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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Standaert, O. (2018). A labour market without boundaries? Integration paths for young journalists in French-speaking Belgium. *ESSACHESS - Journal for Communication Studies*, 11(1), 99-117. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-58683-1>

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# A labour market without boundaries? Integration paths for young journalists in French-speaking Belgium

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**Abstract:** This study aims to describe the growing influence of flexibility rationales on the early careers of young, francophone Belgian journalists. The study on the integration of new journalists enables us to grasp how the destandardisation of the beginnings of a career creates new identity forms in part distanced from the traditional values that had managed to make journalism a job that was distinct, recognised and more or less solidly positioned in the social sphere. At its most extreme, flexible rationale acts as a key factor in the increasingly frequent divide between a job and work. After having established these observations through a longitudinal study of a body of young journalists, the study analyses the impact of flexible rationales in the identity forms and the theoretical issue of boundaries between journalism and others business sectors.

**Keywords:** career paths, young journalists, labour market, flexibility, boundaries of journalism

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*Un marché du travail sans frontières? L'insertion professionnelle des jeunes journalistes de Belgique francophone*

**Résumé :** Cette étude analyse l'influence croissante de la gestion flexible des carrières sur les nouveaux journalistes de Belgique francophone. L'étude diachronique de leurs trajectoires d'insertion montre comment la déstandardisation des schémas de carrière reconfigure la mobilité entre secteurs d'activité ainsi que les identités professionnelles, qui tendent à s'éloigner des schémas identitaires collectifs du groupe professionnel. A son point le plus extrême, la logique flexible est un facteur clé de la séparation de plus en plus fréquente entre le journalisme comme emploi et le journalisme comme travail. Après avoir étudié les impacts de ce phénomène dans les discours recueillis lors d'entretiens, cette étude interroge la question théorique des frontières d'un marché du travail aussi flexible et ouvert à d'autres activités que le journalisme.

**Mots-clés :** trajectoires d’insertion, jeunes journalistes, marché du travail, flexibilité, frontières

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The topic of the conditions in which people integrate the journalism labour market is one that has been raised for several years now, particularly because of the increase in atypical forms of employment and the changes in business models of companies publishing journalistic content (Trappel et al., 2015). The francophone Belgian market is currently in a recurring spiral of self-questioning about the viability of journalism trades, especially for new recruits.

The main aim of this article is to describe, using a diachronic approach, the ways in which young francophone Belgian journalists break into the profession. This analysis shows to what extent the matter of the spatio-temporal perimeter in which integration takes place is being reconfigured by flexible management practices. This, then, goes right to the heart of the scientific debate about the boundaries of journalism (Carlson and Lewis, 2015; Carlson, 2016). Through the prism of these integration paths, we will study the mobility of borders for newcomers to the profession. Starting with this first issue, the article intends to contribute to the understanding of professional identities for these new recruits by looking in particular at the impact of the rhetoric and strategies arising from increasingly flexible human resources management.

A brief review of a few elements puts the francophone Belgian journalism jobs market into context. Firstly, there are many higher education courses in journalism available and these became increasingly popular in the early 2000s. Inversely, the jobs market underwent a period of contraction, aggravated from 2009 onwards by the financial and then the economic crisis. Despite the high number of publishers<sup>1</sup> in this relatively small market (less than five million listeners/readers), there is a clear discrepancy between the supply and demand for jobs, against a backdrop of increasing complexity in transitioning from student life to working life (Benson and Furstenberg, 2007; Silva, 2012). The decision to focus specifically on new recruits is justified in a broader perspective that encompasses human resource management challenges. As Ruellan and Marchetti noted well before the crisis at the end of the 2000s, “the analysis of the journalism jobs market, and particularly the ways in which young professionals enter active life, is very useful in understanding the transformations which have affected this universe of the production of cultural assets since the beginning of the 1980s” (2001, p. 85).

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<sup>1</sup> There are twelve local television channels, six daily newspapers, two audio-visual groups each owning several radio stations as well as dozens of magazines with highly differing editorial frames of reference. To this should be added the significant audiences French media in francophone Belgium, particularly television, attracts.

In this regard, the point of approaching journalists through the prism of their jobs and management methods fits in with the issue of the growth and then mass generalisation of the flexibilisation of professional relations (Amossé, 2003; de Nanteuil and El Akremi, 2005; Martinez, 2010). Flexibility calls into question all disciplines related to human resources as well as wider sociological approaches, examining both their economic and cultural responsibilities. This has been a recurrent theme in the sociology of labour markets and human resources for three decades.

### **1. Theoretical background and methodology**

As much in the sociology of professions (Abbott, 1988; Paradeise, 1988) as in the sociology of journalism (Ruellan, 2007; Leteinturier and Frisque, 2015; Carlson and Lewis, 2015), the issue of professional groups' territories and boundaries demonstrates all the complexity, for the researcher, of the limits of their field of study. First chronologically: what "event" sanctions entry into a professional group and when does the so-called integration period end? The answer is far from obvious (Vernières, 1997; Mansuy and Couppié, 2004; Fournier and Monette, 2004). From the tasks and practices point of view, what falls within the strict remit of journalism, what is on the periphery and what falls outside? Points of view on these questions vary depending on the interests of those asked and on opposing opinions on the legitimisation of journalism. The legal texts, the position of trade unions or associations, the point of view of employers and those of new recruits offer varying perspectives which only converge partially.

In Belgium, it is no longer possible to identify new journalists through them obtaining their press cards (Standaert and Grevisse, 2013). To get as close as possible to the two realities which are the lengthening of the integration period and the heterogeneousness of journalistic careers, the decision was taken to no longer approach the problem starting with the official definition of a socio-professional category<sup>2</sup>, with the title of professional journalist or a company employing journalists, but starting with the individuals themselves. In concrete terms, the identification of the population of this study has been established empirically, based on services actually provided; services that indicate that a person, whether they are a journalist or not, considers themselves to be one at least for a certain period of time. The delimitation of the sample therefore matches a logic of comparing sources and data bases based on an inductive approach centred on the individual.

It was decided to consider as pertinent any individual claiming to have less than five years' experience in paid journalism within one or several companies publishing journalistic content in the French Community. In line with studies

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<sup>2</sup> Official statistics, issued by federal ministries, struggle to identify and isolate the journalistic population from other, so-called "intellectual", professions with which they have nothing in common.

signalling the lengthening and the increasing complexity of transitions from training to working life (Nicole-Drancourt, 1994; Marchand, 2002), this definition aims to be sensitive to the fact that integration is a *process* and not a moment. The option of flexibility regarding the main parameters that traditionally define the job in a professional field (initial training, official position, work hours and average monthly salary) entails the study covering part-time journalists or those alternating between periods in or out of a job. This implies judging pertinent a set of tasks and businesses that go beyond the traditional view of what is mass general news journalism, carried out by the better known media, whose identity has, historically, been built on these foundations.

The question of the area of research poses that of a theoretic framework in which the results and observations are to be included. An approach centred on the trajectories of those involved and the desire to restrict the realities of integration as close to the ground as possible mean this study is in line with the interactionist sociology of professional groups (Becker, 1984; Dubar and Tripier, 1998; Demazière and Gadéa, 2009, Champy, 2012). From this point of view, the subject professional group can be understood based on four characteristics; there is no "separate" profession, nor is there a "unified, established or objective" profession (Dubar and Tripier, 1998, p. 247-250). This quadruple assessment constitutes the theoretic foundations on which is based the desire to observe the threshold of the labour market in an inductive way, starting with segments of individuals' careers, taking into account the fact that these careers are built in a vast number of different sectors of work. The affinity of the interactionist stance for the dealings of the individual raises questions about a key aspect of modern, Western societies. In their study on the impact of what they called the "flexible society" in the world of work and running businesses, Matthieu de Nanteuil-Miribel and Assâad El Akremi note that "the use of flexibility relies on an important cultural bedrock, connected to the individualisation movement and the singularisation of existences" (de Nanteuil and El Akremi, 2005, p. 21). This approach focusing on the heterogeneousness of the journalism labour market does not, however, mean there is no need to attribute a common culture and practices to the young journalists, even if they were negotiated with certain latitude in their daily rolling out. Dubar, Tripier and Bousard also mention the importance of avoiding any relativist stance and trying to update "the traditional mechanisms of production and legitimisation of this "modern" form of economic monopoly and social closure" which are the professional groups" (Dubar et al., 2011, p. 120).

The methodological apparatus of this research builds its inductive approach in two parts. Firstly an online questionnaire returned 128 usable replies from journalists with less than five years' seniority (the reply rate was 38.5%). The aim here was to describe the socio-personal profiles, the working conditions, the tasks and the assignments of young journalists. The second part comprised 59 non-directive research interviews divided in the following way: Twenty-seven people

who had answered the questionnaire and who formed a strictly representative sample of this group agreed to two interviews, 12 or 18 months apart in order that the study could include their paths over a period of time. These were preceded by five exploratory interviews. The reason for wanting to use a diachronic approach in this integration study was so that it would be in line with recent insights into the sociology of professional integration which note the distance between "markers laid down by previous generations" (Fournier and Monette, 2004, p. 29) is increasing while the markers themselves are becoming weaker, making this process less predictable. Finally, in order to contextualise the data gathered during interviews as much as possible, we analysed the annual accounts of 18 publishers of journalistic content over a period of 10 years (2003-2013). Between them, these 18 companies employed 5,234 full time equivalents (FTE) in 2013 and represented the majority of journalistic job offers in francophone Belgium.

## 2. Results and findings

### 2.1. *Journalism as a flexible labour market*

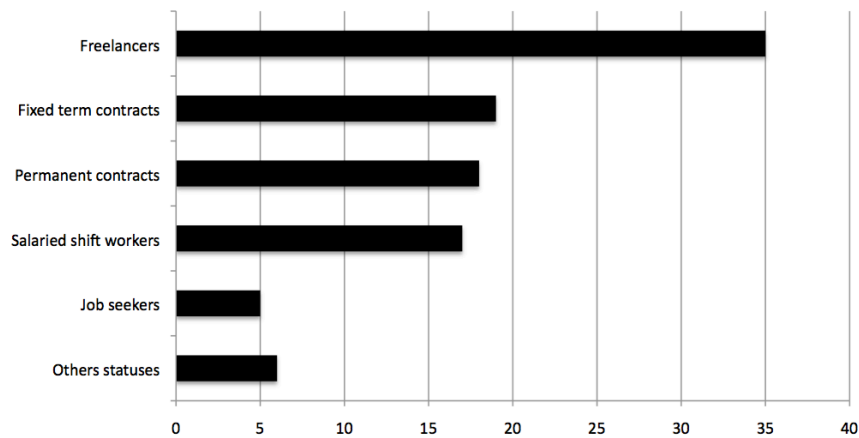
The flexibilisation of the jobs market can be looked at from several different perspectives: contractual, temporal, geographic and organisational (de Nanteuil and El Akremi, 2005, p. 418-419). The contractual configuration of job situations is almost systematically analysed to determine the intensity with which this phenomenon is spreading. In the present case, the results of the questionnaire show that a large majority of the young journalists who agreed to answer our questions were in types of jobs considered "flexible", "special", "atypical" or "precarious" depending on the identity of the person attributing the label (see Table 1). This characteristic is even more significant given that the respondents had already been working, on average, for 2.8 years. So they were not all fresh out of college, far from it. The interviews reveal that there is no guarantee of one day being able to obtain a non-time limited contract at any point of the transition phase or trial period. This assessment runs counter to some stereotype views of first jobs which associate precarious positions with "transition zones", the completion of training or "springboards into a career" (Nicole-Drancourt and Roulleau-Berger, 2001). Among the 128 respondents analysed, there clearly exist job statuses which are *long-term precarious* with poor chances of stabilisation in the short or mid-term. Without prejudging how the individuals concerned feel about them, the statuses of freelance or shift worker<sup>3</sup>, for example, are not automatically designed to be temporary. This indicates deep changes in standard employment practices and the general economy in the human resources sector in particular. Table 1 displays the variety of statuses

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<sup>3</sup> In Belgium, a salaried shift worker denotes a freelance journalist who enjoys a guaranteed wage through temping agencies specialising in managing temporary contracts (usually for artistic and intellectual professions).

and different ways of getting closer to or distancing oneself from a permanent, salaried contract. The steady rise in non-salaried work, symbolised in particular by the freelance group, is corroborated by several sets of official statistics consulted during the course of this research such as national insurance contributions categories for freelance workers and administrative-type temping agencies who look after services provided by workers in cultural industries.

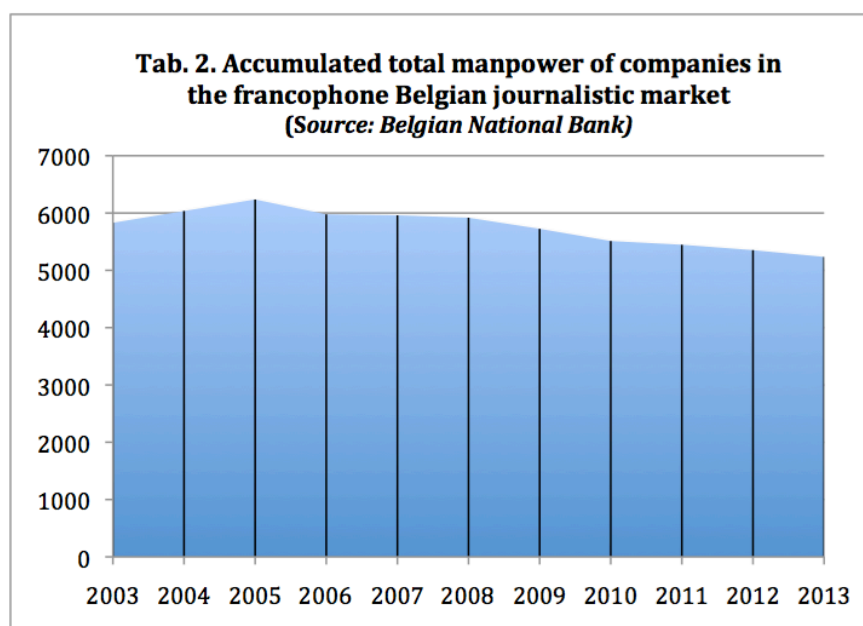
**Tab. 1: Break down of professional statutes (%)**  
(n=128)



If we had to draw a typical portrait of a newcomer based on this aggregate descriptive data, we would find in the majority of cases a woman, aged 27 on average, usually with a university degree in Journalism. One in four newcomers have two master-level degrees and there is a high chance they will work in daily print journalism or in audio-visual journalism, two sectors that attracts the majority of beginners. They are unlikely to be given a permanent contract during the first three years of their career or even longer. So it is not unusual to see young journalists switching between statutes as well as employers within *and* without media. One of the causes of such movement is doubtless pay which does not always seem to guarantee financial independence. More often than not, young journalists say they are satisfied with the work they achieve on a day-to-day basis, despite recurring criticism of levels of pay, working hours and promotion opportunities. They rarely occupy any other post than that of copywriter, journalist, photojournalist or presenter and, as a general rule, have not yet had time to specialise in a particular field. This general picture does not preclude a disparity in career paths and positions. Some career paths show rapid stabilisation accompanied with higher pay cheques

and centred on a sole and unique employer. However, these are the minority. Belgian journalistic market does not follow a clearly marked and predictable path. On the contrary, it requires a real aptitude for mobility and an ability to work under variable job descriptions for several employers (and at the same time in almost one case in three).

When asking about employment conditions from the employers' perspective, in general the same issues arose from the statistical data. Figures from the Belgian National Bank for the 2003-2013 period are clear about the trailing off of full-time, permanent jobs (Table 2). The labour market's hiring capacity is lessening across almost all kind of trial periods considered, during which 1,002 full time equivalents (FTEs) were lost, across the board. But job shrinkage is even more evident from 2008 on. So the creation of salaried posts shows occasional logic while the long-term view reveals a progressive reduction in those employed in this category. It should be noted that the increasing scarcity of permanent contracts is only one of many causes of a change in the relationship to the job that characterises Western economies in broad terms (Castel, 2009: 109). To this must be added all phenomena such as part-time work, temporary work and freelance work.





Many newsrooms are learning to work with smaller and smaller budgets and the organisation of output is adapting to the constraints. Structurally, the rhythm of work and the staff turnover to which most media outlets are subject, has, for a long time, favoured opting for atypical job types. The economic climate has probably accentuated this shift, especially by partially replacing permanent posts that have been axed or become vacant, not to be filled.

This being about young journalists, it thus becomes necessary to distinguish the two parties in the work-job couple. We understand work as a “human activity that makes sense and is productive”; a job is a “contractual type of inscription in a society located in space and time” (Fouquet, 2011). When it comes to work, its volume has increased in almost all newsrooms under various diversification policies and the development of multimedia content. But it is carried out by a core of salaried staff tending to be fewer in number yet required to do more and more (Corsani, 2012). The mutation of the journalistic market leads us to conclude that the reference of a full-time, salaried employee applies less and less to the contractual transactions between employers and young workers. In the majority of cases, professional relations at the beginning of a career are built around what the sociology of professions calls “atypical forms of employment” (Givord, 2005). Given this context, they should, from now on, no longer describe shifts, temporary or part-time work, but full-time, permanent, salaried contracts. The question that then arises is that of the specific relationship newcomers forge with journalism as a statutory, paid for post (a job) and journalism as a labour activity in which the subject is involved to a varying degree (work). In a sense, it questions, from a very technical perspective (statutes, wages, type of company), the boundaries of journalism as a labour market since it seems that many individuals encounter difficulties in gaining a secure, stable and full position in this market. In other words, where are, for the younger journalists, the border between the outside and the inside of the journalistic market?

### *2.2. Mobility and individualisation, two facets of “flexible” journalism*

In order to answer this question, we focus on the results of a diachronic analysis of the career paths of the young journalists, which enable us to monitor the vagaries of the career paths of each individual. Various indicators were chosen in order to categorise their developments during the period between the two interviews. The indicators chosen were the following: changes of employer, changes in social status, hours per month devoted to journalism, average monthly income earned through journalism, work outside the journalistic market, changes in hierarchical position, changes in laborious, daily tasks and unsuccessful job applications. The table below summarises the results for the whole group of 27 journalists:

Tab. 3: Synthesis of changes between the two interviews (n=27)	
<b>Employer(s) acquired and/or lost</b>	20 individuals affected
<b>Change in professional status</b>	14 individuals affected
<b>Change in the average monthly length of time worked</b>	17 individuals affected (9 increases and 8 reductions)
<b>Change in average monthly income</b>	24 individuals affected (14 increases and 10 reductions)
<b>Jobs (temporary or not) outside the journalistic market</b>	6 individuals affected
<b>Change in hierarchical position (promotion)</b>	2 individuals affected
<b>Change in tasks/assignments</b>	9 individuals affected
<b>Unsuccessful applications</b>	14 individuals affected

Practically everyone seemed to have to navigate the vagaries of mobility at the start of their career. Some indicators such as pay, statuses, unsuccessful applications and promotions enable us to note whether mobility can go hand-in-hand with positive developments. Viewed from the 27 career paths, it primarily concerns the horizontal dimension of the labour market, often with frequent comings and goings from one employer to another (or within the same media group) and a combination of several professional relationships. Profiles integrated under a lasting status by their first employer are rare; there are three within the study group. For the other 24, the scenario is very different.

In terms of the journalistic market and the frequently asked question about its relations with other markets, it is worth pausing to note that 14 members of the study group - i.e. half - declared they worked (or had worked), partially or fully, outside of the journalistic market in the strict sense of the term. These are, in order of importance, PR, teaching, academic research, the hospitality trade and the construction industry. It is also a surprising figure which breaks with data coming from major general studies of profiles (de Burgh, 2005; Raeymaeckers et al., 2013) and which highlights more clearly the frequency of links between journalistic and non-journalistic careers. In Belgium, young journalists seem to be different from other age brackets in the professional group. It could be the fragility of employment statuses at the beginning of their career that leads some young people to look sooner and more often for ways to supplement their income in other sectors; more and more of them have two higher education degrees which *de facto* opens doors to other types of employment. But the relative shortness of journalistic careers shows that the

issue of mobility between journalism and other markets, such as communication, remains relevant throughout the career.

The individualisation of career paths is a fundamental phenomenon in understanding what is going on in the labour markets in Western economies. The situation has not arisen solely because of the new economic climate: “However remarkable the economic storm and social crisis have been since the 1970s, individualism did not emerge to fill a social void; its evolution began long ago” (Karpik, 2007, p. 347). Referring to arts professionals, Menger described a phenomenon that will sound familiar to journalists: “*Individualisation and the dispersion of job relationships engenders (...) considerable inequalities between those at the centre of networks in which everyone knows everyone to a great degree and which yield the most useful information, and those who find themselves on the farthest outskirts of this interwoven system of the incessant production and sharing of information, assessments and commitments, because they are less well known, younger or still being integrated, not mobile enough or too unaware of the social games which underpin and underscore this trading of information and promises of jobs*” (Menger, 2009, p. 361). As for Karpik, he suggests that “in the jobs market, the personal circuit is more effective than the impersonal one” (Karpik, 2007, p. 231).

Within the body of career paths, this professional individualisation is instantly evident from the uniqueness of each path; while the initial training programmes may have something in common and the socio-professional characteristics of the study group offers a fairly homogeneous image of the social backgrounds of the young journalists (Lafarge and Marchetti, 2011; Author, 2016), we should not assume from this that their paths will follow a concurrent logic. Despite the “family likeness”, the paths become distinct and the aspirations diverge. This does not resolve the question of maintaining identity forms (Dubar, 1998) or of comparable or even similar projects. But in general, the more the individual looks after him or herself, the more he or she will be different. Dispersion is one of the main characteristics of the paths studied. The chronological rhythms of integration, the variety of employers, the status and work schedule combinations, the switching between labour markets, the subjectification of interpersonal relations, the importance of network relations (Granovetter, 2000) and the frequency of movement within the journalistic market itself are so many objective parameters of the deep-rooted destandardisation of the career paths of young journalists.

As well as these indicators, another dimension must be added to the narrating of one's own career path: personal projects and the plurality of wishes for self-fulfilment. The “decollectivisation” and the “reindividualisation” (Castel, 2009, p. 23) of career paths should not only be understood as a measuring rod of the deconstruction of the labour market. They also express an undercurrent which grants increasing importance to the realisation of all aspects of one's potential and uniqueness (Karpik, 2007). The reinforcement of extra-professional investments

(charity or humanitarian work, commitments to clubs or societies and career breaks) accentuates the individualisation of career paths and is sometimes presented as a system for compensating for the obstructions and other hurdles faced in the labour market. As an illustration, six respondents in the group of 27 interviewed were involved in volunteer work and three in entrepreneurial projects in or outside journalism, most of them emphasising that they had free time and/or personal projects.

This is yet another way of exploring flexibility; its side effects create disruptions in plans made possible precisely because of the intrinsic malleability of flexible management systems. That which flexibility renders impossible to accomplish *within* a job, it enables us to achieve *outside* it. Roulleau-Berger and Nicole-Drancourt label these measures to invest in private or work-fringe projects “identity restoration mechanisms” (2001, p. 241), created during periods of latency, insecurity and hesitation about the labour market. Saint-Pierre (2001) opted for the expression “civic integration portfolio”, in which work is grafted onto other projects which, depending on how they feel, can take up a great deal of a young person's disposable time. This comes close to what Ulrich Beck (2001) called the “biography model”, describing the taking in hand of one's own career path based on choice, career moves and changes one assumes responsibility for to a greater or lesser degree.

At the end of the day, whether it is mobility or the individualisation of career paths, it all comes down to the notion of flexibility. Debated from a sociology of professions perspective, this phenomenon offers a frame of reference particularly suited to this study. Imposed on or sought after by the worker, flexibility seems to be the favoured stance to adopt in labour markets such as that of journalism. So being flexible is not just an adequate response to an imposed situation; it is no more a choice, consciously and openly selected by young journalists, nor is it one optional behaviour pattern among others, an aptitude, a required or sought after quality. Flexibility is all these various dimensions at once and, much more profoundly, a paradigm that is increasingly pertinent which we use to read and interpret the evolutions of the journalistic market. Now the consequences on beginning careers paths have been shown, we would like to connect these results to the theoretical question of boundary work in journalism.

### **3. Professional identities: Blurred boundaries, hybrid identities?**

Above and beyond all economic justifications that those advocating policies of flexibility in human resources might put forward, it would be difficult to conclude without reflecting on their effects in terms of professional identities. Flexibility under its economic rationality is usually restricted to a short-term outlook. But if it is gradually becoming more associated with a longer term, as a system of management, then it is necessary to understand its effects not only on career paths, as explained above, but also on the identity of the trade and on collective, professional

frameworks. The hypothesis defended here comes down to considering that as the ways of weakening employment statuses become more numerous, so they tend to affect collective identification frameworks and personal identity forms, understood as “the types of rationale, justifications for methods of working, employment or training, practical rationalities; in short, sound reasons put forward by individuals, during non-directive interviews, to justify their actions in the professional sphere in its broad sense, i.e. including looking for work, mobility and training” (Dubar, 1998, p. 79). It is that “after having contributed to the forging of a strong feeling of collective identity and to cementing the collectivism of “workers”, labour law is now participating in their downfall. (...) From a collective identity through work we have passed to an individual identity within work”, wrote Supiot (2011, p. 97). Castel (2009, p. 24) put forward the same reasoning which he also links to an individualist thrust due to the recession of “collective regulations of stable employment” and the fact that “the mandate to be an individual is becoming generalised”.

It does not take long to find traces of this basic switch in young francophone Belgian journalists. It seems that the wane of classic forms of employment and the destandardisation of ways of beginning a career in journalism echo the developments in labour law highlighted by Supiot. Many young people play it by ear in journalism's various “grey zones”. These evolutions contribute to the destabilisation of collective identities, which are substituted, at least partially, by falling back on references that are individualised or shared by a small number of close friends or colleagues. Sociology may suggest that in this we should see a key element of journalism: its multiplicity of approaches, definitions, compositions and practices - in short its heterogeneousness which leads some to ask whether it is not primarily a “discursive structure” (Schudson, 2011, p. 5-6) or “a social practice of discursive production before being a profession” (Ringoot and Utard, 2005, p. 18). Journalism's lack of identity is particularly a lack of a unified and collective vision of many issues. In the absence of a unifying core and of a socio-historic construction of its long-established aims, journalism is a profession with fluctuating and uncertain contours from the point of view of the unity of the professional group (Beyens, 2003; Ruellan, 2007). In short, journalism is very definitely (and always has been) a profession with a *flexible* identity. By individualising and dividing employment relations, by chipping away at its base of stable workers as soon as they enter the profession, the professional group breaks up a little more by diversifying the myriad ways in which each individual can define themselves as a journalist to themselves and to others. In Belgium, this identity is defined on an increasingly malleable base by those who are its official and sworn guardians, in this instance, the bodies delivering press cards (Standaert and Grevisse, 2013). It appears that the same movement towards more flexibility in terms of collective and traditional identification frameworks is playing at the very gates of the group; Identity forms become less collegial and respectful of the trade's traditional shapes, confirming the hypothesis “that the ability of professions to set themselves up as a unitary, collective player is diminishing” (Champy, 2012, p. 124). In the present case, not so

much because their members are less and less willing “to sacrifice their own interests for that which their representatives present to them as being those of the group” (*Idem*) as because the numerous bifurcations increasingly risk forcing individuals into “double-bind” situations in which they are trapped between “an obligation to work and the impossibility of working in the expected or hoped for way” (Rouleau-Berger, 2012, p. 216). This is followed by various detachment and disengagement identity forms, justifying, for example, working in several fields at once and in careers which reject the traditional journalist line, in particular in marketing or communication. This is also the expression of a deconsecration identity form, of a disenchantment with the professions “high priests”. Young journalists sometimes become aware that their pre-career ideals are not connected to reality, just as Deuze, among others, stressed when he noted that “any definition of journalism as a profession working truthfully, operating as a watchdog for the good of society as a whole and enabling citizens to be self-governing is not only naïve, but also one-dimensional and sometimes nostalgic for perhaps the wrong reasons” (Deuze, 2005, p. 458). Many studies show that the ideal journalists aspire to or claim “entails a mission that makes journalism a counterweight to the three formal branches of state power” (Sjovaag, 2013, p. 139). Those wishes tend to be less clear when young journalists face precariousness and uncertainty about their work conditions. Many journalists, during their first or second interview, expressed deep doubts about their future, increasingly remaining open to new professional opportunities. Some individuals even confessed a kind of disavowal towards journalism as a profession, as emphasised by this journalist explaining why she launched a commercial activity alongside her journalistic occupation:

What’s going on with this job? I find it crazy (...). I need to stop now. This job has worn me out. In fact, I feel a little bit despised, it’s deep in my soul, I have been working for this magazine for three years and I’m just a “little pawn”. They took advantage of me, this job exploits people, and my reaction to that is to create my own business thanks to the network that journalism gave me (...). I feel like a journalist, I like this job, there are many aspects that I like, I was just not born at the right time. Though they took advantage of me, I will still enjoy all that this job gives me.

This kind of shift expresses the very particular relationship journalists have with their work. Rendered even more precious precisely because it is often unstable, temporary, precarious - in a word, rarely associated with a secure *job* - a journalist’s work is generally highly appreciated and valued. Its worthiness is rarely criticised, despite it having strayed rather from some of its more attractive forms (Weaver, 2005, p. 45). In many cases, the constraints that the lack of a stable job inflicts on the beginnings of a career will lead to repositioning, distancing and new identity forms. In particular these express a loss of personal interest in any overly strong identification with a collective since the collective has lost its various interests:

objective (to defend and represent), symbolic (fellowship) and psychological (being recognised by the group) (Supiot, 2011, p. 128-129).

### **Conclusion**

Even if this study is limited to a fraction of the professional group, a labour market so impregnated by flexible management must think about its boundaries. From a theoretical point of view, this is an issue both for the sociology of the professions (under what conditions are we considered as a member of a profession? When do we consider a professional insertion completed?) and for journalism studies: historically porous and open to external influences (Ruellan, 2007) the boundaries of the journalistic market seem more open than ever since labour conditions make it difficult for the new members to fully belong to the group, its standards, its practices and its networks. Concerning the boundaries of a profession, this study suggests that the boundary work done by journalists (and other actors) is firstly anchored in the material situations of the individuals. We can't analyse the discursive practices legitimating or excluding such a professional practice without considering the situational context surrounding it.

Discourse analysis of the 54 interviews, and the identity forms that result from it, show the extent to which young journalists facing uncertainty envisage their own exit from the market, or fear it. They also show how much their feeling of belonging to the professional group is blurred and sometimes replaced by tailor-made and individualized identifications which seem better adjusted to their hybrid or uncertain statutory positions (see also Ladendorf, 2012). The identity forms of young journalists, especially among freelancers, thus develop particular claims about the borders of the profession for the simple reason that they cannot pretend, for themselves, that they are legitimate journalists nor that they will remain for a long time within the traditional borders of the journalism market. The following testimony, given by someone working with a short-term contract in the daily press, expresses this recurrent tension between the posture of the insider and the outsider:

I know that in a few months my boss will perhaps tell me "No, I am not satisfied with your work and I can give a chance to someone younger who will not cost me years of seniority, whereas you will already cost me two of them". It is difficult to project oneself into the future. I don't have any particular career plan. I can't say where will I work in five years. No, it's very difficult to have plans. I have plans at the personal level, but at the professional level, I don't make any because I don't know if I will still be working as a journalist in six months.

What we describe here for young people is not a specific feature of the studied market, as Reinardy seems to show about American journalists (2011, p. 46): “In 2007, Weaver et al. reported that 24 percent of journalists with four or fewer years of experience expect to be working outside of media within five years, which was up from 19 percent in 1992. In this study, 31 percent of those 34 and younger said they expect to work outside of media within five years”.

This phenomenon of hybridization at the entry point to the journalistic job market is not new but it is accelerating. Career paths are not the only reflection of this phenomenon: more and more media outlets are diversifying their activities and, consequently, their income sources and their manpower. In Belgium, the profile of the companies operating in the journalistic market becomes more and more complex: once almost monolithic structures exclusively dedicated to the creation of journalistic content, they are now subdivided into various “business units”, in a mosaic of activities reflecting a new strategy of profitability based on diversification. According to the National Bank of Belgium’s classification, the majority of the 18 media outlets studied have added to their historical activity one or more activities from among the following: publicity and advertising agencies, tour operation, consulting, audiovisual and online tailor-made production, (online) retail, paper mills, online sports betting, events organization, caretaker services, real estate or professional training. The question of the borders of the journalistic market thus does not only concern its most fragile or peripheral workers: the media outlets themselves, including those who belong to the hard core of the profession, take part in this movement. All, in their own way, raise the same question that metajournalistic discourse about the borders tries to resolve (Carlson, 2015): in this deeply flexible market, who are the legitimate actors and how is this legitimacy established?

It is worth considering that the study of the discourse about the boundaries of journalistic activity requires a pluralistic approach, which relates discourse analysis to a study of the concrete and material forms under which the companies, the workers and their daily tasks evolve. In illustrating clearly the fuzzy borders between journalists and non-journalists, the study of the integration of young journalists requires at least two focal points: from a market point of view, it means trying to understand how parallel or subsidiary activities influence journalistic career paths and professional identities; from a chronological point of view, it means considering that the flexible phenomenon described at entry to the profession will probably be activated at other key periods of the career. If “the meanings of journalism - its definitions, boundaries, and claims to legitimacy - arise through metajournalistic discourse” (Carlson, 2015, p. 364), then the study of this discourse must be anchored in the material situations and the “lived geographies” (Carlson, *idem*) where the actors develop. Those who are located in the turbulent access areas of the labour market show that despite their diplomas, their motivation and their first steps in remunerated journalism, the issue of the distinction between the outside and



inside of the journalism as a profession, and therefore the issue of its borders, is becoming less relevant: many young journalists surf, for significant periods, on both sides of the “border” or hesitate to make the best career choices.

Beyond the methodological questions posed by hybrid and shifting journalistic careers, the issue of the very limits of journalism also arises for the researcher. It seems necessary to consider research scopes resolutely decomposed from the traditional boundaries of one single profession, whether it is journalism or not. As others scholars have pointed out about the emerging journalistic roles and practices in the digital ecosystem (Deuze and Witschge, 2018), the dominant scientific understanding of journalism does not account for the large array of practices that make up journalism nowadays. Entrepreneurial (Cohen, 2015) or computational (Lewis, 2013) journalism, for instance, have developed complex interactions with other professional cultures. Following Deuze’s theorisation of “liquid journalism” (2008), the study of young journalists highlighted the increasingly fluid interactions inside the market (throughout the career) and between journalism and other labour markets. In this liquid context where careers (and daily tasks) are no longer limited to a well-defined sector, scholars must also ask the question of their ability to grasp the links between journalism and other activities with appropriate interpretations. This means, among others things, avoiding the ethnocentric approach considering that journalism is an end in itself, let it be a research subject or any individual who once claimed to be a journalist: “In a digital culture, the roles, identities and activities of the people implicated in (journalism) are constantly shifting and, if anything, are less than clear-cut as (we) would suggest”, underlines Deuze (2008, p. 861). The same is true when focusing on career paths, with a strong influence on journalist’s identity forms and the complex issue of boundaries of journalism.

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