

# The imaginaries of the future journalists in France

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**Abstract:** This article analyses how differently future journalists perceive the professional and social realities of journalism according to their gender and socio-economic background. The study is based on two methods. The first method is the empirical analysis of the social features of the students of the schools of journalism of the public universities of Strasbourg, Bordeaux, Tours and Marseille, at the start of their studies. The second method is a series of in-depth interviews that investigate the family history, values and perceptions about journalism of the students of the Institute of Journalism of Bordeaux. The results show that journalism students are not a homogeneous group. Their social backgrounds are remarkably different and greatly influence their perception of the profession of journalism.

**Keywords:** Imaginaries of journalists; journalistic identity; ideals and motivations of journalism students; future journalists in France.

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## 1. Introduction

In a context marked by the profound transformations that have occurred in the field of journalism as a consequence of the technological changes, the impact of the economic crisis, the unemployment and precarious work, it is important to investigate the

features of the future journalists, how they perceive the profession and its role in society, and what are their ideal references.

Faced with the loss of credibility in the profession of journalism as a result of the collusion between journalists and the political and economic powers, it is imperative to determine: What role do journalism students believe they should play in the future? What relations do students think journalists should establish with the political and economic powers? How do students think they can recover readers and the public trust again? What are the dominant values, professional beliefs and myths of reference of the new generation of journalists? In a country like France, with a journalistic tradition that inherited a literary and opinion press, with a critical tradition towards the media, how should journalism be reinvented?

Young people and journalism students are not a homogeneous social category. Their social origin, age, gender, and previous training are factors of differentiation which this study aims to highlight through the stories told by the interviewed students.

The study is based on the hypothesis that contrary to the dominant belief that journalism schools are what define the ideas of the future journalists (Lafargue and Marchetti, 2011; Le Champion, 2010: 86-103), there are other sociological, economic and cultural factors that play a decisive role. This study considers that student's family media habits, cultural practices and ideological heritage as well as the imaginaries typical of today's young generation are variables that must be taken into account.

## 2. Methods

This study is based on two methods. The first method is a synchronous and quantitative analysis based on a survey questionnaire applied to students recently accepted to four schools of journalism that are part of the French public university system [1]: the EPJ of Tours, the CUEJ of Strasbourg, the EJC of Marseilles, and the IJBA of Bordeaux. A total of 115 students answered the survey questionnaire, which was applied on their first-class day at the journalism schools in order to capture their first ideas about the profession. The second method, which aims to complement the previous work, is a diachronic and qualitative analysis of the in-depth interviews applied to a sample of thirteen students with different social backgrounds. The interviews investigated respondents' family history and its influence on their perceptions of the profession. The in-depth interviews were designed from an ethno-sociological perspective that is based on the narration of life stories (Bertaux, 2010). The interviews were conducted and recorded from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January, 2012, and all of them were based on the same questionnaire format.

The students selected to participate in the interviews are part of a cohort of 36 students coursing the first academic year of the master's programme in journalism (2012-13 academic year). The sample was selected based on the information shared by students in the admission form of the IJBA, which invites students to indicate the professional occupation and job category of their parents according to the nomenclature proposed in the current classification of France's National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE). This question was answered by all of the 36 students of the 2012-13 class.

In order to simplify the sample selection we classified the socio-professional occupations into four groups:

Group 1: Farmers, labourers, retail employees and unemployed people.

Group 2: Craftsmen, small-scale traders, technicians and public service employees.

Group 3: Public service managers, and education, health and public service intermediary staff.

Group 4: businessmen and liberal professions.

Three students representative of each group were selected. However, in order to get a deep understanding of the group 1, which is representative of the IJBA, but a minority in other schools of journalism, we carried out a fourth interview which increased the sample of interviewees to 13. The selection of respondents aimed to include both genders equally and was finally formed by 7 women and 6 men.

### **2.1. Theoretical framework. The imaginary and the paradigm of what people want to be**

The imaginary is described as one of the organising principles of the human conduct and according to Gaston Bachelard "humans are imaginative, they cannot study what they have not dreamed". In this sense, the imaginary is the bearer of moral energy, of the art of living. It frames or distorts the perception of the present world and imprints the contents of the thoughts it feeds and widens. Each individual experiences a combination of more or less rich imaginaries that form a plural map of strictly personal images (dreams), and cultural, professional and universal images (Wunenburger: 2011). The imaginary is built by endogenous elements that are characteristic of our memories and biography. It is also built by exogenous elements, by our ability to produce images, symbols and myths, which depend on the richness of our symbolic heritage which is conveyed by the education system and the media

technologies. From the perspective of psychoanalysis, the imaginary is a principle that reveals the personality traits, where the irrational sometimes hides.

Edgar Morin (2008: 88) highlights the conflict between the real and the imaginary. The latter is presented as an "antagonistic and complementary structure of what is called real". For Morin, the imaginary "is multiform and multidimensional" and "does not only draw what is possible and feasible, but also creates fantastic and impossible worlds". So "it can be shy or bold, depart only slightly from what is real, daring to overcome only the first censures, or can give in to the ecstasy of the instincts and the dreams".

Cornelius-Castoriadis (1975: 152-153) considers that the imaginary gives meaning to the actions, and is where the behaviours and motivations of individuals are concentrated. The imaginary is the space where the identity, the consciousness, and the representations are constructed. Moreover, the imaginary is where the desirable, the imaginable and the unthinkable emerge. In the words of Paul Ricoeur (1990), the imaginary allows people to see and imagine themselves as something else. Castoriadis goes beyond and considers that each "individual is dominated by an imaginary that is lived more realistically than the real thing". Therefore, the real thing is inseparable from the "real" dimension, and the virtual is inseparable from the imaginary. Castoriadis also points out that the function of the unconscious, which *supplies* the real elements to the imaginary, makes the imaginary independent and gives it the power to make decisions. The intrinsic willpower of the imaginary is affirmed in the "I should become". Likewise, the imaginary is where people's ideas of what they want to be professionally originate. In the imaginary, the "professional reality" is intertwined with the symbolic.

This study is based on the idea that individual conceptions are supported by a postulate of pluralism, which Cyril Lemieux (2000) defines as a "plurality of action logics", which underpins such phenomena as the sociological explanation of personality, which is built with elements from the social universe of origin, and the individual experience, subjectivity and autonomy. All individuals have personal inclinations (*habitus*, in the words of Bourdieu) that have existed long before their entry to a school of journalism (their interest for "street journalism", their social commitment, their desire to meet people, etc.). The investigation of students' life stories aims to understand the tendencies to action that motivate them.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Social origin

The social origin is one of the determining factors in the construction of the imaginary of the future journalists. The perceptions about the professional world are more virtual and romantic for those students whose family and social universe are disconnected from the world of journalism and therefore partially ignore the reality of the profession of which they will be part. However, the imaginary of those students whose family has a high social and cultural capital is more pragmatic, partly because they have already experienced the professional reality through multiple internships.

Of the sample of students only one reflects the social reproduction scheme of journalism, as his father and grandfather are journalists (group 4). His school career has been irregular and he has not been part of prestigious schools of the *Sciences Po* type. This insufficiency in school capital has been compensated with social capital. Thanks to family contacts this student has been able to multiply his internships in prestigious media, and has even signed a one-year contract with a large and very popular private radio station: *Europe 1*. His knowledge of the professional area, of what is real, has led him to develop a more defined career plan, a conformist thinking, and a less critical yet more ambitious mind-set than his classmates. His imaginary feeds from the family imaginary and is closer to the social reproduction. This student, who belongs to a dynasty of radio journalists, wants to build his professional career in the same radio station his father has worked and aims to occupy the same positions his father has occupied.

“Since I was little I have lived in an environment saturated by information and above all by the radio waves. In the past I listened to my father every morning presenting the news on the radio and the house was flooded with newspapers. And this has marked my spirit and that is why I chose this path”.

Another student from group 4 also has a relative working in the press, in *Le Figaro* newspaper, and this contact has allowed him to get an internship at this newspaper. The rest of the interviewed students do not have relatives working in the journalistic community. Students from humble backgrounds have made more educational efforts to build their imaginary. Most of them have a higher school capital than the students from the most privileged social categories. They already have a master's degree in another discipline, unlike the students with higher social and cultural capitals. Those who have been able to do their internship have only done so in the local and regional press.

The choice of the journalistic profession in groups 1 and 2 has not been motivated by their families, which are not interested in the production of information. Their choice has been motivated by their previous studies. "My parents do not have any idea of what it is to be a journalist. My mother has always supported me. They are proud of my choice. What they like is the public notoriety provided by this profession and the fact that it is an intellectual profession".

The values that these students claim to have inherited from their family differ with regards to the social origin. The students from groups 1 and 2, whose parents did not go to university, highlighted that the main values for them were work, solidarity and respect for others. In their imaginary, the culture of effort emerges as the reward of the republican ideal of the meritocracy: "work and work to get what we want", "we have to try our luck". Some of them are aware of their reduced opportunities in a profession which often operates by co-optation; however, their commitment and perseverance are their springboards to get a place in the profession: "we must find the means to succeed. I am aware that I do not have a literary culture, but at least I have the courage, commitment and ambition I inherited from my mother. We should always want more than what we have". However, their ambition is self-censored when they project their professional imaginary. They do not see themselves working in the Parisian press which is considered more elitist: "I want to work in the regional press. I don't see myself in Paris. In Paris there is a great deal of competition and journalists are more subjected to the pressures of the editorial line".

Another group 1 student, who lived in the humble neighbourhood of Vitriolle, admitted that nothing predestined him to want to be part of this profession: "My parents are not intellectual, in fact, they do not have studies. My grandparents, Italian immigrants, were illiterate, they could not read or write. But I have always been a good student. I have been able to study thanks to scholarships. When there were riots in my neighbourhood, many journalists went there to report what was happening. I saw them as artists. They came, filmed, interviewed people from the neighbourhood and were interested in what was going on, but left afterwards. That is when I decided I wanted to be a journalist".

In contrast, humility is the predominant value inherited by those students whose families have more economic resources. When there is a strong social and cultural capital everything is so evident that it is easier to be humble. "Being humble is essential. We are not specialised in anything. I am someone who gets surprised by everything, whether I know it or not. I have an outsider's view and I think this is a good quality to exercise this profession. It may seem silly because I come from a very rich environment but I give everything I have. Generosity is also an important value for my family".

This student, from the fourth group, was surprised to see students from diverse backgrounds at the IJBA: "My parents had the means to send me to other private journalism schools. Perhaps I am in no position to say this but it is very important to change my social environment. I do not want to be surrounded by students of a school that costs 10,000 euros a year. My parents sent me to a very expensive private school and I could have continued that path. I had never been trained in a social environment as diverse as the IJBA. I have always been in private schools, in a closed universe, all people there do the same". On the other hand, honesty and generosity are the core values shared by all the interviewed students from the different social groups.

### **3.2. Social sensitivity and commitment**

The group 1 students developed a stronger and more structured discourse about "commitment", in the historical sense that corresponds to the image of the "committed journalist". Their discourse is more social and reflects a social sensitivity when talking about the "French working class". In their imaginary, journalists are the communication channel for the working class people. Some of them are aware that they are not part of the "journalistic elite". The discourse is eloquent: "We should not disregard certain sectors of the population", "We should avoid the ivory tower mentality", "I want to show that there is more than Paris".

In their imaginary, this group of students, particularly the female respondents, have a strong sense of professional ethics, integrity, dignity and honesty. A female student said that the most important thing for her was "to have freedom and autonomy" in her journalistic work and "not being censored". She also highlighted that she wants "to become a freelance journalist" and does not care if she "earns little", because money is not what has motivated her to choose this profession.

The parents of many of the students from the first and second groups are part of trade unions and associations. This legacy of solidarity is reflected in the imaginaries of these respondents. The father of a male student living in the humble area of Vitrolles has worked as a coach at the sports club and has contributed to the social integration of young people through sports. A female student, whose father is a road labourer, is member of an environmentalist association that helps to preserve endangered birds. Another student has participated in demonstrations and political culture with his father, who is a labourer and trade unionist.

### 3.3. Media practices

Regarding the family media practices, they are drastically conditioned by their social origin. While the consumption of the national daily press is low in the families of group 1 students, whose parents are low-level employees, it is very high in the families whose leaders occupy executive positions. The middle and upper classes diversify their consumption of information and culture.

Family media practices influence the imaginary of the group 4, by becoming the reference models of the medium in which they want to work. A female student dreams of working for the business radio station that her father listens to:

“My mother listens to *France Culture*, *France info*, and my father listens to *BFM*. They are subscribed to *The Economist* and *Les Echos*. We never watch television. My father is a financial manager, and my mother, who has a B.A. degree, gives cooking classes. I was born in New York, and I have also lived in London and Rome. My parents were concerned when I told them I wanted to be a journalist. It has taken me some time to convince them. They thought it was a complicated profession. They enjoy reading the newspapers. I want to be a business journalist. My dream is to work in *BFM*. It is a business radio station. It is a good getaway to the world of journalism, in my class no one wants to do this. At home, the issue of economy is very present. My grandfather also worked as a bank director. And my other grandfather worked as a director in *Total*”.

We have to differentiate the family media practices from the reading made by students in preparation to enter the school of journalism. Many prospective students enrol in courses that will prepare them for the selection contest and this leads them to diversify the newspapers they read. Three years ago the Institute of Journalism of Bordeaux started proposing a quality journalistic production to the students admitted to the oral examination [2]. Although this exercise aims to satisfy the demands of the jury that will examine the students, it is interesting to note that 80.43% of the submitted texts come mostly from the quality press, mainly *Le Monde*, while *Libération*, *Le Figaro* and *L'Equipe* are much less present. With regards to the weekly press, *Courrier International* and *Le Monde magazine* are the most popular. Online journalistic production is practically non-existent.

The quality press also occupies the first position within the media practices of the 115 students that were recently admitted in the four aforementioned public schools of journalism and that answered the survey questionnaire [3]. For them, the best sources of information are the newspapers (mentioned by 75 students), followed by radio news

programmes (mentioned by 38), and the evening TV news programmes (mentioned by 10). The social networks and online information barely counted as sources of information for the journalism students when they were about to start their study programme. The use of social networks and websites is restricted to the private sphere [4]: Facebook was mentioned by 3; news websites, like *Orange* and *Yahoo* were mentioned by 4; and *Twitter* was mentioned by 3.

According to the quantitative results of the survey, the most important newspapers among students were, in decreasing order: *Le Monde* (preferred by 48), *Libération* (29), *Courrier International* (22), and *Le Canard Enchaîné* (14). It is surprising that the conservative newspaper *Le Figaro* was only mentioned by just one student. Regarding the favourite radio stations among the future journalists, the public service radio stations *France Inter* and *France Info* were preferred (by 40 and 22 students, respectively) over the commercial radio stations, which have a lower audience level: *La Matinale of Europe 1* was preferred by 16 students while *RTL* was preferred by only 9 students. However, it is interesting that one of the most followed radio programmes, *Là Bas si j'y suis* (watched by 14 students), was presented by a committed left-wing journalist, Daniel Mermez.

Although television is not the preferred source of information for the future journalists, they do like to watch some programmes that present debates (like *C dans l'air*, with 26 mentions), news reports (like *Envoyé spécial*, with 19 mentions) and political satire (like *Le grand journal* from Canal +, with 22 mentions). In terms of online sources, the most used among journalism students were, in decreasing order: *lemonde.fr* (46 mentions), the news websites *Rue89* (28 mentions), *Mediapart* (20 mentions), and *Liberation.fr* (18 mentions).

### 3.4. Cultural practices

While students' cultural capital varies according to the socio-professional category of their parents, there are other factors, like the place of residence (rural or urban), that also condition the cultural practices. The extension of the "middle-class culture" has been verified in the popular classes (Goulet: 2011). The parents of some of the group 1 students are interested in history, visit monuments, and even attend art and experimental cinemas.

All of the 115 surveyed students from the public schools of journalism emphasised that the expertise in ICTs (62 mentions) and a solid general culture (43 mentions) are the most important qualities that journalists must possess after they complete their education. In their imaginary, other competencies such as bilingual and multimedia

skills (12 and 8 mentions, respectively) and thematic specialisations (5 mentions) are secondary.

### **3.5. The imaginary and the vocation**

The decision to become a journalist seems to have been developed over time. Of the 115 surveyed students, 22 made their professional choice since 5 years ago, 18 since 6 or 7 years ago, and 16 since more than 10 years ago. Only 3 students indicated that they decided to be journalists since just one year ago. The vocational call does not appear to be the main motivation to choose the journalistic profession. The main reasons for students to choose this profession were practical decisions (47 mentions), pure and simple vocation (36 mentions), passion (28 mentions), and ambition (22 mentions).

The factors that motivated students to choose the journalistic profession vary according to the personality and career of students but are also related to their social origin, as reflected in the life stories told by the students of the IJBA: the interest in learning and "meeting people" are the most frequent explanations expressed by group 1 students. In their imaginary they dream of exercising an intellectual profession. They are aware of the fragility of the labour market and the low income but these factors do not worry them. The thirst for the social distinction linked to the journalistic profession is much more present in the imaginary of the group 1 students (Accardo, 1998: 105-121) [5].

### **3.6. Prestige**

In their imaginaries students see symbolic rewards that compensate for the precarious work conditions and the low wages: they share the personal pride of exercising a profession that still enjoys prestige in their eyes. In their imaginary there is an outstanding feeling of social mobility. The social improvement in comparison to their illiterate ancestors was evoked by one of the interviewed students. Some group 1 students made references to the intellectual prestige of the profession while others pointed out that it was "a noble profession". They obtain gratification by exercising a profession surrounded by precariousness.

They are aware of the social recognition linked to the profession despite the criticism it has received in recent years. They have a sense of importance because of the social status of the group. In their minds they are certain about exercising an influential

profession, which is more legitimated by the intellectual aspect than for the political influence.

A female student from group 1 commented that her parents, a secretary experienced in the travel industry and a trucker, have always supported her despite they did not know exactly what the profession of journalist was about:

“I’ve always loved to write. When I finished high school at the age of eighteen, I did not know what to do. By chance, I discovered a pamphlet about journalism studies. Although at that time I did not know what exactly journalism was about I liked that option. Then to confirm my motivation I did an internship in the regional press and it was street journalism what cultivated my passion for the journalistic profession. What I like the most about the profession is that it nourishes you intellectually. You are continuously learning. Traveling is not what I like the most, what I want is to meet people and work independently”.

For the group 1 students, whose families are far from the world of journalism (their media practices are reduced to television and radio consumption) the value of journalism is the omnipresent “contact”. The human dimension is also frequently highlighted. Moreover, group 1 students also make references to the “civic responsibility” and “social utility of the journalist”.

We can classify the arguments used by students to explain their vocation for journalism in the following order of importance according to the model proposed by Rémy Rieffel (1984):

1. *Journalists are permanently at the university.* Some students decided to become journalists because they believe this profession allows them to permanently renew themselves and helps them to be in the know about today’s world. This imaginary is more characteristic of the group 1, perhaps as a compensation for their low level of cultural capital and the attraction for a profession they consider to be intellectual, in contrast to the manual work of their parents. Students’ discourses include references to the economic crisis because they are partly aware of precariousness in the profession and the low wages they will face.
2. *Journalism is a profession of contact.* This answer was given by all the groups of students but it was more common among female students. For instance, a female student stated: “I like to learn from the encounters with people. One morning you have to interview some workers and then in the evening you have to attend an official event”. For group 1 students, whose family universe is far

away from journalism, the value of "journalism is the contact" and "the human dimension" is omnipresent. The social utility of journalism is also mentioned by the group 4.

3. *Journalists are privileged observers.* Students' discourses highlighted the role of the journalist as a witness of the world's history and reality. This perception was expressed by all groups.
4. *Journalists are ignored writers.* This is a minority response, mainly expressed by female students, who indicated that their passion for writing was what made them choose this profession.

The passion for sports triggered the journalistic vocation in several male interviewees (four out of seven). The passion for journalism is nourished by the passion for sports especially in the group 1 students.

Money did not motivate the interviewees to choose the journalistic profession. This point coincides with the results of the work carried out by Rémy Rieffel (1984) about the French journalistic elite. The interviewed students conceived journalism more as a way of life. Most of their answers made reference to personal satisfaction they obtained by exercising the profession (particularly the group 4 students).

### **3.7. The journalist's mission**

The positive perception that the 115 surveyed students have of the figure of the journalist is based on its perception as a witness, observer and narrator of events (46 mentions), as a professional research (25 mentions) and as a historian of the contemporary world who analyses and puts the events into perspective (25 mentions). Other less common perceptions of the journalist were: pedagogue (9 mentions), social actor/commentator; defender of democracy (5 mentions) and adventurer (1 mention).

The ideal missions that the interviewed students from the IJBA associate to journalism also coincide with the previous perceptions. However, among these perceptions the figure of the committed journalist who gives voice to citizens is the one that stands out the most, particularly among students who come from less privileged social backgrounds. This difference is perhaps explained by the social diversity that characterises the profile of the students.

Based on the survey we can indicate that the imaginary of the sample of students from the IJBA contains the following perceptions about the mission of the journalist:

1. The *myth of the committed journalist* is getting stronger, especially in the group 1. Although previous works had indicated that this role had been relegated (Rémond, 1999: 4-23) during the euro crisis, and after the strong vilification cause by the collusion between journalists and the political powers, it seems that the journalist's mission of becoming a guardian of democracy is re-emerging with force.
2. *The civic journalist* who gives voice to the ordinary citizens who are often passive spectators. Thus, students promote the social integration function. Group 1 students highlighted the social function of the journalist as promoter of social integration. They understand the media as a forum for debates.
3. *Pedagogue*. Its mission is to explain events and translate information into a colloquial language. They see the journalist as a disseminator of information, motivated by the desire to learn and transmit information.
- 5 *Witness*. With a strong sensitivity for the verification of facts. There is a return to the role of information transmitter.
- 6 *Adventurer*. To travel the world is the dream of one of the interviewed students. The main travel destination in his imagination is Latin America. The mythical figures of the foreign correspondent and war correspondent still survive.

Ambitions have disappeared partly due to the economic crisis. One of the interviewed female students from the group 3 indicated that her dream is just to get a job after finishing the journalism degree. Others speak of the figures of the reporter and the investigative journalist as the ideal professions. Some express their desire to become the mythical war correspondent or foreign correspondent. The male respondents express more professional ambitions in terms of visibility, especially those from the groups 3 and 4: some indicate that their dream is to become a columnist or radio presenter.

In the imaginary of the 115 surveyed students the classic dreams of becoming a foreign correspondent and the mythical figure of the war correspondent are still persistent (16 mentions in both cases), but there are those more inclined to become a versatile editor (17 mentions). The low interest in becoming editorial writers is striking (8 mentions). Within opinion journalism, students are more inclined to become columnists. The passion for sports is still recruiting journalists (this was indicated by 12 respondents). As mentioned, the Internet is not appealing for the sample of students: only 9 of them indicated that they wanted to become a multimedia journalist. Respondents are not interested in the new professional profiles that have emerged with the development of digital journalism. For example, not a single student wanted to work as an online community manager or an online disseminator of journalistic content.

It is surprising that unlike the students from the IJBA, only few of the 115 respondents dream of becoming investigative journalists (2 mentions) or free-lance collaborators for different media (1 mention). Students confirmed this trend when they answered another question that investigated whether they preferred to exercise journalism being employed by a media company or independently as freelance: most students selected the first option and only 14 selected the second one.

The news sections where students prefer to work are, in decreasing order: Culture (29 mentions), International (28 mentions), Politics (26 mentions), Society (16 mentions), Sports (15 mentions), and General information (9 mentions). The least attractive news sections for these future journalists are: economy (2 mentions), local information (2 mentions), science and health (1 mention) and environment (3 mentions).

### **3.8. Without journalist role models**

Most of the IJBA students that participated in the survey do not have journalistic idols or emblematic newspapers. These results categorically confirm the trend identified by Edith Rémond in her 1996 study: there are no journalistic role models. Heroes hardly exist in the imaginaries of students.

Students do not have journalist role models or idols that provoke admiration or inspiration. This trend is more marked in the students from group 1, whose family media practices are limited to the consumption of television and radio. Only one of the four interviewed people mentioned a group of admired journalists, all of whom have a very high media profile: Alain Duhamel, Jean-François Kahn and Jean-Michel Apathie.

The questionnaire applied to the 115 students included a list of current and retired journalists which respondents had to rank in order of preference. The most popular journalists, in decreasing order, were: Albert Londres, a classical legend in French journalism (32 mentions); Bob Woodward, a legend of international journalism (20 mentions); Edwy Plenel, an investigative and political journalist (18 mentions); Yves Calvi, a TV journalist specialised in debates (10 mentions); and Florence Aubenas, a veteran investigative journalist (10 mentions).

According to the 115 surveyed students, the most important qualities that journalist should have are, in decreasing order: curiosity (51 mentions), honesty (15 mentions), fact-checking skills (13 mentions), passion for the profession (8 mentions), disposition to listen to others (8 mentions), independence (7 mentions) and inquisitiveness (5

mentions). Creativity, sensitivity, availability, appreciation for teamwork and self-confidence were not mentioned by any student.

### **3.9. A critical view of the media**

A striking feature of the surveyed students is their strong rejection of the collusion between journalism and the political and economic powers, which has been made to look ridiculous in the past decades in France by the media criticism. This sensibility is shared by almost all groups. With the exception of the group 4, all other groups use a critical discourse towards those journalists who are too close to the political power. Students resent the omnipresence of the journalistic elite and the mainstream journalists, who are not seen as role models, but all the contrary.

Students believe that moral integrity should be “the most important” quality for journalists. They want to contribute to the return of a journalism that is more focused on research, on fact-checking, on the reporting of events instead of opinions. Students, especially those from the group 1, show willingness to get closer to the readers. Some students speak of “reconquering the pillars of the profession”. Their criticism towards the current state of journalism is expressed once again in this aspect: They are not interested in the ordinary people”. With a strong social vindication that is based on their own experiences, members of the group 1 highlighted that journalists “have to talk about the France that suffers, to tell stories of the ordinary people” and “have to give voice to those who do not have it”. In their discourse, students reject the social injustice and the media’s scant coverage of the social conflicts.

### **3.10. Gender**

The future female journalists do not dream of following the steps of certain female journalists. In their imaginary they prefer to become reporters. The sections they would prefer to cover are those traditionally covered by women: culture and society. The political and sports sections are more preferred by men.

They do not dream of making a brilliant career and occupying positions of responsibility. They prefer information journalism over opinion journalism. They want to produce news reports and interviews and to “meet people”. Female journalism students barely have female role models. Travelling is neither included in their imaginary. They prefer to live in France and to work as reporters.

The female students who come from less privileged social backgrounds show a greater social conscience. The question of having children has barely been touched. It is not known whether this is due to self-censorship. Only one female student spoke of this: "first I want to find a job and to do well and only afterwards I will consider the possibility of having children". Female students are aware of the difficulties to reconcile their personal and professional lives. The interviewed students prefer to work in the print press or radio. None of them showed a special interest for television.

### **3.11. The future of journalism**

Students are not interested in becoming digital journalists: they still attached to the printed journalism, to which they confer prestige. "I see the printed version of the press still existing 20 years later". They are still attached to the "Gutenberg Galaxy", and relegate the "online journalism" to the private sphere. One student from group 1 admits his devotion: "For me it is a ritual to go to the newsstand to buy newspapers: I prefer to read the news more on paper than online". The print press is still the preferred type of press despite their families prefer television, as it is the case with in the group 1 students.

Students believe that one of the measures needed to guarantee the future of journalism is to get closer to readers, which the current press is not doing. This discourse is more developed by group 1: "We have to renew the relationship with readers. We should not despise them". In their imaginary their mission is to renew ties with them.

They believe that journalism should be renewed by going back to the pillars of the profession. Students are aware of the crisis affecting the press but are not afraid of not finding employment. In their imaginary, obtaining a certificate from a journalism school that is recognised by the profession will facilitate their employability.

The research lines of this work include the re-application of the survey questionnaire to the new journalism students that will start their classes in the next academic year. The application of the survey will be extended to private journalism schools. Moreover, the study will be completed with the monitoring of the surveyed students from the IJBA during their first three years of employment in order to evaluate the evolution of their imaginaries after they have faced the reality of the profession.

## 5. Conclusion

The imaginaries of the future journalists vary more according to their social background than according to their gender. The interviewed female journalism students do not have female journalist role models or journalists they admire. Female students prefer to become reporters and not dream of reaching the highest positions of power in the profession, unlike the male students who do see themselves in these positions.

The majority of the interviewed students highlighted that the role of the media is to inform and to disseminate disclose the media. The human dimension is crucial in the students' conception of what a journalist should be. Students perceive journalism rather as a way of life that will allow them "to meet people", "to talk about the everyday life of ordinary people", "to produce news reports", "to conduct debates", "to explain to people what is really going on". The figure of the street reporter, the foreign correspondent and even the mythical figure of the war correspondent are more admired than the figure of the digital journalist locked in four walls. Journalism students use social networks and the Internet in their private sphere but not as sources of information. The quality press is the model of which they want to be part. It is clear that the way in which students perceive the working conditions of journalists differs from the increasingly harder conditions actually faced by journalists. This is a worrying aspect because of the precarious conditions and the frustration that students may face in their future employment.

Students do not have heroes. As one of them put it: "I do not practice idolatry". Although the interviewed journalism students do not have role models, they have their own recipe for success, which is based on fact-checking, honesty, independence, ethics, and the desire to renew ties with the readers. This discourse is more common in students from the groups 1 and 2, which belong to the least privileged social classes.

The journalistic elite have lost their power of attraction and are no longer role models for journalism students. Elite journalists are hardly mentioned and those who are mentioned are criticised due to their proximity to the political power. "Journalism should not be a profession of stars. It should not be developed in an ivory tower".

Students from the least privileged social sectors are more socially committed and more aware of their civic responsibility: These students want "to reveal cases of corruption, show realities that are unknown to the general public, and to do investigative journalism".

These students condemn the collusion journalism practiced by the journalistic elite. They do not support the current media model and believe that other types of journalism are possible. They want to practice street journalism that is closer to the people. They dream of the noble image of the profession. The figure of the committed journalist is more appealing for the students that come from humble backgrounds. This is the true pillar of the profession.

The students belonging to disadvantaged social classes value the profession of journalism the most, and have a culture of effort and selflessness, which has been inherited from their families. The force lifting the social elevator to access an intellectual profession like journalism is their constant effort. They consider journalism to be a "useful and noble" profession. They have a more romantic and social view of the profession: they want to be a real communication channel for the village people, the forgotten, and the voiceless. "We must not forget or despise the people. I want to show people that there is more than Paris. I come from provincial France. We should talk about the many realities that are not addressed in the media." However, these students practice self-censorship by not working in recognised and prestigious media, unlike the students from more privileged social classes who do so because they have greater social capital and contacts in the profession of journalism thanks to their families.

The research results allow us to corroborate that journalism students are not a homogeneous group. Their differences in terms of social backgrounds are remarkable and greatly influence their perception of the profession. Students from humble backgrounds have the richest imaginaries as well as a romantic and more demanding view of what journalism should be. Their social origin influences their vision of the world and the mission they associate to the profession.

In a context marked by the current debate on how to increase social diversity in the profession of journalism in France, the social selection carried out by journalism schools has been brought into question. Although some public journalism schools aim for greater social diversity in their student selection, as in the case of the Institute of Journalism of Bordeaux, it should be noted that there is a problem regarding the social homogeneity of journalists in France. Some studies have shown that most journalism students come from the middle and upper classes (Lafargue and Marchetti, 2011) [6], the children of the intellectual professions, which makes journalism an excessively endogenous profession.

Despite the efforts made by the majority of journalism schools to open up their doors to other social sectors, it should be stressed that this should be one of the main missions of public journalism schools. Their task is to increase the diversity of social

backgrounds in a profession that is denigrated by the social reproduction of the elites (Bourdieu, 1989).

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## 6. Notes

[1] In France there are 13 journalism schools. Nine of these schools belong to public universities: Strasbourg, Bordeaux, Tours, Lannion Marseille, Grenoble, Paris-Sorbonne, Paris Panthéon-Assas and Sciences Po Paris. The other four schools are private: CFJ Paris, ESJ of Lille, IPJ of Paris and EJT of Toulouse.

[2] Etude du recrutement de l'IJBA, 2011.

[3] This study was conducted by members of the French association of "Journalism Researchers from Accredited Schools" (CEJER). The study had the participation of journalism schools recognised by the profession: CUEJ of Strasbourg, the EJCM of Marseilles, the EPJT of Tours, and the IJBA of Bordeaux. The results of the survey investigating the professional imaginary of 115 students from these 4 schools of journalism was presented by Nicole Gauthier, Director of the CUEJ, at the conference conducted by CEJER, MICA and IJBA at the IJBA on 31 January, 2012.

[4] Bassoni, M., Liautard, D., Aiguillon, B, (2012): « Quand le numérique ne fait pas rêver les futurs journalistes... Routines digitales personnelles et représentation traditionnelle du métier », Ecole de Journalisme de Marseille, Aix-Marseille Université. Study presented at the conference conducted by CEJER, MICA and IJBA on 31 January, 2012.

[5] The interviewed journalism students confront their imaginary before becoming part of the profession, which is surrounded by a "mythical universe" which contrasts with the precariousness they face in the early years of the professional practice, which leads them to frustration produced by the succession of acts of submission and renunciation to which they are subjected.

[6] The study of Lafargue and Marchetti (2011) demonstrated the high social selection practiced by journalism schools in France: 52% of students have parents who exercise intellectual professions. Only 10% of the students are children of labourers and only 6% of retail employees.

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