

Control of journalism by journalists?

Analyzing the benefits and flaws of Professional Cards for French Journalists in the context of journalism transformations

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1. Introduction

At a time when a major French magazine digitally re-touched the waistline of the new French president, Nicholas Sarkozy, in order to make him look "macho", we are obliged as scholars, to analyze French journalism and discuss the very mechanisms that are in place to prevent such practices. This paper therefore proposes that France's "Professional cards for journalists" are such mechanism that controls the quality of the France's public sphere which is a network of opinion-forming institutions.

Over the years a multitude of scholars has been astonished to discover that French journalism, instead of following all Bourdieu's predictions, has, in fact, been partially 'Americanized' but to a not too harmful extent. Political news has not become sensationalized and the press has not become "yellow" or lost its quality. Benson, while analyzing two decades of French reporting, from the 70's to the early 90's, confirmed that journalism's power of inertia as a cultural 'field' slowed and even resisted increasing economic pressures (Benson:2002:65).

Such conclusions however, are supported only by text analysis. In order to explain why such inertia helped French journalism keep its standards high, it was suggested by Benson that "two aspects of the journalism field 'are crucial: the historical formation of the field and the structure of competition within the field'" (Benson: 2002:65).

The problem is that these two aspects of the journalism field cannot be discussed with tools offered either by content analysis (Benson) or theory of distinction (Bourdieu). Instead, we are obliged to look at them from a different angle. Journalism is not only the product of journalists, and it is not only an ideology (as an "ism" it appeared at the dawn of modernity

iii, Tokyo U, Ph.D. Candidate, 2nd year, Prof. Hayashi Kaori Lab

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(Hanada). It is, from a sociological perspective, as Ruellan suggests, a professional group (Ruellan:2007).

This article proposes that the "Professional Cards for journalists" as a main characteristic of this professional group, protected French journalism and helped it keep its standards high. Ruellan (1997) showed how and why the workforce/market caused journalists in France to organize themselves into a professional grouping, and why and how, by negotiating with other structures, this group gained visibility and, in effect, have attempted to gain the same recognition as doctors and lawyers.

Benson, while criticizing Bourdieu, was clever enough to observe that "one of the distinctive aspects of the French journalistic field is its highly centralized character in which all the major news outlets are based in Paris and in which political, professional and economic competition are thus all closely intertwined" (Benson:2002:66). We can add that the best expression of this centralism is the "Professional Card" system, a system that brings together journalists and ownership and ask them to decide who is worthy of having a "professional card".

French journalists have the benefit of "Professional Cards", documents issued by an ID Card Commission established by the Government. These ID cards resemble those of public servants and are meant to represent, as Bourdon wrote "the control of journalism by journalists".

This research is motivated in part by Bourdon's words and investigates the validity and actuality of this claim. However, the idea of journalists being in control of journalism is interesting, also, because, if actually realized, it would be a sign of accomplished modernization and a model instrument that could be copied around the world. Habermas (and others), while looking into ideal models of public spheres, feared that journalism is controlled, to a great extent, either by the state or by money. The ideal public spheres of Europe, those coffee shops linked by the early newspapers were "transformed" and information institutionalized. Empirical evidence suggests that this is as true in France as it is in other parts of the world. As a recent illustration of this point: after Nicholas Sarkozy became President of France, three well-known journalists were appointed to his administration. Were these journalists "objective" in the conduct of their profession prior to their political appointments? Were they impartial during the electoral campaign?

However, more important than answering these rhetorical questions is the necessity to ask "Qui prodest" or "Who benefits". We discover that the main beneficiary of this system is ubiquitous: the public sphere, a network of opinion forming-institutions and in which journalism

has an important place (Gross: 2002). This claim, if proved right might also provide a way out of many of the thorny problems inherent in Japanese journalism, such as the journalist's status as a 'salary man' and the problems posed by the Press Club system employed here.

1.1. Methodology

After gathering and analyzing literature and statistical data this research paper was completed in January 2007 with fieldwork in France. In France, 13 in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviewees were a mixture of professional journalists, representatives of journalist unions and journalism educators. One independent filmmaker was also interviewed. All the interviews were conducted using the same set of core questions regarding the status of journalists in French society, as well as their opinions about the professional identification card system. All the interviews were conducted in French and recorded on audiotapes. The interview transcripts, along with short descriptions of the interviewees have been uploaded to the internet and can be accessed (See Annexes and resources). The locations for the interviews were chosen by the interviewees and most of them were conducted informally. The interviews viest all one-on-one and no other persons participated in the discussions. Note, however, that if the interview took place in a public place, such as a coffee shop, other persons would have been present in the same room but were not privy to the conversation.

All the taped interviews were carried out after previous informal introductions, by way of telephone calls or e-mail and after subsequent face-to-face discussions about journalism and journalists in France. These informal unrecorded chats, in some cases, lasted for more than two hours.

The 13 respondents, listed in the order in which they were interviewed, are:

- G rard Dupuy, Deputy Editor in Chief of Lib ration
- Jocelyne Iamonte, Administrative General Secretary for SNJ
- Dominique Pradalie, Secretary General for SNJ, Director France2
- Michel Leroy, Current director of CFJ
- Fran ois Carrel, journalist for Les Montagnes magazine, freelancer for Lib ration and Respect Magazine.
- Matthieu Demeestere, journalist AFP, former economics correspondent in New York;
- Accacio Pereira, journalist for Le Monde
- Samuel Degasne, "pigiste" (freelance journalist)

- Daniel Kupferstein, documentary film maker
- Olivier Puech, journalist for LeMonde.fr, and former Kabul correspondent
- Hélène Ganzman, journalist for Respect magazine and 'pigiste' for other titles;
- Jean - Michel Thénard, Deputy-director for Libération
- Annick Desolneux, Course Director of ESJ Paris.

(NB: Pigiste - French word meaning "freelance journalist".)

The interviewees were chosen on the basis that, between them, they could offer a wide cross-section of views on journalism in France from different levels and aspects of the profession.

For example, there are interviews with the two main decision makers, from the editorial team of Libération, Gérard Dupuy and Jean - Michel Thénard; interviews with journalists who are chiefs of sections like Accacio Pereira and Olivier Puech of Le Monde, as well as interviews with 'regular' journalists like Hélène Ganzman of Respect Magazine. The views of freelancers (pigistes) are represented by François Carrel and Samuel Degasne. Similarly, the views of journalism educators are represented by the directors of two respected schools of journalism, CFJ Paris and l'ESJ Paris, in the persons of Michel Leroy and Annick Desolneux, respectively. Dominique Pradalie is the head of SNJ, the main union representing journalists in France while Daniel Kupferstein is a well-known independent documentary film maker.

Note that while Kupferstein does not consider himself a journalist, his choice of subject matter for his features - mainly social and political issues/subjects - bear obvious similarity to those which would be covered by journalists. He proved to be a sound and informative observer of the practice of journalism in his country and his observations were relevant for this research in terms of understanding French journalists and the state of the media in that country.

2. Professional ID Cards: history

Before discussing the history of the Professional Card system, we have to acknowledge the fact that this system still functions today largely as it did in the early decades after it was first introduced in 1936. Although for a number of years after World War II the Professional Card Commission acted to restrict access to the profession to those who either collaborated with the Nazi Occupation or supported the Petain government, this exception will not be

considered for broad analysis in this paper.

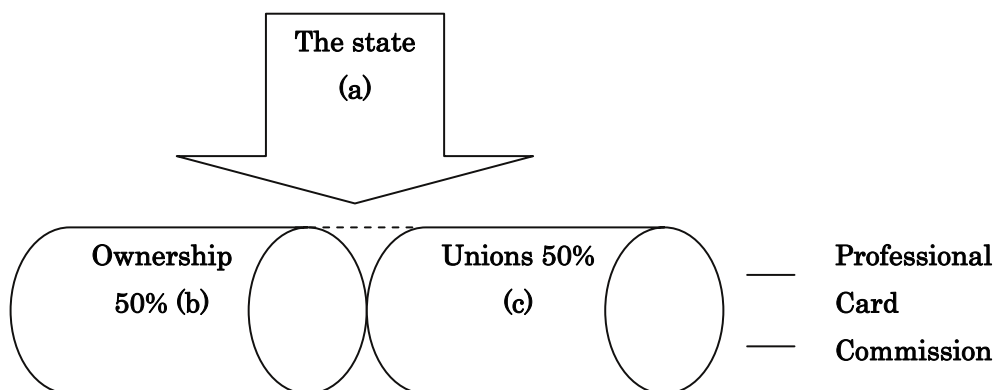
The first step towards a professional identity for French journalists was made after World War I and only because "the French press were discredited from a war in which it served without problems the official propaganda" (Neveu: 2004:15). In the immediate aftermath of the war a journalists union, SNJ (National Union of Journalists) was created, in 1918, and its first move was to publish in that same year an Ethical Charter for Journalists.

The introduction of a Professional ID Card for journalists was a natural continuation of these first attempts to promote greater professionalism in the practice and it exists only because of the SNJ's efforts. The card system was introduced in France in 1936 with the aim of creating order in the field of journalism (Neveu: 2004). By proposing such a tool to the French Assembly, the SNJ wanted to draw a line between journalists and non-journalists and thus enforce a professional ethic on the part of those who claimed to be journalists and who practice journalism (Martichoux: 2003). Georges Boudron said, in 1936, that "the Professional Card is the permanent right for self-observation of our profession. It is the control of journalism by journalists." (Boudron: 1936, in Martichoux: 2003).

Since 1936, French journalists have been recognized as professional journalists by the three actors bound together in the ID card commission. They are: (a) The state, which established the legal framework for the commission and appoints its members; (b) the owners of the various organs of the media; and (c) journalist unions.

The media owners and the journalist unions are represented in a 50:50 proportion as shown below:

Fig.1: French state forced both the Media Ownership and Unions to assume a common identity within the Professional Card Commission



To understand why media owners and journalist unions, traditionally on opposing sides regarding most issues, became joint participants in the creation of this commission, we have to take account of the historical situation that led the French Parliament to create such an institution. In this regard, it is important to understand that the Brachard Report, which constitutes the heart of the 1935 law on journalism, was a product of necessity.

Prolonged negotiations stretching from 1919-1933, between journalists, then represented largely by the SNJ, and media owners, failed. Press owners did not want to recognize the fact that journalists, as members of a distinct profession, have the right to be collectively protected by special laws. Consequently, they did not want to sign a Collective Convention of Work.

It was this failure of negotiations that prompted journalists to seek justice and arbitrage through the French Parliament. They asked, in 1933, for a special law to govern their professional body. That same year, a draft report was written by Henri Guernut, but French society was not yet ready to accept it. It took another two years, and the work of Brachard, another deputy in the lower chamber of the Parliament, who revised Guernut's propositions and finished the report.

The legislation promulgated in 1935, on the basis of this report, is the instrument by which was realized the establishment of the governing body for professional journalists, in 1935, as well as the creation of the ID Card Commission a year later, in 1936.

For Ruellan, these dates are important because they show exactly when French journalism stopped being a *métier* of frontier - in the American sense of this word, as a moving front - and became, instead, a *métier* for which there were fixed borders (Ruellan: 1997). This, in turn, was provoked, he says, by the public's recognition of a simple fact: "the journalists were salary men". They were not writers and they were not artistes, they were salary men: that is to say, salaried employees and they constituted a social group in need of protection by the State in the same way as other social groups and this protection was granted through their ID cards.

Thus, the same author shows how the French Parliament, in its decision in favor of journalists in their conflict with media owners and managers, by means of the Brachard Report, obliged both journalists and owners to "assume their common reality under the patronage of the State" (Ruellan).

The ID Card Commission, therefore, was formed on the basis of a compromise. Media owners accepted that they had to recognize the collective rights of journalists, while, for its part, the

SNJ accepted that a professional card would be delivered through a simple administrative procedure, by a commission in which unions and ownership shared an equal membership. As a consequence, in France, a professional journalist can be, according to the 1935 law, a salary man or a pigiste (freelancer) who works for a news company and earns at least 51% of his/her revenues from the press (Brachard: 1935). "A journalist is a salary man, is an attaché to its journal by the means of a contract; he/she is constrained to a determined need, mostly occurring in the stipulated working hours, and he/she is charged with precise responsibilities" (Brachard: 1935).

2.1. The professional card: benefits and flaws

Despite the fact that the Professional Card system has received criticism from both professional journalists and academics, this criticism is not questioning the existence of the system. It does however, question its mechanisms. For a deeper discussion of this issue, this paper proposes, per the table below, the benefits and flaws of the Professional Card system for journalists as a way of identifying the source of its accused weaknesses.

Table1: Benefits against flaws: 4:2

Benefits or positive points	Flaws
<p>(1) The creation of a professional community of card bearers.</p> <p>(2) The creation of a means of inducement for journalists to remain journalists by limiting their income from outside the profession.</p> <p>(3) A symbolic value.</p> <p>(4) The establishment of the journalist and his/her conscience as the final authority on ethical issues.</p>	<p>(I) The optional character of these cards.</p> <p>(II) The impossibility of establishing an accepted mechanism to sanction ethical mistakes from inside the ID Card Commission.</p>

Neveu writes that "the status [of journalists] defined the rights in the domains of work and social protection for journalists but nevertheless constructed a frontier by reserving the quality of journalists to those recognized as such by 'a commission for professional ID cards' for journalists, in which the owners and the journalists will be represented" (Neveu: 2004:15). Consequent to this law, the ID Card Commission is an institution which, in the name of the French State, delivers, if applied for, a professional card to those lawfully recognized as journalists (Da Lage: 2003). In this sense, we can assert that the first value (1) of the professional ID card is the creation of a professional community of card bearers. However, the first value of the ID card institution stands to be negated by its first flaw (I) which is, as observed, too, by Neveu, the optional character of the system. It is a fact that, either with a card or without one, a journalist has the same rights according to the law. The card does not prove anything and does not offer anything (Neveu: 2004, Martichoux:2003, others). Even the promise that employers, when trying to hire someone for a job, will look first to unemployed journalists who hold professional press cards, is not realistic. The press card has to be renewed every year, so a longer period of unemployment means a professional journalist will obtain a different status:

"Art.15. - (...) When trying to employ professional journalists or those assimilated with the professional journalists in the sense of the article L.761.2 of the Work Code, the employers are obliging themselves to look at first on those professional journalists who are unemployed or who are working only occasionally. They are obliged to employ above others journalists who are unemployed and then those who received a formation in one of the establishments recognized by the profession for all collaborators capable to occupy the vacancies" (National Convention).

This flaw in the ID card system is very much criticized by journalists, who observe that their professional cards are not "entry tickets" into the profession. Neveu believes that although the ID commission delivers an official document, its monopoly is void of any authority/value because the Commission is just participating in an unchanged pre-existing status quo.

"The Commission is just registering the reality of the revenues which are coming from press activities while not forbidding those who are not holders of an ID card to exercise the same activities as registered journalists" (Neveu: 2004: 19).

This situation also caused Martichoux to question the value of the card, drawing the conclusion that "although apparently this card has no value the failure to re-issue it is seen as a sanction" (Martichoux: 2003: 23). Thus, we can assert that the second value (2) of this

card is its quality as an instrument of pressure to limit the appetite of journalists for income or material gains from outside media, so it is also a pressure mechanism directed, critically, towards guarding the journalists' status as independent.

"The professional card for journalists has the format of a credit card. It is even introduced in the wallet, from which it has little chance to be taken out. It is crossed by three colors: blue-white-red (the France's National Colors) and it contains little information: the registering number, the name of the bearer, the delivery or renewal years, a photo of the bearer, and the name of the media for which the bearer works. On top of all this information there is written: The French Republic. On verso it is written that the journalist is exercising his *métier* by observing the March 1935 Law on press" (Martichoux: 2003).

By bearing the National Colors of France and the inscription "The French Republic", the professional card gives the impression that its bearer is employed in the public service. This fact represents, as this paper suggests, the third value or benefit (3) of this ID card for the professional journalist.

However, for many French journalists, their ID card means nothing more to them than a free ticket to a museum; this facility being, as they see it, the only tangible benefit of having it. In this sense, the existence of this institution is considered equivocal. Neveu writes that while journalists went on to speak of an 'Order of Journalists', the ID card commission does not have any disciplinary power (Neveu: 2004:15). Thus, we can assert the second flaw in the institution of this ID Card Commission is (II): its inability to take a stand on ethical issues. It is widely discussed that because of this flaw the very existence of this commission is problematic for French journalism. In employing only administrative criteria in recognizing professional journalists and forgetting the moral ones, the commission does not help to promote the molding of journalists into a truly professional community. On the contrary, in reality, the commission is taking from the professional body - formed, it must be recalled, around press unions - the power to make their own rules, while conceding half of this power to the owners of the media.

"The creators of the ID Card Commission were jubilant when they took office: they saw in the ID Card an ethical instrument and a protection similar to the one that covers the professions of doctors and lawyers. However, in reality, this card is not comparable because, it is not an authorization for work. The professional exercise does not depend on this plastic rectangle" (Martichoux: 2003: 97). To obtain a professional card for journalists, a journalist has first to be employed or be working as a freelance journalist. Thus, the authorization for

work comes from the ownership, or, according to Pradalié of SNJ, the owners "keep dirty journalists close" because such journalists can satisfy their need for disseminating non-objective information.

It is important to accept that even in a situation where a journalist is seen and labeled as "unprofessional" by other journalists, he can keep his status as a journalist and his professional card, if he can keep his job, so, the ultimate arbiter in ethical matters seem to be, paradoxically, the media ownership and not the press unions. This is because, as François Carrel remarked, unions are getting weaker (François Carrel - interview: 2007). This situation, which confirms and reinforces the second flaw (II) observed in the institution of journalism ID cards. The missing ethical issues in the process of recognizing professional journalists conceals however, the last and most important value (4) of this card. This value resides in the fact that journalists, as recipients of their cards, are trusted as being professional journalists. This trust, as expressed by Olivier Olivier Puech (Olivier Puech - interview: 2007), is "a trust in their humanity, in the fact that they can change to become better journalists, in the fact that they can recognize their own mistakes and can act to repair those mistakes without coercion from a higher power."

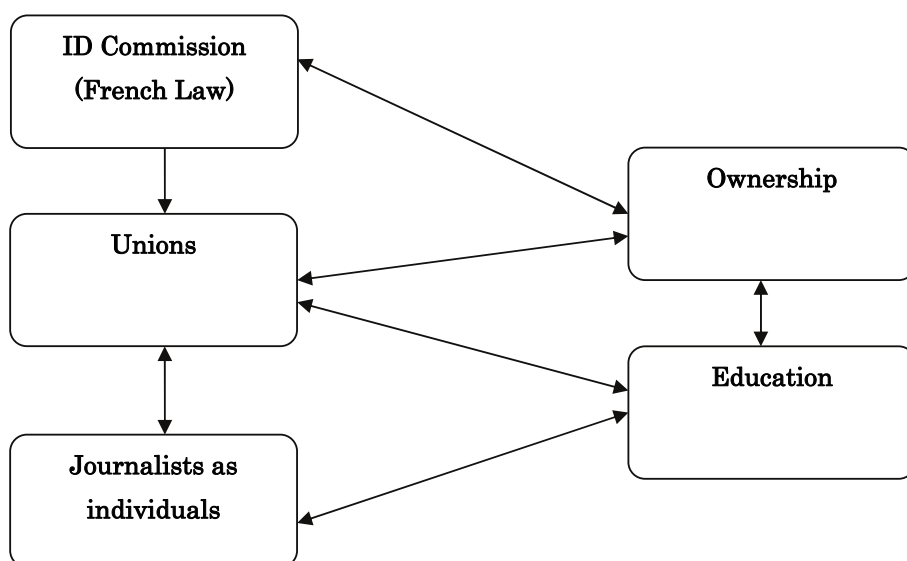
In this sense, this fourth value of the ID card lies in it making the journalist his/her own last moral and ethical resort; in making the journalist decide good from bad, right from wrong and encouraging them to act accordingly.

3. The Professional Card in the context of problems in French Journalism

It is not sufficient however to identify the benefits and flaws in the card system without placing these benefits and flaws in a meaningful context. This article introduces that the benefits and flaws of the Professional Cards for journalists have to be analyzed in the dynamic context of the evolving problems within journalism in France. The French media lost almost all its independent newspapers by the close of the 20th Century, with one notable exception, *Le Monde*. However, even *Le Monde* is only a part of a bigger media group, so we can consider that *Libération* was the last really independent French journal, until sold stocks due to its financial difficulties, to the mogul Baron Edouard de Rothschild. It is important to highlight this fact because the French media landscape today is quite different from what it was over 80 years ago when the Professional Card Commission started its work. In 1936, the French media was composed of hundreds of newspapers, representing hundreds of different small interests.

Thus, with the 1935 law and the creation of the Professional Card Commission in 1936, a 'status quo' of trust between the media and public was created. This construction was possible only by making the professional union, SNJ, the equal and the partner of owners. It was the moment when opinion journalism was officially replaced by objective journalism. The invented "status quo" can be traced as follows:

Fig.2: The "status quo" in the situation of objective journalism:



This paper proposes in the above figure the 'status quo' which has functioned until the present for the benefit of French democracy. The double arrows signify the equal representation and equal competency of the actors involved in the French media system. As explained, the ID Card Commission is composed in the ratio 1:1 by owners and syndicated journalists, the schools are recognized by both ownership and the unions, and so on. In this situation the flaws of the Professional Card system, (I) the optional character of these cards, and (II) the impossibility of establishing an accepted mechanism to sanction ethical mistakes from inside the ID Card Commission are not problematic, because journalists as individuals are persuaded by the education establishment and by the unions to discover and appreciate their independence, thus, the fourth benefit of their cards, i.e. they are able to be the final authority

regarding moral issues.

However, this picture is blurred by current developments in the French media. It is blurred - and to an extent surpassed by the increasing influence that politics exerts, especially indirectly, via the corporate establishment, a sizeable percentage of which are media owners - which has started to diminish the independence of journalists.

"At the beginning of the 21st Century the French people are afraid of journalists, are washed in hot water by adrift articles, are disgusted by scandals (...) so, can we forget that previously the big journals were instruments in the hands of grand entrepreneurs or in the hands of elected politicians who did not care about deontology?" (Martichoux: 2003)

This rhetorical question is common to almost all researchers of French media who cannot forget how this establishment supported the provocateurs of World War I, the Petain Government and Nazi collaborators; or how TV was used by the government in the 1960's and 70's, as a mouthpiece for government propaganda; or, cannot forget that still, the major journals such as *Le Figaro* are in the hands of grand entrepreneurs like Dassault and Lagardère, or, cannot accept that *Libération*, the journal of the French 1968's militants sold stocks to Baron Rothschild?

The question of the credibility of journalists also arises from the 'periphery', the segment of society which went unreported on before the 2005 violence, and also from the countryside, where the expression "TGV journalists" was invented only to describe how Paris-based journalists hop on express trains to file reportage and pretend that their opinions on things are objective, despite their very low level of understanding of local problems. The TGV is the French high speed train, similar to the Japanese Shinkansen or bullet train.

Neveu believes that the main problem of the press in France stems from the deteriorating economic environment. Journalism in autonomous journals is more costly than the journalism employed by media trusts and journals distributed free of cost. However, the newspapers are all competing for the same readers. Thus, Neveu believes in the benign character of market-driven journalism.

"The possible corollary of a market-driven journalism is the possible dissolution of the journalistic profession in a continuum of communication métiers illustrated by the American neologism media-worker" (Neveu: 2004:97).

The French scholar also addresses the problem of journalists working for Public Relations organizations. Like François Carrel, he is worried about "the development of the institutional press fuelled repeated debates over the professional identity of the collaborators which are

supporting these publications. Considered with suspicion as being 'communicators' by the journalists, the redactors of these titles, often former journalists, are contesting this pejorative classification"(Neveu: 2004:97).

Thus, Neveu retakes the proposition of Charron and Bonville (1996) who announced a third generation of French journalism: communication journalism, which he sees as a natural successor to the objective journalism which developed in the 20th Century, which, in turn, was derived from the opinion journalism (Neveu: 2004:98). However, the French scholar remains skeptical in the face of this kind of "attentive" journalism done by journalists who are not just offering information, but are also trying to influence public opinion.

"What will be the place in this society [of communication journalism] for groups without buying power?" is the key question that Neveu poses of this new journalism, because democracy has to be build as a deliberative process, in which everyone has to participate starting with the necessary knowledge of current problems, knowledge offered nowadays by objective journalism.

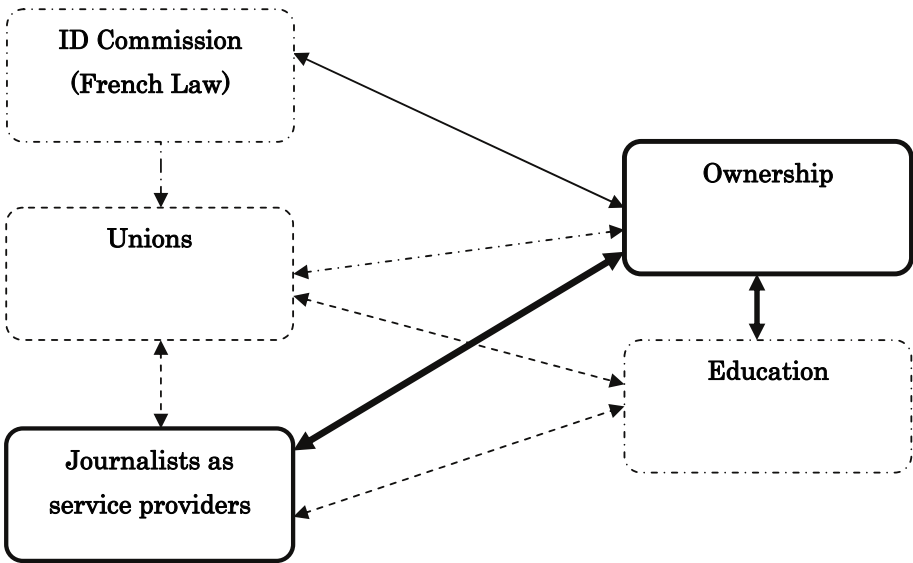
We have also to remember the work of Ruellan who presents the failure of French journalists to constitute a profession in the real sense of the word, thus becoming a corporatist professional group structured on three levels with a leading elite which tightly controls access into its ranks. In this sense, the education of journalists provided by the system of Grand Écoles, can be criticized as a system which it reinforces - by allowing the media ownership to have a say in the shaping of future journalists. If we remember press mogul Dassault's proposal that schools start to produce journalists with "healthier ideas" i.e. "right wing ideas" instead of journalists who are sympathizers of left wing politics - the negative aspects of French journalism, and in a way in which the professionalism envisaged by press unions like SNJ, cannot do much to counteract.

However, as this paper has already asserted, along with the problem of losing its markets, French journalism is menaced by a moral crisis. As François Carrel opines, there are still virtuous journalists and virtuous owners and there are journals which still resist advertisers' pressure. Unfortunately the flaws inherent in the professional card system have become magnified in recent years. And the inability to fix (I) the optional character of these cards will become synonymous with putting journalists under siege by the patrons who are ready to use a cheap workforce that they can command. Moreover, this siege can happen in an environment where it is (II) also impossible to establish an acceptable mechanism to sanction ethical mistakes from inside the ID Card Commission.

More than one interviewee denied the need for such a mechanism, arguing that ethical considerations should be applied internally by each individual news organization. However, how can we imagine that a person employed on a short term basis and with a defined job description will refuse to sign a contract, which contains the relevant articles, just because they are not objective, when objectivity is not a necessary reference or skill?

Here is an illustration of what is now evolving from the previous status quo that functioned until now in the situation of communication journalism:

Fig.3: The status quo in the situation of communication journalism:



In the absence of a mechanism to sanction the moral drift of journalists and in a market situation where one is forced to sell or die, hopes are fading. Communication journalism is consolidating the influence of media owners, undermining the influence of unions which were previously equally influential. At the same time, by allowing journalists to transform themselves into contract bound service providers, the unions will lose their importance in establishing a moral line for this profession. Thus, union recognition of schools/institutions of journalism education will become not only increasingly unnecessary and irrelevant but will eventually be rendered obsolete.

The discussed four benefits will be meaningless in such a scenario, so it is this paper's

suggestion that the status quo that functioned for the French press over the last 70 years should be preserved. It is then meaningful to remember Benson (2002) and his prediction of inertia in the field of journalism in France where changes are following French patterns that respect both the history and competition of this field.

4. Fieldwork results

During the fieldwork in France two possibilities of reform of the Card Commission were observed. Michel LeRoy, the new head of the well-known school of journalism, CFJ; Le Monde's Accacio Pereira and Jean - Michel Thénard, the editor in chief of Libération, were opposed to the idea of reforming the Card Commission by empowering it with a moral dimension. They all cited the French political system as the main argument against such empowerment, while stressing the fact that ethics should be discussed and applied only from inside newsrooms.

For Olivier Puech the inclusion of moral standards in the Card Commission together with a mechanism to implement them is not desirable because it is against the spirit of Enlightenment. Similarly, Hélène Ganzman of Respect Magazine believes that empowerment of the commission with special attributes is not realistic because journalism is not an established profession like law or medicine. She explained, however, that this impossibility is directly linked to the fact that newspapers are not independent, but are owned by economic interests.

The opposing views were just as strong. They all took into consideration the bigger picture of the economic environment that the mass media operates in and expressed fear with respect of the possibility of organizing journalists to resist political and economic pressures given the current environment. Dominique Pradalie, François Carrel and Samuel Degasne all agreed that the problems of corporatism cannot be fought with the same tools historically employed. The statistics show that this view is realistic. The number journalists hired for short and fixed periods or on trial is increasing from 3522 in 2005 to 3800 in 2008 and becoming a source of concern for both employed and unemployed journalists(CCIJP) All of this led to public confidence in journalists reaching historic new lows. This situation is explained by the government as follows:

The French Government position:

"There is a code of conduct in France dating from 1918 which is common to the press as a whole,

and several publications have drawn up their own individual codes, but none of these documents stipulate penalties for transgressing the principles which they lay down.

France has no equivalent of a professional journalist association of the Italian kind, or even of a Press Complaints Commission as in the United Kingdom (or a Press Council in Germany) which ensures compliance with stated rules of professional conduct.

Furthermore, journalism is an open profession and its practitioners do not need a press card. Press cards are issued by a joint board of journalists and editors on which the government is not represented. The sole purpose of the card is to facilitate the journalist's work and its issue merely requires evidence that the applicant properly meets the definition of a professional journalist for the purposes of article L. 761-2 of the Labour Code; this provides that a professional journalist is a person whose principal and regular occupation is the practice of his/her profession for remuneration in a press concern.

Nor does the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (Higher Council for the Audiovisual Sector - CSA) have any particular powers in this area, apart from a general regulatory power with regard to audio-visual media which enables it to warn audio-visual communication services against repeated invasions of privacy.

Source : PRIME MINISTER / Legal and Technical Office of Information and Communicatio

It is necessary then to acknowledge that more important than which strategy of reform will prevail -in fact any will- it is a fact that French journalists are aware of the flaws observed in the system of "professional cards". This awareness was observed as positive. This empirical evidence proves, then, that the system of Professional Cards for journalists is a modern tool which properly used, can solve the problems observed in the French journalism.

5. Conclusion

Jean Chalaby's argument that the French press places a "greater emphasis on political critique and literary style" than the British and American media do (Chalaby: 1996), is not just a simple observation. It should be read as a link between journalism as a professional group, united in unions, and distinguished by other professionals by means of the professional cards, and the public sphere, as a place of debate where citizens find information. It is not a simple coincidence that professional journalists while benefiting from their ID cards are also recognized inside their profession for their writing skills. Sensationalism was never a priority in a press and for a public that appreciates more skilful writing than tabloid

sensationalism.

In this environment the cited benefits of the "Professional card" system have surpassed its' worrisome flaws. Thus, although these cards have not achieved their aim of control of journalism by journalists" they are precious because of their ambivalent character and the way in which they allow journalists to become a moral authority. As Olivier Puech suggested, people can change and bad journalists can become good ones, so, in light of the rapidly changing journalism environment, this paper suggests that the "professional card" system remains a good anchor in the tradition of the French public sphere.

This paper proposes that it is the above mentioned status quo that allowed the flaws inherent in the Professional Card system to remain uncorrected. Although acknowledged they have not been corrected before now because the benefits of the Press Card have always surpassed them in importance.

However, this system, which enabled French journalism to become trusted and objective was designed for an epoch that has almost passed. The "status quo" presented in this article was preserved without problems only while the unions were powerful, and only while media ownership could not undermine the unions and only while journalists were recognized as such first by their fellow journalists and then by the unions and media owners.

It is important that the original "status quo" be reinforced. It is not the objective of this paper to suggest concrete ways in which to do so, but the passion observed during fieldwork in journalists, union members and educators when discussing journalism is an important sign that the energies that are, or will be, employed to keep journalism independent from political and economic pressures are still alive and well.

6. Annexes and resources*

(*These resources are downloadable in a PDF format:

Charter of Journalists www.geocities.com/floringrancea/Charta

The Brachard Report www.geocities.com/floringrancea/Brachard

The Collective Convention of Journalists

www.geocities.com/floringrancea/convention

The ID Card Commission <http://www.ccijp.net/>

SNJ Home Page <http://www.snj.fr/>

Interviews realized during January 2007 field work in France

(Interview with Gerard Dupuy-Deputy Editor in Chief of Libération; Jocelyne Iamonte - Administrative General Secretary for SNJ; Dominique Pradalie - Secretary General for SNJ, Director France2; Michel Leroy - International developer of CFJ, now head of CFJ; François Carrel - Journalist for Les Montagnes magazine, freelancer for Libération and Respect Magazine; Matthieu Demeestere - Journalist AFP, former economical correspondent in NY; Interview with Accacio Pereira, journalist for Le Monde; Interview with Samuel Degasne, pigiste; Interview with Daniel Kupferstein, documentary maker; Interview with Olivier Puech, journalist for LeMonde.fr, and former correspondent in Kabul; Interview with Hélène Ganzman, journalist for Respect magazine and pigiste for other titles; Interview with Jean-Michel Thenard, Deputy - director for Libération) www.geocities.com/floringrancea/
Interviews

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Control of journalism by journalists?

Analyzing the benefits and flaws of Professional Cards for French Journalists in the context of journalism transformations

Florin Grancea

French journalists are required, by law, to be registered by the government appointed agency the "Professional Card Commission." This body, since 1936, has issued identification cards to journalists. The cards are valid for one year and are subject to renewal. The card proves that the bearer is a professional journalist.

France is the only country in the western world to recognize professional journalists using such a system. This research paper describes and analyzes this institution of professional ID cards for French journalists and will look at the strengths, weaknesses, as well as prospects for the system.

The study will show that these cards have helped French journalism to maintain high standards of expression and remain as an anchor for the quality of France's public sphere. It will also discuss the flaws observed in the meaning and usage of these professional ID cards. In this sense, this article will try to explain why these flaws, observed over the years, have still not been corrected. Thus, this paper will analyze the opportunity to reform the institution of professional cards for journalists, by extensive discussion of two major flaws in the usage of these cards.

This study will propose that, notwithstanding its 70-year history, the system is still a modern tool which, properly used, can solve the problems observed in French journalism and can be a model for other countries too.

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Key Words : Platform-Strategy, Innovation, Modularity, enterprise alliance, mobile internet.