abilities and consequently pushing women out of journalism or even excluding them from decision-making processes. The constraints of family life weigh heavily on the lives of professional journalists. Lipani (2017, p. 29) demonstrated that these discriminations “remain a major cause of discrimination against women in the workplace”. All the women interviewed for this study do not question these gender stereotypes, they accept them. One journalist from *Oméga FM* states: “I’m not prepared to assume a position like editor-in-chief as this is too difficult for a woman, you have to be more available, more engaged and be willing to sacrifice everything”. (A.S., 9/6/2017). The feminine conditions are a structural obstacle facing female leadership in Burkinabé vehicles. One assistant editor-in-chief from one of the vehicles researched here could not effectively perform her

job. Favours were made, authorizing her to start newsroom meetings in the morning and to not have to close the newsroom late at night. Instead, this part of the job is handled by her superior, the editor-in-chief is not required to be present in morning newsroom meetings.

One female journalist from *Radio Burkina* said: “Management at *Radio Burkina* offered me the position of programming editor, but I declined, not because I’m not capable of doing it but because of my family duties” (C.D., 12/6/2017). For a woman, moving up in the ranks of newsroom hierarchy means relinquishing family or married life. “If we want to be a good mother, a good wife, it is difficult” (A.N., journalist at *L’Observateur Paalga*, 5/6/2017). Almost all Burkinabé women dream about being good mothers and good homemakers as marriage represents “an important event, a guarantee of social respectability” (Adjamagbo et al., 2006, p. 16).

Women believe their role in journalism comes in second place to their role as mothers and family obligations (domestic work, taking care of their husbands, educating the children, etc.), including physiological obligations like maternal leave for pregnancies. This conflict of roles between family and professional activities “exacerbated by the constraints of married life” (Kouamé, 1999) is equally shared by editorials. It is one of the mechanisms that keeps sexual stereotypes alive in newsrooms. Women are excluded from certain roles due to their femininity. Male and female relationships are built around clichés of strong and weak, dominant and dominated, capable and incapable. This dichotomization echoes what Héritier (2002, p. 17) called “the differential value of the sexes” which he describes as the condition of valuing one sex and devaluing the other. Bourdieu (1998, p. 3), in his studies on the *cabila*² society, shows how much the world of labour is profoundly marked by the stereotypes of male and female where the masculine order is imposed as something perfectly natural or something that derives from this natural order. Likewise, the inavailability associated with females is seen in Burkinabé media as normal and natural. Beyond social restrictions, there are female journalists who do not believe in themselves and doubt their own ability to lead. Others express displeasure at the thought of powerful roles, confirming the Bourdieusian premise that “masculine domination is so rooted in our unconscious that we don’t even see it anymore, it is so present in our expectations that we find it difficult to question it” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 24). Sociocultural obstacles that accentuate gender stereotypes in the Burkinabé media ecosystem.

3.3 The omnipresence and *diktat* of husbands

The interviews also revealed that gender stereotypes often occur in the form of a husband's interference in his wife's professional life. Even today in Burkina Faso and other sub-Saharan countries women cannot hold certain jobs without their husbands' approval, which the law theoretically upholds (Burkinabé Family Law). Journalism is one of these jobs. A public relations profession, journalism places women in the public eye which upsets some men who would prefer their partner be restricted to family and domestic life or have a job with less visibility. Women are frequently forced to resign from their profession if their husbands do not approve of it. As one female journalist from *Radio Burkina* said: "My husband does not approve of my profession; he told me to choose between my profession and the home, it was really tense...I had to leave the newsroom to avoid creating problems" (C.D., 12/6/2017). She was transferred to production where she works as an animator for a weekly debate program.

Women have confirmed that their partners have suppressed their ambitions, both on the level of profession and taking on more responsibility within the job. Other women have said they were supported and encouraged by their spouses, especially professionally, winning awards and bonuses. For the women in the latter group this distinction or these awards mean either increased or relief from tension. The women in the former group do not often participate in worktrips either inside or outside the country due to their roles as mothers, a role synonymous with the guardian of the family. But they also do not participate because sometimes their husbands refuse to allow them. "Every time I talked to him about travelling for work his mood would change" (C.D., jornalista de *Radio Burkina*, 12/6/2017). She told us that on her last worktrip to Morocco her husband did not pick her up at the airport because he did not approve of her trip, so she had to take a taxi home. A Burkinabé husband's will is unbreakable, so much so that it can lead to divorce. There a number of female journalists in Burkinabé media who do not stay at home or are not married. What we have here then is women who are married to their careers, something similar to what happens in the political sphere where "female politicians are most often widowed or divorced" (Savane, 2006, p. 34). The statements given by female and male journalists converge on the idea that the profession of journalism pushes women toward divorce and single life.

With the threat of divorce hanging over their heads, female

journalists feel they are forced to resign or distance themselves from newsrooms in order to keep their homes. There tends to be an incompatibility between home and journalism, family life and professional life. Only a single woman can properly perform in this profession, not a married one. But single women are not looked favourably on in Burkina Faso; the public looks down on them as they believe their place should be in the home. In most societies “marriage is an essential path toward social maturity and preludes individual development” (Adjamagbo et al., 2006, p. 4). It is a catalyst of status inequality between men and women. In Burkina Faso, as in other sub-Saharan countries, domestic chores are carried out exclusively by women.

Just like in other professions, promoting or appointing a woman to a position of greater responsibility in journalism requires *a priori* consent from her husband. In a society dominated by males, females are not, by themselves, allowed to decide on whether to accept a promotion or not; their husbands’ or partners’ opinion is essential and, often, domestic chores and educating the children come first, forcing their hand and pressuring them to decline the job offer. In addition, some men cannot admit that their wives have positions of greater authority than they do. Popular imagination defines positions of power and finance as being masculine, not feminine. It is out of pride that a man refuses to accept it the other way around, which keeps women away from, *ipso facto*, decision-making positions and certain jobs. The financial cost of the home in most urban African families is the man’s responsibility, and he may forbid his wife to do any job he does not want her to. Here, the economic subjugation of women is one of the more powerful tools of masculine domination (Locoh and Tichit, 1996). Even with couples who are both journalists (seen by the respondents as couples who rarely get divorced and who are used to the professional restrictions), male dominance prevails. A female journalist from one of the television channels researched here had her career halted by her husband (also a journalist) and was forced to resign from working on screen as he believed television would expose her to advances from other men. This is a reality in Burkinabé media but unapproachable: female journalists do not talk about it, and when they do, they choose their words carefully, keeping this issue a taboo.

The fear of a failed marriage and a husband’s interference in professional life leads to a certain chauvinistic dichotomization in the organization of journalistic work. Men want to be sent on worktrips where their expenses are paid for and they can increase their earnings,

while women prefer to be confined to bureaucratic work or avoid working at night. Some newsrooms do not trust women to work at night, it is systematically given to men. “I prefer to send men to do certain types of work” (B.D., editor at *L’Observateur Paalga*, 5/6/2017). The editors in charge uphold these preferences and stipulations because they are the cornerstone to organizing work and flexible management, focusing on the differences between the sexes. The focus on gender is either well understood or understood too well. It maintains an idea of women being unavailable or incapable, legitimizing the choice of men for certain jobs like editor-in-chief or newsroom secretary, jobs which require one to work longer hours and stay late. The prevailing organizational management in Burkinabé media confirms the premise from Neveu (2000, p. 204) which showed how much “being of female gender impedes access to jobs of greater responsibility”. The statements shed light on the microcosm where masculinity is asserted much more than femininity. This creates a dissymetry between men and women, and female and male journalists. However, as stated above, this dissymetry is dictated by the production of information. The women interviewed for this paper refuse to believe that there are feminine and masculine qualities and that their male counterparts are more competent professionally than they are. The men however do believe this.

3.4 Society’s devaluation of women beyond journalism

Gender stereotypes do not only manifest in the world of professional journalism; they are also produced and maintained in the world outside of journalism. Within popular imagination, journalism as a profession is still associated to being masculine. Certain conservative public opinions convey a certain number of clichés which devalue female journalists. According to statements from this research, women are seen as “talking to much”, “too free”, “the ones who wear the pants at home”, and “do not act as a housewife should”. They are also subject to all forms of negative prejudice when the profession requires them to work late nights. This idea is summed up by a director from *Sidwaya*: “Despite being conscious of our social realities, we think poorly of a woman who comes home late. It creates an air of distrust, of suspicion, and a need to control, because the way we see it, only prostitutes work at night” (X.Z., 1/6/2017). In this context, a woman who leaves a hotel at midnight is not a

“serious woman”, we would say she was there with a man. From this point of view, female journalists are either “the minister’s woman”, “the Director General’s woman” or “the congressman’s woman”. These stereotypes are rooted in popular imagination. A male journalist at *Sidwaya* was called “an easy woman” (in French, “une femme à cuisses légères”) because his name sounded feminine. “Some people even said that he was a slutty woman (...), some even said they had gone out with her” (K.M., ex-journalist at *Sidwaya*, 14/6/2017).

The set of stereotypes described here shows that media is a place where gender inequalities are easily identifiable within the labour world. It reveals the mechanisms that limit women’s access to journalism and to its decision-making processes. The stereotypes are characteristic of a society dominated by misogyny and conservatism. The division of labour is founded on a sociology of sexual differentiality in which masculinity is a symbol of superiority, of capability, of power and authority. Lebel (2017, p. 101) states “the values associated with femininity are systematically disregarded”. Labour organization in Burkinabé media is built socially on the duality of man/woman and a hierarchy of roles. This sexual dichotomization is also seen in journalistic content, most notably in the editorials and issues addressed here.

3.5 Specializing in “cute” or “tranquil” issues and editorials

Studies have already demonstrated that women in the United States and Europe prefer issues on domestic life and maternal subjects more than men do. Mei-Ling Yang, after examining the women’s pages in the *Washington Post* in the 1950s, noted that the content for women could be divided into the four “F’s”: *Food, Fashion, Family and Furnishing* (cited by Neveu, 2000, p. 200). This analysis showed a binary gender model: *hard news*, information on the public sphere (government, economy, law, education) and *soft news*, information on the private sphere (family responsibilities, personal relationships, social life). The former is male dominated and the latter, female dominated. Bourdieu (1990, 1998) also showed in his six works on the *cabila* society how much official taxonomy associated femininity to domestic, private, family issues and masculinity was associated to public values, to public space, action, politics and power. Neveu (2000, p. 185) also stated that “the domains of public health, of exclusion, and of policies for the protection of children and family” were addressed by women.

Our research reached the same results. Issues regarding health, human rights, the environment, education and culture in Burkinabé media all have a markedly high number of women working in them. The variable of sex in the vertical organization of labour separates female journalists from male journalists and the dominators from the dominated and, in the words of Bourdieu (1966), the thematic breakdown of jobs reveals sexual segregation. The women confirm the feminine identity that directs editorials and labels some less qualified issues as “tranquil” or “light”, or even “cute” These qualifications coincide with the Bourdieusian posit that “jobs may be noble and difficult when performed by men, or insignificant, easy and futile when performed by women” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 67). Journalism produced by women mainly focuses on the social world. Similar to France, Burkinabé female journalists “specialize” in women’s journalism which is “more connected to a slower reality, less adventurous, and more focused on reparations for social evolutions, less polarized when analyzing decision-making processes controlled by elites who pay attention to its impacts on livelihood of ‘ordinary’ social agents”. (Neveu, 2000, p. 185).

Current national and foreign politics, just like sports, are not issues that Burkinabé female journalists prefer to cover. All of the June 2017 editions of *Sidwaya* and *L’Observateur Paalga* did not have a single female writer on politics or sports. Even if in some newsrooms, such as *L’Observateur Paalga*, *rang* journalism (journalists who do not work in specific newsrooms; they are sent out to cover events as they happen) is what prevails, we cannot help but notice that current politics is dominated by men. There is also a lack of women covering politics in *desk* newsrooms like *Sidwaya*. Not one woman wrote an article or commented on anything in the month of June 2017 yet *Sidwaya* has a variety of topics geared towards journalists: *Trait de Plume* (“With the Stroke of a Pen”), *Autre Regard* (Another View), *Chronique* (Chronicle), *Mercure* (Mercury) and *Flash*. All these issues that were sent to newsstands during the research period were written by men. Among the vehicles studied for this paper, only *L’Observateur Paalga* had a female columnist. She wrote seven columns which were published in the editorial “Regard sur l’actualité” (A Current View) in the month of June.

Pertaining to audiovisual, the strong absence of female journalists in political debates is sometimes met with disapproval by certain journalists. Female journalists – feminists – regularly publish *posts* on social networks like *Facebook* or *Twitter* condemning sexual segregation or accusing editorials of being sexist; they criticize their

lack of interest in politics. Responsibility is divided here: newsrooms only trust female journalists to write on issues related to women and society, but these women do not sit in the shadows. In many cases they call themselves “specialists” or adept at “light” or “tranquil” issues.

The political field is seen by both editors and women themselves as a domain “under constant pressure” and “sensitive”, requiring “prudence”, “attention”, “availability”, and “perseverance”. Editorial or *desk* “politics” often demands many activities and the slightest mistake is rarely forgiven or understood. And, “since women do not like to create problems for themselves or to be criticized, and the fact they also prefer to get home early, they are able to avoid political issues” (X.Z., editor at *Sidwaya*, 1/6/2017). Political and sports journalism and a columnist’s job in Burkina Faso takes after the positioning of men in 1990s France. “They are very attractive to men for they are holy symbols, places of professional power, gender [issues] lead to a metadiscourse on the social world” (Neveu, 2000, p. 211). Nevertheless, it is not just any male journalist who can cover important political events for Burkinabé media newsrooms. Since women, newcomers and interns are ranked inferior in hierarchical order they are given social issues to cover, which are considered to be easy. Men are similar to women while they are still studying to be professionals. Women are also mistaken for men professionally when through political newscasts. The variable of gender is not the only indicator of specializations according to the sex. Cultural capital or qualification may question the idea of a systematic breakdown of gender in jobs. Content analysis of daily life and interviews does not conclude that women’s journalism is focused entirely on “women’s” issues. The issues regarding women are addressed both by women and men.

4 Conclusion

Analyzing gender stereotypes in Burkinabé media offers a detailed look at a few findings. Gender is a social construct around which journalistic activity is organized and realized. Within this microcosm there are informal adaptations that feed toward the subtle inferiorization of female journalists. Both the vertical scale of organized labour and the horizontal scale of repetitive duties hinder opportunities for female journalists and give them a bad name. They are restricted to subaltern positions and social issues referred to as “cute”, “tranquil” or “easy”. If gender segregation stems from a

dynamic within the world of journalism it is also the result of a social dynamic outside of journalism, characterized by preconceptions and *a priori*s that portray female journalists as symbols of emancipation, as uncontrollable, not to mention unfaithful. These professional hierarchies or relationships of power built on standards of gender make journalism slightly chauvinistic in Burkinabé media. Nevertheless, male identifies with female when they are considered to be incomplete professionally, and female identifies with male when a certain feminine quality is considered remarkable. In short, Burkinabé journalists learn about the socioprofessional world and its arbitrary divisions between sexes as natural, obvious and valid.

*This paper was translated by Lee Sharp

NOTES

- 1 Similar to the Secretary of State in Brazilian hierarchy.
- 2 This is in reference to Kabylie, a mountainous region in northern Algeria where traditional values are rooted in a predominantly masculine cultural and symbolic system (N.E.)

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