

## **The Spread of Casual and Freelance Work in French Journalism New Flexible Model or Deconstruction of Labour Market and Professional Status?**

*IAMCR Conference, Dublin 2013, Journalism Research and Education Section*

Cécolène Frisque, Assistant professor of Sociology,  
University of Nantes (IUT de la Roche sur Yon),  
Centre for Research on Political Action in Europe (CRAPE, Rennes/CENS, Nantes),

This paper aims to investigate the effects of the increase of non-standard and freelance work on the journalism labour market in France. Indeed, for about twenty years, forms of insecure, casual, non-permanent work have multiplied and expanded, representing a growing part of professional journalists, increasingly for a couple of years. The status of “pigiste” has been a speciality of French journalism since 1974, as a kind of freelance work usually paid per article (or sometimes per day of work). Despite its casual nature, however, the work relation as “pigiste” was considered as a “presumed” labour contract, in order for “pigistes” to benefit – theoretically – from all the labour rights of salaried journalists. This precarious but quite protective status was overflowed by other kinds of casual work (fixed-term contracts, state-aided contracts...). Most importantly, in the intervening years, new kinds of freelance work – payment as author or as “self-entrepreneur” – have widely spread, shifting the work from a logic of employment contract – more or less secure or precarious – toward a pure market logic of service delivery.

How can we explain these changes? How are they connected to the growth of the Internet sector? To the developing new deregulated media (market oriented magazine papers, all-news TV channels...)? To the crisis of the print Press?

What is the meaning of these changes? Does it involve a new flexible model of journalism? Or a breakdown of the labour market of professional (i.e. salaried) journalism? What are the effects of this flexibility/precariousness on the field of journalism? How does it impact the working conditions of journalists? What are the results on news processing and on the content of the Press? How is it possible to assess the proper consequences of employment conditions in the changes in media information?

This proposal is based on a large-scale research (Frisque et Saitta, 2011), including a secondary statistical analysis of the data of the French Commission of the professional journalists’ identity (Commission de la carte d’identité des journalistes professionnels, CCIJP), a comparison with other statistical sources (that involve a broader definition of journalism and invite questioning the figures usually quoted), and on forty interviews with casual or non-permanent journalists, working in various sectors of the Press, in different employment conditions, with diverse personal career situations.

The theoretical framework is a sociological analysis of journalism which questions the building of the profession and its changes (Schudson, 2003, Neveu, 2009), its frontiers and margins (Ruellan, 1993). It rests on a critical approach that takes into account the concrete working conditions of journalists, their professional practices, as well as economic and social trends that influence them. It also entails distancing oneself from official discourses and idealized representations of the profession – as from ultra-criticism about the “role” of journalists in “status quo”, collusion and decay...

## **An increase in insecure forms of employment and commercial methods of payment**

The press and audio-visual media have always resorted to casual forms of employment, but their forms and extent have changed. In the beginning of the industrial press in the 19th century, the use of freelancers, non-professional people writing articles and providing newspapers with cheap editorial content, was pervasive, unregulated and very low-paid. Permanent journalists considered the competition of these non-professionals as unfair, struggled to differentiate from them, and sought to be recognized as actual professionals. The new National Union of Journalists (SNJ, founded in 1918) promoted the status of journalists, established in 1935, that defines journalist as a subordinate employee to a press company, excluding all external collaborators (Ruellan, 1993)..

After the Liberation, the regulation of the profession and the development of the Press suggested a restriction or even a future extinction of the role of auxiliaries. In the 1970s, the situation of maintaining a population of casual contributors and the desire to protect their rights, resulted in a very favorable regulatory status named “pige”. After a gradual increase in the amount of “pigistes” in the 1980s and 1990s, other status came into existence, even if this phenomenon remains largely invisible from a statistical and professional point of view.

### ***Fictions and decay of “pige”***

In the wake of securing labour and extension of social rights (Castel, 1995), and in the context of a balance of power favorable to workers and their organizations in the 1970s, the Cressard law of 4<sup>th</sup> July 1974 equates “pige” with a tacit labour contract. “Any agreement whereby a press company ensures, through remuneration, the participation of a professional journalist” is “presumed to be a labour contract. This presumption remains regardless of the method and amount of remuneration and the label given to the agreement by the parties”. So the “pige” is assimilated to a permanent contract, which in theory makes it more stable and lasting than a fixed-term contract, by definition limited over time.

According to this “presumption” of employment contract, “pigistes” formally receive all the protections of employees: health insurance, workers’ compensation insurance, pension, paid holidays, maternity leave, and right to training, participation to works council, redundancy payment (Cazard and Nobécourt, 2007)... In practice, jurisprudence requires the contribution to be regular – for more than three months –, so as to apply these provisions. A “pigiste” can claim an insurance payment of per diem in case of sickness, but also demand a severance indemnity in case of work termination, since it is considered as a breach of labour contract. “Pigistes” are also officially voters and eligible for works councils and may be appointed as trade union or staff representatives.

However, “pigistes” are often unable to apply those rights (Contrepois, 1997), either towards employers, who are reluctant, or administration and social services, which often ignore these provisions. For example, very few of the “pigistes” surveyed said they had taken sick leave, for fear of the reactions of managers and a break of future work collaborations. Similarly, very few “pigistes” have applied their right to severance pay – only two in the sample have done so. Again, job center services are usually not trained about these specific rules, and do not understand how there can be a breach of employment contract where none has been signed... And obtaining the breach form from the managers (“yellow sheet”) is also a challenge. So most “pigistes” give up their rights from the beginning.

Beyond these social rights, “pigistes” have difficulty enforcing labour rights, in terms of wage levels, respect for collective labour agreements. As a matter of fact, there is a wage scale for magazines, but it is merely indicative, and not followed by whole ranges of the media. Price

per page (1500 characters) varies strongly amongst print media, around a 60-euro professional reference (stable for 15 years), which is not mandatory however (Cazard et al, 2007, p. 165). But in magazines, you can go down to 45 euros (or even less in the least prestigious ones), 35 to 45 euros in free newspapers, 30 euros in the local press. In small businesses, employing only a few journalists, or in emerging media, especially in web-sites, the price per page is lower, and can reach 15 euros or even sometimes being free (in the hope of a future pay or of a mere access to the profession). More generally, several experienced “pigistes” have reported a downward trend in nominal prices per article. The usual prices have not increased, but in addition, some companies have openly reduced wages levels, especially for their new contributors.

More importantly, the official payment through the legal form of “pige” is actually much more limited than the number of “pigistes” usually recorded. In fact, there are officially 6300 “pigistes” having a press card issued by the CCIJP (if we distinguish them from the 1000 fixed-term contract journalists which are often mixed with in the public figures). But amongst contributing members to the supplementary pension fund of the media (and entertainment) area (Audiens), there are only 4400 mere “pigistes” (who do not contribute in parallel as employees in this fund), earning the equivalent of half the minimum-wage level, and even 2600 reaching the amount of the minimum wage. This means that amongst people working as freelance journalists, even those well-integrated and well-paid, having a press card as “pigistes” in a broad sense (6300), only a limited part (around a half) of them are paid regularly through the legal format of the “pige”, which entails contribution to Audiens. This discrepancy is also evidence of the significant part of other wage systems (even if they may be declared as “piges” in CCIJP forms).

Contrary to a common statement in France, the “pige” system has declined then, both qualitatively, in terms of access to rights, and quantitatively, in terms of share of unstable journalists officially paid by “piges”. Therefore, one must distinguish between the method of payment in itself (“pige” in the strict meaning) and the way to exercise the occupation of journalist (“pigisme” broadly defined). This system, which is sometimes considered in France as a specialised elite, autonomous and well-integrated into the profession, corresponds actually more and more to insecure forms of employment or “precarious work”. In fact, other types of employment contracts - less favorable - or commercial, have been widespread in France for about ten years.

### *The raise of fixed-term contracts*

“Fixed-term contracts” (contrats à durée déterminée, CDD in french) were introduced by the January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1979 Law. It applied initially only to temporary replacement of an employee, temporary increase in activity, and seasonal work, thus excluding the press. The July 12<sup>th</sup> 1990 Law extended the scope of the fixed-term contracts, including professions, and introduced a new kind of “customary” CDD in a variety of sectors, including performing arts and some media (as radio and TV), where they are considered as usual practice. These contracts can then be indefinitely extended in order to avoid the mandatory “precariousness bonus” (10 % of the amount of wages for ordinary fixed-term contracts). The 2008 law also multiplies the grounds for such contracts and allows to use their use for executive staff - including journalists -, through “defined-object” CDD, whose duration and possibility of repetition are widened. Generally speaking, these laws assume that labour flexibility will reduce unemployment, and strengthen workforce and the competitiveness of business. Replacing stable situations by unstable jobs, and the windfall effects it creates, is either perceived as a secondary issue, or hidden.

In fact, fixed-term contracts, either ordinary or “customary”, have expanded in media newsrooms since the end of the 1990s, after their – regulated – spreading in artistic occupations (1998 agreement). Many cases have been brought to Labour Court, Appeal and Cassation Courts, while case law has evolved over time.

Among the holders of the press card (CCIJP), we can distinguish among those broadly classified as “pigistes”, those who reported “wages” but not “piges” on file card application. They comprise in fact fixed-term-contract journalists. As a result, we noticed a strong increase in their number, from 38 in 2000, 529 in 2005, to 1,000 in 2009.

The realities which CDD refer to, are very disparate: the term can be a few hours to eighteen months or even more in “defined object” CDD. For example, radio and public-service television operate in a dual manner, with a core of permanent employees in the one hand, and a large pool of CDD, on the other hand, who are registered in the “planning” after a strict selection, working throughout a vast area for years, without any security to be later hired (Okas, 2007). In the print press, the concrete uses of CDD vary greatly. In the trade press, part-time jobs are sometimes proposed, for instance for “desk” or layout work. In the daily regional press, short term contracts of one or two days, which were used as stopgap solutions, seem not to be in use anymore, because of the lawsuits lodged by employees to requalify their contracts as permanent ones. Nonetheless, most of the contracts in that sector remain short (from a few days to a few weeks or sometimes months). They are used to replace employees who are off or missing, but the unoccupied phases between, will reduce the global income of the job keepers as much.

We must grant that CDD contracts ensure a formal integration in the salaried-employee world, bring the welfare of collective Labour agreements, provide access to some labour rights, and even sometimes to a “precariousness bonus” of 10 % of the wages. But many differences remain in comparison to permanent employees, regarding working conditions (compulsory mobility and availability; lower position in the newsroom), and social rights (problems to apply to seniority rise, trip expenses refund, lunch vouchers...). More generally, very short-term contracts correspond to stronger kinds of work discontinuity and insecurity, which approximate flexible work (*Regards sociologiques*, 2006) or “liberal workforce” described by Rémy Caveng about individual contractors in polling institutes (Caveng, 2011). At the other end of the spectrum, long-term contracts form a first partial stabilization, which is sometimes even harder to bear.

In any case, they remain often quite unseen, first in news organizations, where their situation is trivialized, and second in the professional arena, where they are not visible as a category, either in the CCIJP data or in the social views of trade-unions. Even cheaper and more unseen forms of employment are used by media organizations, through state-aided contracts.

### ***A confusing series of state-aided contracts and internships***

Many media organizations use a wide range of measures, work-study contracts, internships, state-aided contracts, to complement their workforce at lower cost. These subsidized measures are intended to promote the integration of young or unemployed people into working life, but this aim is hardly ever shared by managers.

Work-study contracts, including apprenticeships and vocational training, are intended provide mixed training, both in a school or a university and in a company, to applicants. Thus, organizations benefit from well-skilled employees, for a long period but part-time, for wages lower than the legal minimum, that means a low level in a qualified sector as the Press. Some newsrooms use permanently “sandwich-course” employees to fill certain positions, like desk editing.

More generally, internships have increased in media, and tend to replace more and more often working positions. All journalists interviewed in the survey said they had completed internships during and immediately after their degree. Beyond thirteen schools officially recognized in the collective agreement, 69 courses are listed by the Press Occupations Observatory. But we can add any other training courses that combine journalism and communication with various titles, which may be public, held in universities or private, held in specialized schools. In addition, some students in university or pursuing technological degrees in Information and communication, or even in other specialties, do traineeships in the media. Overall, a study by the Ministry of Culture (Lutinier et al, 2011) counted 110 courses in communication, and 41,991 students in 2008 (against 26 511 in 1998, rising by 58.4% in ten years). An increasing share of these students have to do traineeships in third-year degree, first and second year of masters programs, and a fraction of them practice in media companies. Even if it is difficult to measure the phenomenon precisely, many jobs are occupied by all these work-study contracts or traineeships, this issue is being disregarded by professional organizations and authorities.

Additionally, some media organizations, having a status of association, can recruit state-aided contracts, aimed at social and occupational reintegration of jobseekers. In particular, alternative-movement magazines are often associations, under the law of 1901, which allows them to benefit from subsidized contracts, including “contrats d’avenir” (26 hours per week), or “contrats d’accompagnement dans l’emploi” (between 20 and 35 hours per week). These are paid at the level of hourly minimum wage, thus resulting in very low levels of income (615 euros for 20 hours, 800 euros for 26 hours). In this type of press, low wages combine with forms of activist involvement in favor of free information or critical journalism, and are justified by the precarious economic situation of these newspapers.

Beyond the two traditional forms of unstable work in journalism, the “pige”, which is traditional and profession-specific on the one hand, and fixed-term or special contracts, increasing for the last fifteen years as in other areas, on the other hand, new methods of payment, of a commercial nature, have grown in recent years.

### ***The extension of payment as author or “auto-entrepreneur”, a switch towards independent freelancing and service delivery***

Payment by author royalties or invoices issued by journalists having an “auto-entrepreneur” status, is spreading rapidly in the media.

Indeed, the use of author status was already common in some sectors of the press, particularly in the magazine and specialized press. There is a porosity between some areas of publishing and the media sector. For example, between writing a part of a travel guide and an article on the same subject for a magazine belonging to the same group, the difference is small. Firms integration also often confuses sectors and responsibilities. More and more employers in the press industry offer payment by autor royalties. But the journalists concerned are not always aware of its consequences: they must pay themselves afterwards social security contributions (none being paid by employers), and benefit only from a very limited social security, or none if they do not reach a minimum contribution threshold. This does not entitle them to any social protection systems for old age, illness, unemployment... In fact, payment as author comes close to self-employment, freelancing in the proper sense of the term. It turns to a commercial service delivery logic, instead of a logic of employment contract, of labour relationship. But this particular status remained specific to some sectors of the press and strongly regulated.

“Auto-entrepreneur” status brought about a rapid spread of invoice-payment. It was established by the economy modernizing Law of the 4<sup>th</sup> august 2008. It has introduced a social and fiscal tax of 23% of the sales figures (up to 32 000 per year for a service activity), the opportunity to opt for the “micro-enterprise” regime which enables registrants not to be liable to VAT. It has given the possibility to use one’s private home as business premises, and provided business tax exemption for three years. This law was intended to promote emerging new activities , by simplifying declaration procedures of small self-entrepreneurs or freelancers considerably, and reducing their contribution rates. However, even reduced, these contributions become at the direct expense of declarants, and are payable at the end of the current quarter, often coming as a surprise. Although journalism is not officially part of the list of professionals who can practice under this statute, in practice, many media try to use this system. Because of the number of candidates to enter the profession, and the imbalance in the labour market, they often find people accepting these conditions. And wage levels are often very low then, down to 5 to 10 euros per sheet. To illustrate, in an interview, a journalist mentioned a payment of 350 euros a month for a half-time job paid by “auto-entrepreneur” invoices.

This method of payment enables (media) business to avoid completely labour law and collective agreements, since it rests on a commercial but not employment relationship. Then neither working-hour rules, nor minimum wage, nor social rights of employees (health insurance, unemployment protection, pension...) apply. It is therefore not only reducing rights or simply increasing social insecurity or precariousness – as in other non-standard forms of employment, but a complete swing towards independent status, where such issues are not at stake anymore. The issue is no more the level of protection for employees but the very bases of work relationship, which are different in kind.

We finally ascertain a proliferation of non-standard, insecure employment status of journalists, the traditional “pige”, regulated and protected, constituting a more and more restricted core, while other forms of employment or payment are soaring – fixed-term, work-study and state-aided contracts, traineeships, and above all author and “auto-entrepreneur” status, in recent years. What are the reasons for these changes?

## **Factors explaining expansion of casual and freelance work in journalism**

Different levels of analysis must be combined to understand the development of non-standard, casual or freelance work in the media, supply and demand for labour, more and more unequal, the role of media industry employers and journalist trade-unions. Furthermore, the structural effects of changes in media markets must be taken into account.

### ***Pressure from new entrants and applicants for journalism***

the general attractiveness of journalism, which is a greatly esteemed occupation in our society, is paradoxically a great factor for labour instability. Journalism is considered as a noble “vocation”, prestigious, socially usefull, creative, having a bright appearance including meeting many people, permanent novelty, autonomy, prestige...

Indeed, all training courses in journalism, whether officially registered or not, receive a very high and increasing number of applications. Only a small minority of these candidates will have access to registered journalism schools (18% of new press card holders), but all the others will grow the ranks of all the other training courses, from the most serious ones to new ad hoc small study courses.

Afterwards, all these young applicants for journalism, and less young ones, trying to branch out or to retrain, seek to enter the labour market. Some of them, particularly the best trained ones, know the professional rules of the job market : payment by “pige” or fixed-term contracts, standard wage levels, applying labour and social rights. Even those who know these rules and are already integrated, are not always able to enforce them and often have to compromise. But people seeking to enter the profession, or those who remain at its margins, cannot afford demanding compliance with these rules, and often are not aware of them. They often accept very bad working and wage conditions, in the mere hope of getting a foothold in a newsroom, of including it in their CV and then reaching other jobs. For instance, many of the youngest and most poorly skilled accept wages of 5 to 10 euros per sheet, and some of them even do quasi-free work (earning only travel expenses, a DVD or a place for a press screening). And it's always the hope to reach that desired profession that justifies these choices, these renunciations, a false hope most of the time. Those who have entered at this level and actually work at the margins, will never advance towards upper media areas. Nonetheless, the existence of that downgraded segment and the pressure of job applicants, have ripple effects on all sectors of the profession, where working and wage conditions tend to deteriorate.

### ***Structural changes in media market: Deregulated emerging media and crisis of the Press***

On the other hand, media companies are undergoing fundamental changes, as a result of the emergence of new media that are not covered by existing collective agreements and provide much lower work and pay conditions, and the crisis of the press which greatly reduces the stable sectors of the job market.

Many new media have actually developed over the past ten years. There are 24-hour-news channels, and all special or general-interest channels that are broadcast by cable, satellite package or digital terrestrial television. 24-hour news channels hire many journalists, but only a few are permanent, and remote coverage is carried out mainly by freelancers, who also merge reporter, cameraman, soundman and editor roles, for much lower wages than major chains do. Other channels of special, general or regional interest, employ few journalists, often relatively low-paid - even as permanent employees .

More importantly, Internet industry has developed, offering the poorest employment conditions, due to participation of amateurs and unpaid passionate persons, and especially difficulties in finding a “business model” to make trade websites profitable. The number of websites offering - informative, practical, commercial often mixed – content boomed. Some were launched by existing media - newspapers, radio or television channels - or within structured media groups, and jobs were then created within editorial offices, often paid a little less but under the same or nearly same status. By contrast, small “pure player” websites provide the worst work and wage conditions, especially those created by an enthusiast, who himself started on a voluntary basis, or in very small structures where “start-up” spirit entails appealing to promises of future success, and a sense of community in which it is difficult to claim “rights” and wages...

All these factors conduced to create a quite deregulated media labour sector, eluding agreements negotiated on an employer/employee basis, in each press industry branch (national, regional, magazine...), in each type of radio (national, local, commercial, associative ...) and in each kind of television (public or private), and even overriding French journalists' collective bargaining agreements.

On the other hand, the core professional spaces, which are more regulated and better esteemed, have gotten into serious economic trouble in recent years, with a sharp drop in sales

and advertising revenue, and downsizing, redundancy plans, collapse of newspapers... Namely, the French press as a whole, reported a fall in sales of 30% in constant-price euros from 2000 to 2011, including 7.8% in 2009, 3.2% in 2010 and 1.9% in 2011 (DGMIC, 2011). The decline over the whole period is nearly 40% in the technical and trade press, and the general information and political press. There are failures of newspapers (France-Soir), takeovers and mergers inducing downsizing or closure of local teams (especially in regional newspapers, undergoing a strong concentration process), saving and voluntary-redundancy plans, even in larger newspapers, weather facing economic difficulties or not at that time (respectively Le Monde and Libération one the one hand, Ouest-France on the other)... If the “crisis” of the press has for a long time been a meaningless cliché, a lamenting speech masking the development of other forms of media, it nevertheless became a reality over the past ten years.

Structural factors related to changes in the economy of the media therefore impact the working conditions of journalists and partly explain the aim of compressing wage costs and increasing flexibility.

### ***Search for flexibility from media directors***

Using the various non-standard employment systems is a way for media employers to cope with the difficulties mentioned above, to reduce labour cost, compared to permanent employees, and to pursue greater flexibility.

Search for flexibility takes different forms depending on kinds of media, each having its own rationale and constraints, managed in a more flexible, versatile way with intermittent or freelance workers. In regional newspapers, as well as in local radio and television, the main challenge is continuity and planning management. Fixed-term contracts are used to replace salaried employees, for either planned or unplanned absences. For many newspapers and magazines, the aim is to outsource peripheral tasks (foreign correspondents, regional correspondents), particular specialities (theatrical criticism in some cities ...), or even regular columns (everyday life, health...). Some magazines and trade press, even allocate all news coverage tasks to external collaborators – keeping only a managerial staff inside. In some media organizations, this outsourcing involves subcontracting columns or features to news or communication agencies, which will search and employ themselves editors (usually under less favourable status and wage levels).

Alongside this search for greater flexibility and fluidity in news-production management, the purpose is to compress or reduce wage bills, first by limiting the number of permanent employees and secondly by reducing payments to external contributors. While in the early 1980s, the first growth of “pige” was relatively regulated, lucrative, and combined to specialization and/or career perspectives, the recent expansion of non-standard work in the 2000s has gone through deregulated systems (largely invisible, confused in CCIJP press card data) along with a downward trend in wages. Employers have clearly substituted payment by “pige” by fixed-term contracts or payment as author, and for three or four years increasingly payment as auto-entrepreneur. In this context, specialization or integration outlooks become weaker and weaker, replaced by a simple rationale for flexible workforce pool and cost containment. The dualism between secure and insecure, permanent and precarious, or even independent, workers gets stronger.

### ***The troubles for unions and associations in positioning themselves***



Facing these logics of insecurity, deregulation and commercialization of work in journalism, French unions in the field and associations of “pigistes” have difficulties in responding. While most of them denounce employment “insecurity” or “precariousness” in the profession and seek to advise and support “pigistes” to enforce their rights, they absolutely do not manage to counter the increase of insecure, casual and independent work.

First, there are in France six unions of journalists, all being now related to national trade-unions. The major one is the National Union of Journalists (SNJ), created in 1918 as an autonomous organization, gaining a majority of support in the press industry. It has played part in the foundation of the “Group of Ten” (1981) and the trade-union “Solidaires” (1998). It received 51% of votes in the last elections to the CCIJP in 2012. Other journalists’ unions are respectively members of the main national confederations: Confédération générale du travail, Confédération française démocratique du travail, Force Ouvrière, Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens, and Confédération générale des cadres.

Despite the differences and discrepancies between these unions, most of them take a clear stand against casualization and insecurity of employment, and provide information and legal advice to non-permanent journalists, including their defence in industrial tribunals. Nonetheless, they appear powerless to counteract the deregulation of the labour market and the switch toward a logic of service delivery. Firstly, most union members are themselves permanent employees, while non-permanent journalists hardly engage themselves in organizations, and even less self-employed people, for which it is excluded for statutory reasons. Secondly, even standing together with them, activists who are themselves permanent employees, do not always realize the deterioration of working conditions of non-permanent workers and sometimes focus more on internal staff issues (working conditions, wages, restructuring firms ...).

More importantly, the rise of precarious or freelance work is implicitly perceived as either a fatality, affecting all sectors and that it is impossible or vain to oppose, or as a normal part of work evolutions that it is worth accompanying and managing (flexsecurity). In all cases, conditions of employment and methods of payment are seen as being under the responsibility of employers. Apart from a few legal re-characterizations of labour contracts, obtaining a hiring decision of previous non-permanent journalists is very unusual. More generally, we can notice that the balance of power and industrial relations within companies, in the media and elsewhere, are more and more unfavourable to employees for twenty years, and that unions hold very little influence on labour market development.

Associations and groups of “pigistes” are ambivalent on the issue of labour status. On the one hand, they are for the “defense” of labour and social-protection rights attached to “pige”, arising from its assimilation to an employment contract. On the other hand, most of them support flexibility, autonomy considered as inherent to their “independent” way of working, criticizing intern (“shift”) journalists, identifying salaried employment with dependancy, submission, not to worker protection. Conversely, they tend to disclaim or even deny the insecurity, the sort of precariousness of their status. They even make attractive and promote market-driven management methods of freelance activity, prompting their members to use accounting tools to estimate working time, costs and expenses, and to quantify and restrict the work time on a feature or an article to these data. They are imbued with a deep ambivalence between labour rights defense and promotion of self-employment.

For all these reasons, the increase of job insecurity and the conversion into a commercial relationship, promoted by employers, is hardly curbed or opposed by journalists, it remains mostly invisible or hidden, unions committing poorly this industrial and political issue.

To sum up, increasing non-standard employment derives from imbalances between supply and demand for labour, due both to the pressure of job applicants and to recruitment freeze or depletion, and along with structural changes in the media market, which have contracted well-

regulated employment in favour of poorly-regulated sectors. Media employers do search for flexibility and cost containment, while journalists' unions are in trouble to take a position. It is then interesting to consider the challenges and broader effects of these changes on the profession.

### **Issues and impact of increasing non-standard or freelance forms of employment**

The expansion of non-standard and insecure work and self-employment in journalism raises a series of general questions about how to conceive these developments, the outline of the profession, the “autonomy” of journalists and news processing.

#### ***Flexibility, insecurity or self-employment?***

The debate between flexibility and insecurity is a traditional question in France. Some people emphasize the positive aspects of new forms of employment, named “atypical”, in a neutral way, in French statistics; the others underline the negative aspects. On the one hand, a greater fluidity of the labour market is deemed as necessary, since inherent to the “new spirit of capitalism” and the work “by projects” (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999). On the other hand, it is considered a ground for discontinuity and harmful insecurity for employees (*Regards sociologiques*, 2006, ARSS, 2008...). These theoretical positions refer ultimately to political opposition between the point of view of companies or employers and that of the employees.

In the field of journalism and artistic professions, this opposition is particularly strong. Some approaches consider artistic work as flexible, uncertain work in itself (Menger, 2011 and 2009), journalism as an uncertain labour market, highlighting the freedom potential of this way of work (Pilmis, 2008). Other research emphasizes the increasing insecurity and “precariousness” of intellectual work, becoming a nebula of depreciated and exploited activities and business (Rambach, 2009 Moureau, 2007), the legal deregulation of salaried employment, the exploitation of flexible work, in polling organizations for instance (Caveng, 2011), and the consequences of “precarious” journalism on news processing (Accardo, 1998). Béatrice Appay defines “precariousness” as “a state of dependence, submission to approval and confinement in imposed forms of instability”, marked by destabilization of time organization and generalized competition, affecting all employees, either permanent or non-permanent. This leads to an “individualizing process that puts pressure on people, making them responsible for their own work duty development” (Appay, 2005). Rémy Caveng also highlights the paradox of flexible work: “a form of employment that can be defined as economically “liberal” (market-driven) insofar as mobilization and submission of players are not obtained by reducing freedom and uncertainty, as in the Fordist model, but on the contrary by their maximization”. In this system, “market risks are passed on to employees, accountable for their own employment” (Caveng, 2011, p. 140).

Nowadays, this problem is overwhelmed by new challenges of self-employment, shift to service delivery, though poorly reckoned with. What is the meaning of this shift? What conceptual tools may we use to understand it? The same as those for analyzing work, employment relations, flexibility and insecurity? Or should we develop new concepts? Does this type of activity imply greater autonomy and greater dependence?

Given the dearth of studies on the subject, we can rely on broader analyses of labour relationships and their social regulation. Social welfare makes paradoxically salaried people self-sufficient and then “autonomous” both toward employers and in the way of conducting of their lives (Castels, 1995). Social regulation of employment relations then ensures a certain

individual “freedom”. By contrast, self-employment, linked with sub-contracting arrangements, paradoxically reinforces dependency, submission to the leading contractor (Appay, 2005). The concepts of “independence” and “autonomy” are particularly complex, since in social terms, they turn into their opposite for individuals.

### ***Redefining the boundaries of journalism?***

Usually, surveys on journalists have relied on data from the CCIJP, so they have strongly underestimated the scope of occupational insecurity, by taking into account only the most integrated core of the profession (IFP, 1991, 2001, CRAP, 2001). Research works are usually based on these figures without examining, questioning them, or even knowing their producing methods and criteria. These data count approximately 37,000 journalists, about 20% of them being “pigistes”. But first, this figure combines the fixed-term employees and freelancers (respectively 3% and 17%), and most importantly, it does not take into account all other forms of insecurity, such as unemployment, state-aided contracts, internship, professionalized local correspondents, which should also be added people working part-time, which is an indirect factor of insecurity (20%). Despite their porosity, the flow of individuals among these statuses and the problem of holding various ones at the same time, we have assessed the weight of these different classes. For this purpose, we have compared the data of the French “Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques” (INSEE) on the category of journalists in the system of “occupations and socio-professional categories” (professions et catégories socioprofessionnelles, PCS), with those of the CCIJP, those of the supplementary pension organization Audiens about their contributors, and those of the French employment agency about the national center for reclassification of journalists. Here is the personal calculation we have reached.

#### **Estimated figures of non-standard forms of employment among all journalists, either holding a press card or not (main status according to detailed INSEE data on PCS 352A)**

	CCIJP		Total journalistes	
	Effectifs	Pourcentage	Effectifs	Pourcentage
Permanents	28 300	76%	30 000	62%
CDD	1 000	3%	3 500	7%
Pigistes	6 300	17%	10 000	21%
Demandeurs d'emploi	1 400	4%	2 000	4%
Corresp. Locaux pro			3 000	6%
<b>Soit instables</b>	<b>8 700</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>18 500</b>	<b>38%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>37 000</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>48 500</b>	<b>100%</b>

Sources : CCIJP, INSEE et évaluations croisées personnelles

This research therefore induces to redefine the scope of journalism, from 37 000 to 48 500 people carrying out such an occupation, approximately 38% of them under insecure forms of work (instead of 20% usually admitted according to the CCIJP figures, 24% including job-seekers, which are rarely taken into account). Among these 18 500 “insecure journalists”, 47% hold a press card and 53% work without having one. This calculation results roughly in doubling the number of “insecure journalists”, including all people performing journalistic work in media companies, and considered as such by the INSEE. This vast constellation is highly stratified, with a sharp hierarchical ranking and a wide gap between the core and the margins of the profession. There are very heterogeneous wage levels, ranging, according to testimonies collected by interviews, from 2000 or sometimes 3000 euros for the oldest and most specialized freelancers, to about 600 euros per month, half the level of the French

minimum wage, for new entrants, poorly integrated into the profession, some ending up to receive a minimum-income support (basic earned income supplement or additional revenue according to the situation).

The overall representations of journalism are hence modified, leading to broaden its scope and definition, in order to get more insight into this sharply differentiated constellation. It includes very different areas, revolving around a professionally integrated core, well-regulated and well-paid, with concentric lines where employment status, remuneration systems, access to labour and social security rights and wage levels are more and more deteriorating, the further you are from the centre, while taking different forms in each media sector.

### ***What “autonomy” for journalists?***

The challenge is to understand the effects of these work systems and payment methods on journalist work, and first to consider the issue of their autonomy. We have already seen that for employees in general, self-employment might at first seem to be a guarantee of autonomy, but it often implies increasing dependency to contractors, being employers in fact even if not in law. For journalists, the temptation to transmute and show off their insecure situation, into a positive value or resource is very common, because the “pige” is often presented as a “noble” form of exercise of the profession, non-routine, more specialized or better paid. This situation may have existed for some freelancers in the 1990s, but it is actually more and more uncommon nowadays. For example, among journalists interviewed, some had reached this level of specialization and integration, but they were then forty years old, working for fifteen years or so, while among later generations, very few people got close to this situation. In addition, even for the most integrated journalists, risks of falling remain significant (because of the difficulties even in the same precarious survival of a number of titles), and the overall level of pay tends to deteriorate.

But even for these journalists, bearing a kind of insecurity but well integrated, and above all for those who bear a stronger, more immediate insecurity or precariousness, should we not further question the very notion of autonomy? What is their leeway when it comes to making and asserting their own editorial choices facing the demands of the management? And what is their power, their position in relation to news sources?

In the case of journalists, these questions are crucial. In fact, since the institutionalization of the profession in the 1935 Act, if journalists are considered employees, which implies a subordinate relationship, their autonomy is nonetheless protected by different institutions. For example, the “conscience clause” and the “transfer clause” allow them to resign while receiving redundancy compensation, in the event of disagreement about the newspaper policy, change in editorial policy, or change in ownership. Afterwards, the assertion of the autonomy of journalists in news organizations has been strengthened, thanks to union presence, proclamation of specific rights and duties, or the setting up of editors’ societies. Within news organizations, journalists have managed to build a system combining wage relation and relative autonomy, the first element securing the relationship, while conventions of professionalism, hierarchy of information, gave a strong base to editors.

For their part, “pigistes” or freelancers are farther and farther from this framework. They must clearly meet the requirements of managers, primarily for their paper to be accepted, and more generally to go on working. Except for very few well-known experts on specific topics, they can hardly counter or renegotiate the demands and expectations of their directors. This may affect the quality of information, when these expectations are based on unquestioned assumptions or social stereotypes.

The question of journalists' autonomy is especially at stake vis-à-vis institutional sources and political authorities. Journalistic work involves taking a certain distance from the discourses of sources, regaining control over the presentation and organization of news, to insert it into a coherent editorial framework. This entails assuming potential conflict with authorities that be, which can remain latent or sometimes emerge as criticism, veiled threats and even trial.

But “pigistes” and especially other non-standard employed journalists are not able, in most cases, to bear this conflict situation, as they cannot rely on the strength of their newspaper. Insecure statuses deepen therefore the asymmetry between journalists and institutional sources. For example, permanent journalists can much more easily cope with complaints of news sources, answer to readers' letters, explain their stance to management staff, resist requests to publish corrections, and gain support from management board in those kind of situations... But journalists working in insecure conditions are much less likely do so, because of their distance to newsrooms, their lower proximity to chief editors, and mainly their fear of not being hired anymore. In fact, most of them have a tendency to internalize their remote or subordinate position in the relationships with news sources.

In the end, work autonomy appears therefore much lower for casual journalists, especially self-employed ones, much less protected in their relationship to media companies, both in terms of their position within newsrooms, their relationship to the hierarchy, and in their relation to institutional sources. This brings up questions about the consequences of these developments on the content of news.

### ***What effects on news processing and media content?***

How is it possible to study concrete effects of insecure, casual or self-employed work on news content? This would require carrying out a systematic content analysis of the editorial production of permanent and non-permanent journalists. This would also entail having a list of the names of all employees and their status. But in newspapers, first not all items are signed, and then some are the result of a collaboration of several persons. Despite these difficulties, such a study is planned in a future research. In addition, the increasing insecurity in the profession has not only an impact on those who live this actual situation, but also on other employees and the whole journalistic field. How can we gain a broader understanding of these developments? This is the broader question that will guide the new research, which is to be carried out in 2013-2014.

The aim is to test the working hypothesis of a development of “communication journalism” (Charron et al., 2005) or “demand driven” journalism (Champion, 2012). Are journalists not becoming a mere cog in the communication wheel, ever more fluid and also constraining? Is their room for manoeuvre and their autonomy in news processing not reducing? Does not it convert news into a commodity like any other, that is simply worth circulating?

### ***Bibliography***

Accardo Alain et al., 1998, *Journalistes précaires*, Bordeaux, Le Mascaret, 1998.

*Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 2008, « L'insécurité comme condition de travail » (numéro spécial), n°175.

Appay Béatrice, 2005, *La dictature du succès. Le paradoxe de l'autonomie contrôlée et de la précarisation*, Paris, L'Harmattan (coll. Logiques sociales).

- Aubert Clémence, 2007, « La division du travail au sein d'un organe de presse : modes et usages des formes d'emploi », Documents de Travail du Centre d'Economie de la Sorbonne, Université Paris1.
- Barbier Jean-Claude, 2005, « La précarité, une catégorie française à l'épreuve de la comparaison internationale », *Revue française de sociologie*, vol. 46 n°2, avril-juin, pp. 351-371.
- Bresson Maryse, 2007, *Sociologie de la précarité*, Paris, Armand Colin (coll. 128).
- Castel Robert, 1995, *Les métamorphoses de la question sociale*, Paris, Fayard.
- Castel Robert, 2003, *L'insécurité sociale. Qu'est-ce qu'être protégé ?*, Paris, Le Seuil (coll. La république des idées).
- Caveng Rémy, 2011, *Un laboratoire du « salariat libéral ». Les instituts de sondages*, Paris, Editions du Croquant.
- Cazard Xavier, Nobécourt Pascale, 2007, *Guide de la pige*, Paris, Entrecor éditeurs.
- Centre de recherches administratives et politiques, 2001, *Devenir journalistes, Sociologie de l'entrée sur le marché du travail*, Paris, La Documentation française.
- Charron Jean, Brin Colette, De Bonville Jean, 2005, *Nature et transformations du journalisme. Théorie et recherches*, Laval Québec, Presses de l'université Laval.
- Cingolani Patrick, 2005, *La précarité*, Paris, PUF, coll. « Que sais-je ? ».
- Dejours Christophe, 2009, *Souffrance en France. La banalisation de l'injustice sociale*, Paris Le Seuil, coll. « Points Essais » (1ère éd. 1998).
- Direction générale des médias et des industries culturelles, 2011, *Presse écrite – chiffres clés 2011 – enquête rapide*, ministère de la culture et de la communication.
- Frisque Cégolène et Saitta Eugénie, 2011, *Journalistes de la précarité. Formes d'instabilité et modes d'adaptation*, CRAPE, rapport pour le Département des études, de la prospective et des statistiques - ministère de la culture et de la communication, MSHB.
- Institut français de presse, 1991, *Les journalistes français en 1990. Radiographie d'une profession*, Paris, La documentation française.
- Institut français de presse, 2001, *Les journalistes français à l'aube de l'an 2000. Profils et parcours*, Paris, Editions Panthéon-Assas.
- Le Champion Rémy (ed.), 2012, *Journalisme 2.0. Nouvelles formes journalistiques, nouvelles compétences*, Paris, La Documentation française.
- Lutinier Bruno, Dietsch Bruno et Sotto Marie-Françoise, 2011, « Formations artistiques, culturelles et en communication en 2009 : 155 000 étudiants dans des filières très diversifiées », *Culture Chiffres*, 2011-5, avril.
- Neveu Eric, 2009, *Sociologie du journalisme*, Paris, La Découverte, coll. Repères.
- Nies Gerd et Pedersini Roberto, 2003, *Les journalistes free-lances dans l'industrie médiatique européenne*, rapport de la Fédération européenne des journalistes.
- Okas Lionel, 2007, « Faire de nécessité vertu : Pratiques de la précarité des journalistes dans deux entreprises d'audiovisuel public », *Sociétés contemporaines*, n°65, p. 83 à 111.
- Paugam Serge, 2009, *Le salarié de la précarité*, Paris, PUF (1<sup>ère</sup> éd. : 2000).
- Pilmis Olivier, 2008, *L'organisation de marchés incertains. Sociologie économique des marchés de la pige et de l'art dramatique*, thèse de doctorat de sociologie sous la direction de Pierre-Michel Menger (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales).
- Rambach A. et M., 2001, *Les intellos précaires*, Paris, Fayard.
- Rambach A. et M., 2009, *Les nouveaux intellos précaires*, Paris, Stock.

*Regards sociologiques*, 2006, « Précarité et flexibilité salariale» (numéro spécial), n° 32, décembre.

Ruellan Denis, 1993, *Le professionnalisme du flou*, Grenoble, Presses universitaires de Grenoble.

Schudson Michael, 2003, *Sociology of News*, NY, Norton & Cy.