

# Newsworkers and their gendered careers. Findings of a longitudinal analysis of 1,171 LinkedIn profiles of French journalists

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*Received: 14-11-2012*  
*Accepted: 20-12-2012*

## **Abstract**

The social status of journalists has changed very little since the beginning of the twentieth century. Due to a rising market for freelance work, low wage scales and lay-offs affecting early and mid-career professionals, today's journalists find themselves in precarious situations quite similar to those described in the International Labour Organisation's famous report on the life and working conditions of journalists working in 20 countries in the 1920s (Bureau International du Travail, 1928). My aim in this paper is to propose a new source of data that will undoubtedly prove useful to scholars working in the field of journalism studies: curriculum data listed on the profiles of individuals registered with LinkedIn, a professional social network. The findings presented here are drawn from research conducted on the labour market for French journalists. And indicate that men and women do not forge the same kind of careers in journalism, nor do they leave the profession the same way and with the same regularity.

**Keywords:** newsworkers, freelance, French journalists, social network.

**Contents:** 1. Introduction. 2. Journalism research and the issue of careers. 3. Methodology. 4. Conclusions. 5. References.

## ***1. Introduction***

Over the last century, the market for professional journalists in Europe has undergone a degree of transformation that few other sectors have had to cope with.<sup>1</sup> The emergence of audio-visual media, a general rise in newspaper readership and the proliferation of magazines and other specialised publications multiplied job opportunities in this sector and sustained a growing number of careers

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<sup>1</sup> A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the 4th European Communication Conference organized by ECREA in Istanbul in October 2012. I am grateful to the members of the Journalism Studies Section who have generously provided their comments on that version and to Ramon Salaverria, who suggested that I submit this paper to *Textual & Visual Media*.

in journalists in most European countries. However, the simultaneous rise of the Internet and the gradual deterioration of the market for print publications blurred the boundaries between professional and amateur journalism, reducing employment opportunities in the communications sector and, to some extent, the number of professional journalists as well.<sup>2</sup> The expansion of public relations firms throughout the continent created job opportunities for mid- and late-career journalists willing to work in another field, while the development of university degree programmes in journalism considerably modified the profile of graduates entering the profession: more were women and the qualifications of young journalists across the board were significantly higher than in the past, a factor that probably had an impact on their career expectations.

In spite of all these changes, the social status of journalists has changed very little since the beginning of the twentieth century. Due to a rising market for freelance work, low wage scales and lay-offs affecting early and mid-career professionals, today's journalists find themselves in precarious situations quite similar to those described in the International Labour Organisation's famous report on the life and working conditions of journalists working in 20 countries in the 1920s (Bureau International du Travail, 1928). However, unlike the situation faced by journalists in the 1920's, the 'precarity' of journalists' professional status today—and that of the work they carry out—contrasts starkly with the perception of the 'power' attributed to them, which is often expressed in terms of insinuations of their 'connivance' with society's elites and arguments regarding their 'power' over public opinion. There is a glaring discrepancy between the actual social morphology of this group and how it is represented; in other words, a gap between the real, long-term opportunities available to those seeking to pursue a career in journalism and the perception of their power to sway public opinion.

In order to describe and analyse that gap and its impact on careers in the media sector today, it's necessary to gain a better understanding of what impels individuals toward a career in journalism, how they enter the communications labour market and what factors induce them to abandon the sector. In other words, journalism studies as a discipline would benefit more from taking an acute look at how individual journalists try to 'accomplish' journalism throughout the course of their careers (Dickinson, 2007) and clearly defining journalism as a form of labour (Örnebring, 2010) than from focusing on professional groups and how they attempt to advocate certain kinds of journalism. This, of course, is not an easy task. Good empirical datasets that would permit a longitudinal analysis of journalists' careers in media are hard to come by. Most of the data currently available have been compiled by professional journalism organisations.<sup>3</sup> These data have been useful in creating a sociographical map of the profession,<sup>3</sup> but as they are based on a rather restrictive definition of who can be considered a working professional in the sector, they do not provide sufficient information to form a

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<sup>2</sup> This has been the case in France. 2010 was the first year in the recorded history of the profession that the number of professional journalists (meaning those officially accredited by CCIJP) declined (from 37904 in 2009 to 37415 in 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Regarding France, see (Devillard *et al.*, 2001; Devillard, 2002; Leteinturier, 2003).

clear picture of the full span of a journalist's career. They do not, for example, include non-journalistic activities and offer no possibility of monitoring individuals once they have abandoned the profession.

My aim in this paper is to propose a new source of data that will undoubtedly prove useful to scholars working in the field of journalism studies: curriculum data listed on the profiles of individuals registered with LinkedIn, a professional social network. The findings presented here are drawn from research conducted on the labour market for French journalists. For this study, a one-tenth sample obtained from information included in professional LinkedIn profiles posted by both active and former French journalists was analyzed using longitudinal methods.<sup>4</sup> A close examination of this data reveals the overall career patterns of people working in the sector. Viewing careers in journalism from this perspective can be meaningful given the fact that in many countries one must take into account gender issues such as the growing number of women entering the profession, the 'glass ceiling' imposed upon them by the majority of the media outlets that employ them and the weight of a lingering mythological self-identity based on old masculine values (Aldridge, 1998).

## *2. Journalism research and the issue of careers*

Before presenting the methodology and results of my research, I would like to explore a few theoretical questions that need be addressed. These concern the way that careers have not adequately been taken into account in the sociology of journalism.

### *Why we don't really know how journalists build careers...*

Very little research has been carried out to date concerning the ways journalists go about building their careers. There are many explanations for the prevalence of this bias in journalism and media studies. Some concern empirical aspects of journalism. Journalism is often described as a 'young man's profession', an attitude that can be said to be held in media outlets that lack the complex vertical structure needed to support extended, upward-bound professional careers. Individuals employed in these environments tend to move on at some point and subsequently disappear from that organisation's (and the sociologist's) radar. To this empirical limitation to our understanding of how careers in journalism develop and evolve one must add the weight of a rhetorical factor: the complex narratives that the discipline has developed to guarantee its 'jurisdiction' (Abbott, 1988) on news production, which tend to depict journalism as either a strong vocation or a haphazard occupation. Both narratives are based on the idea that journalism is a non-career occupation practiced by individuals who entered the field either 'by chance' or 'by vocation' rather than conscious choice.

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<sup>4</sup> This research has been funded by the Scientific Committee of the Institute of Political Studies (University of Grenoble, France). Data collection and covariates recoding was carried out by Gwendal Perrin and Antoine Machut.

This viewpoint is reinforced by methodological bias. Official statistics available on journalists are overwhelmingly contingent on the possession of professional journalists' identity card that confers official accreditation (when it exists). As a result of their dependence on these statistics, researchers consequently focus their studies exclusively on an elite group of professionals and fail to take into account the many individuals who identify themselves as journalists but who do not need (or do not have access to) documentation that accredits them as professionals. Datasets based on these statistics can only offer a picture of the profession at one moment in time. They are not really useful for gaining an understanding of the full span of professional careers.

However, most of the stumbling blocks researchers face stem from theoretical choices they make. In the early 1970s, Herbert Gans asserted that media research was suffering from an extended 'famine', which according to him, was due to the epistemological status of the object, which was often viewed in a derogatory manner by an academic world that nevertheless had close ties to it (Gans, 1972). For a long time, those who studied media looked down on those who practiced it and demonstrated a clear penchant for theorising. Predominant approaches focused on the impact of media content. In this environment, issues concerning the political economics of information and the conditions in which media content is produced were generally ignored (Janowitz and Schulze, 1961). The media world remained at a certain distance from the issues that would provide insight into how the supply of media jobs is distributed, how this supply interacts with demand, what links exist between training and employment and how the legal framing of work contracts affects the development of professional careers. Therefore, the world of journalism, like the worlds of art or knowledge, has always constituted a 'challenge' for sociological analysts (Freidson, 1986).

A great deal of research has filled the gap once identified by Gans; however, very little of it has focused on journalists' working conditions. The bulk of it has undertaken from two main perspectives, one being the ethnographic study of the media world and its production practices (Boyer and Hannerz, 2006; Cottle, 2007), and the other being the sociological study of journalism as a professional category. A great deal of research work has focused on the particular issue of whether journalism conforms to the model of established professions (Nolan, 2008) and the professionalization of journalists as a group (Aldridge and Evetts, 2003). Driven by these two perspectives, research has concentrated more on groups (professionals and the organisations that employ them) than on 'information workers' (Hardt and Brennen, 1995) and, more generally, the individuals who 'carry out' the activity of journalism (Dickinson, 2007) and the conditions under which they work and plan their careers (Örnebring, 2010). Research has also developed a considerable degree of 'media-centrism' (Schlesinger, 1990), which has resulted in a dogmatic insistence on maintaining the traditional boundaries of professional categories in spite of the continually evolving nature of the tasks journalists perform.

*...and why we should care*

Despite these obstacles, recent empirical research has begun to focus on media

convergence, a phenomenon that is generating new forms of flexible employment on an international scale. The emergence of a freelance workforce has been particularly well documented in Europe (Baines, 1999; Storey *et al.*, 2005), as has the proliferation of atypical types of contracts (Walters *et al.*, 2006). There have also been studies that have highlighted the increasing range of skills required of new recruits (Aviles *et al.*, 2004), the low pay scales offered for work in this field, the role of networks in a competitive environment (Antcliff *et al.*, 2007), 'personal branding' and the rise of a 'competitive ethos' between counterparts in the sector (Ehrlich, 1995) and the blurring of boundaries between amateurs and professionals (Flichy, 2010; Leadbeater and Miller, 2004).

These studies underline the need to reassess the links that unite markets, professionals and organisations in the world of mass communications. Research conducted on the dynamics of occupational labour markets and internal labour markets (Eyraud *et al.*, 1990) have underscored that the latter are currently on the decline, most notably in the areas of culture, knowledge and media (Marsden, 2007). This has inevitably led to a deterioration of working conditions for people entering the profession and an increasing use of 'entry tournaments' as a method of recruitment, a situation exacerbated by the increasingly widespread introduction of media internships.

This new relationship between market and organisations obviously also affects the profession of journalism, an institution that aspires to regulate the practices of its members. Though the sector used to more or less resist employing organisations in the past (Bagdikian, 1974), today it has to prove its efficiency by resisting the Pareto principle at play in today's labour market: an increasing gap between pay scales, the individualisation of contracts, and reputational behaviours. (Menger, 2009).

### 3. Methodology

The 'demultiplication of the self' (Menger, 1997) that media professionals tend to undergo in flexible markets (just as artists do) is not exclusively manifested as a condition of their professional status. The juggling of multiple professional identities that is necessary to survive in a freelance world also produces vast new datasets that social scientists can use to gain insight into how these professionals conduct their careers. Professional social networks, in which journalists can 'type (themselves) into being' (Sundén, 2003), offer this opportunity, because they rely on self-definition and provide a framework for individuals to document and build their careers. This is notably true of LinkedIn, a social network created in 2003 that showcases the profiles of millions of users profiles around the world. Many journalists have created such profiles: when the dataset for this study was extracted from LinkedIn in January 2011, a search using the key words 'journaliste' and 'journalist' produced 11,956 profiles of female journalists and 150,702 profiles of male journalists.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> These figures have increased since 2011. On the 4th of December 2012, the LinkedIn search engine found 39741 female journalists and 317407 male journalists.

Figure 1. A LinkedIn profile extracted from the dataset used in this study

**LinkedIn** Type : Business Plus

Accueil Profil Contacts Groupes Carrières Boîte de réception Entreprises Plus

Personnes - Avancé

Landlord increasing rent? - Not the best lease terms ? We negotiate great leases. Save money. Act now - From Cityspace Corporate Real Estate Services / Cityspace services immobiliers corporatifs

**Personnes** « Revenir aux résultats de la recherche Suivante »

**Freelance journaliste**  
Région de Paris, France Médias radio et télédiffusés

Poste actuel

- Freelance journaliste chez France 24
- Freelance journaliste chez Têtu
- Freelance journaliste chez Suite101.fr

Postes précédents

- Researcher / Producteur chez BFM Radio
- Junior Journalist chez Public Sénat - La chaîne parlementaire
- Editor chez en3mots.com / labotessorties.com

Formation

- Centre de Formation des Journalistes
- London School of Journalism
- Université Paris Sorbonne (Paris IV)

Relations **23 relations**

Profil public <http://fr.linkedin.com/pub/marie-billon/15/125/b94>

**Expérience**

**Freelance journaliste**  
France 24  
Société à responsabilité limitée (SRL) : secteur Médias radio et télédiffusés  
août 2009 - Poste actuel (1 an 6 mois)

FRANCE 24 - Freelance producer, France 24 international TV news channel. Responsible for preparing several different daily shows on a variety of topics, for both French and English editions. Finding case studies in both languages, researching story backgrounds, briefing presenters and production staff. Writing news stories for the web site.

**Freelance journaliste**  
Têtu  
secteur Presse écrite  
août 2009 - Poste actuel (1 an 6 mois)

TETU - Finding, pitching and writing news stories and features for France's most popular gay monthly (circulation March 2010: 45,000)

SUITE101.FR - Finding, pitching and writing articles on a variety of topics, including current affairs, religion and history

**Freelance journaliste**  
Suite101.fr  
secteur Presse écrite  
août 2009 - Poste actuel (1 an 6 mois)

Finding, pitching and writing articles on a variety of topics, including current affairs, religion and history (such as anglicanism, Henry VIII...)

**Researcher / Producteur**  
BFM Radio  
secteur Médias radio et télédiffusés

Mes livraisons doivent beaucoup à mon réseau

Comment vous êtes connecté(e) à

Vous

Les personnes qui ont consulté ce profil, ont également consulté...

Responsable Administratif et Financier...

HR and/or LEGAL AFFAIRS EXECUTIVE

at CPPD - TETU

Freelance Journalist & Writer

rédauteur en chef de Têtu

LinkedIn has a stronger professional slant than other social networks such as Facebook and flickr. Its users are not encouraged to post personal information on their profile pages. LinkedIn profile pages are laid out like professional resumes (see Fig. 1). Users share their information by 'linking up' with people they know or with whom they have something in common, such as a former employer or a shared acquaintance (Papacharissi, 2009). The site's search engine can also be used to look for prospective new contacts, but detailed information is only available for people a user is connected with by invitation. Users can also join affinity or professional groups (such as alumni and discussion groups).<sup>6</sup> Another notable facet of LinkedIn is its conscious attempt to communicate its utility for journalists. Just like Facebook, LinkedIn features an informative page titled 'How Journalists use LinkedIn' that promotes the network as a vehicle

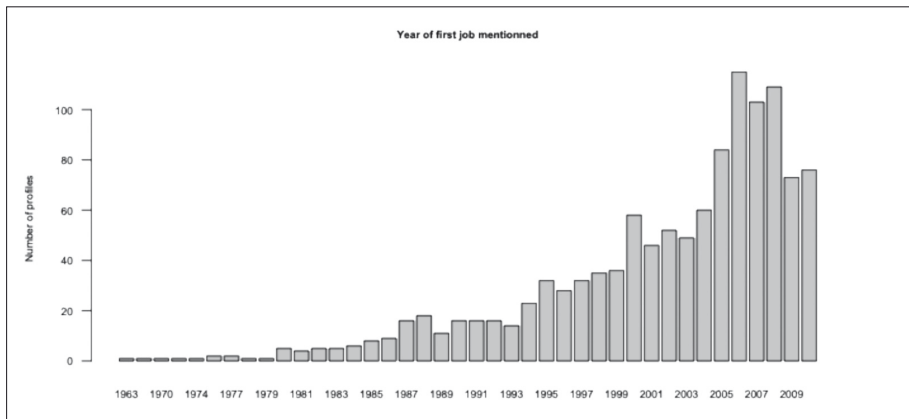
<sup>6</sup> Many of these groups are focused on journalism, such as 'Journalistes francophones' (367); 'Linked Journalists' (3518); 'Media Jobs' (3863); 'Journalists and Journalism' (2874) and 'Media Professionals Worldwide' (101257). Figures in parentheses represent the number of registered members of each group on 21 January 2011.

for both journalistic investigation (e.g. finding sources) and furthering career prospects.

### Data collection

A one-tenth sample of all the profiles registered in LinkedIn by French journalists or former journalists was collected between September 2010 and January 2011. This dataset was composed of 1171 profiles, which were extracted during multiple searches of the LinkedIn website in order to limit the effects of the researcher's access point in the network. The characteristics of this sample were very similar to those noted in official government statistics for professional journalists apart from notable deviations for a few key variables. The sample used for this study contained more women (50.30% compared to the government figure of 45.30% issued in 2010) and sample subjects also had a higher level of professional training: 29.30% of the subjects in the sample had received training in journalism and had studied journalism at one of the 13 accredited journalism schools in France compared to the 2011 government figure of 16%.

Figure 2. Year of first job listed by the journalists included in the dataset



The deviations for these two characteristics *can probably be explained by the seniority structure of the sample*. More than half of the journalists in the dataset used for this study initiated their professional careers during or after 2001 (65.5% of the sample), which means that on the average, journalists with a LinkedIn profile are quite young. On the other hand, the average age of professional journalists in France tends to be older; according to official statistics, 71.5% of professional journalists in France were above the age of 35 in 2011. Because more women and recent graduates of journalism schools enter the pool of working professionals every year, the higher percent of young journalists in the dataset is not surprising.

*Encoding methodology*

The following covariates were collected for every journalist in the dataset: gender, date of first job, length of subject's career, region in which he/she is employed, education (using a very simple dichotomy to keep track of those who held a degree from a journalism school) and number of jobs held (see Table 1).

Table 1. Covariates in the dataset

Covariate	Description	Values
Gender	Gender was encoded manually using first name (and picture when necessary) as an identifier	Factor: Male (49.7), Female (50.3).
Beginning	Year of first job	Numeric
Length	2011-Beginning	Numeric
Region	Place of activity	Factor: Paris (73.2), Other (16.4), NA (10.4)
Education	Type of education listed on website	Factor: journalism school (29.3) Other (%), NA

In order to analyse journalists' careers using a longitudinal factor model, occupations were encoded by year for every year from 1980 to 2010. The dataset therefore contained 31 state variables (31 being the longest state sequence, but as stated previously, many journalists have shorter careers). Because we were interested in the length of a career rather than its starting point, these variables were labelled from t1 to t31 for every individual. The range of activities listed in LinkedIn profiles is very wide, but we ascertained that every profile in the dataset contained at least once reference to the word 'journaliste'. Occupations were encoded to frame this wide range of activities within the context of journalism, using titles common to the hierarchical structures the discipline (from intern to editor-in-chief) as well as to identify positions held in other fields. Table 2 summarizes the possible occupations of the individuals in the dataset with the corresponding frequencies (number of states in the dataset).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The most difficult part of this process was separating freelance journalists from full-time journalists. A lot of freelance journalists actually only refer to themselves as 'journalists' in their profiles. We decided to code a year as 'freelance' if a journalist indicated that he/she held status during that year («pigiste», «freelance», «indépendant»...) or if he/she listed more than two occupations for same year. As a consequence, we probably encoded many freelance journalists as (full-time) journalists.



Table 2. State distribution used to encode dataset

State	Description	N
Journalist (full time)	«journaliste», «rédacteur», «secrétaire de rédaction»...	5031
Editor in Chief	«rédacteur-en-chef», «chef de rubrique»...	1337
Manager	«cadre», «manager», «PDG», «directeur»...	1094
Freelance Journalist	«pigiste*», «freelance», «indépendant»...	1001
Communication Officer	«porte-parole», «chargé de relations publiques»...	540
Intern	«stagiaire»	410
Web designer	«webdesigner», «community manager», «développeur»...	332
Author	«auteur», «réalisateur», «scénariste», «écrivain»	249
Employee	«employé», «assistant», «secrétaire»...	198
Other		155
NA		25964

\* In the nineteenth century, the pige was the quantity of work done by a typographer in a limited time for a certain level of remuneration. Nowadays the word pige refers to remuneration of journalists paid in function of a certain number of words. These journalists are called the pigistes. <http://www.lest.cnrs.fr/IMG/pdf/Paper417.pdf>

## Findings

### *How journalists build careers*

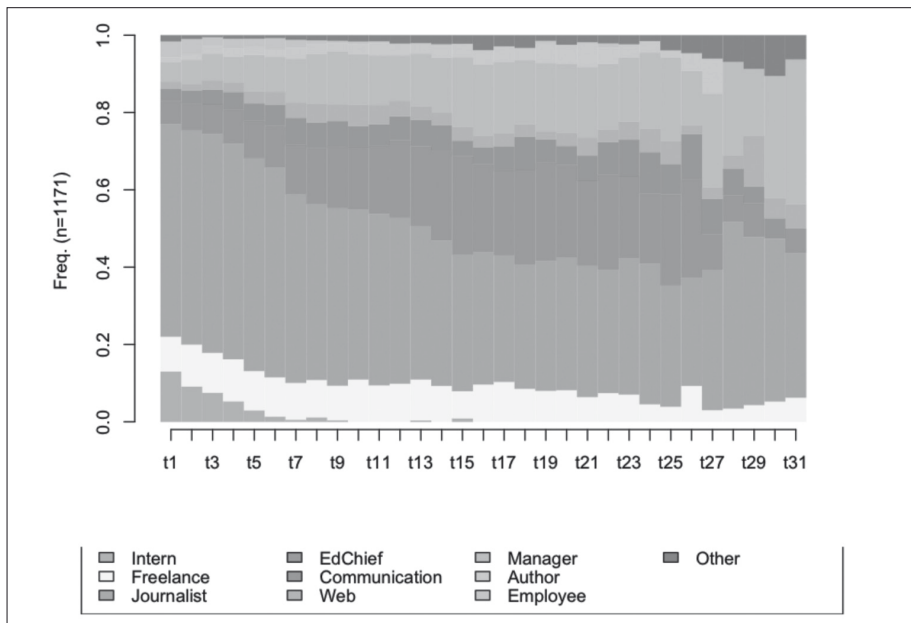
Analyzing and plotting the distribution of journalists' occupations year after year starting from the year they enter the profession (t1) brings to light a lot of interesting information about what a journalist's career entails.<sup>8</sup> As can be observed in Fig. 3, the number of internship positions held by journalists tends to diminish rapidly over the initial phases of their careers, but these positions do account for a high percentage of the frequency of all states available for at least five years, which is significant. In contrast, freelance positions are very stable; the number of subjects identifying themselves as freelance journalists hovered around 10% throughout all 31 sequences. Few journalists hold positions of responsibility (such as editor-in-chief) at the beginning of their careers (6% at t1), but this percentage increases significantly over time and reaches a peak of 25.5% at t15.

<sup>8</sup> All statistical results in this section have been processed using the TraMineR package for R. For more details, see (Gabadinho et al., 2011).

As a consequence, the percentage of full-time (or presumably full-time) journalists falls from 55% of the subjects included in the dataset at t1 to less than 40% beyond t13.

Employment in fields other than journalism was registered as early as t1 (between 15 and 20% of the sample), which indicates that some professionals do manage to enter journalism after working in other fields. However, the percentage of journalists who take up positions in other fields increases dramatically over time. By t20, almost 40% of the subjects in the dataset used for this study were not longer working as journalists. Many of these were involved in public relations and web-related activities, but a significant number had also moved on to general management positions or had become professional writers (the majority as authors of books and/or scripts for television programmes and movies).

Figure 3. Chronogram plotting the state distribution for all journalists in the dataset



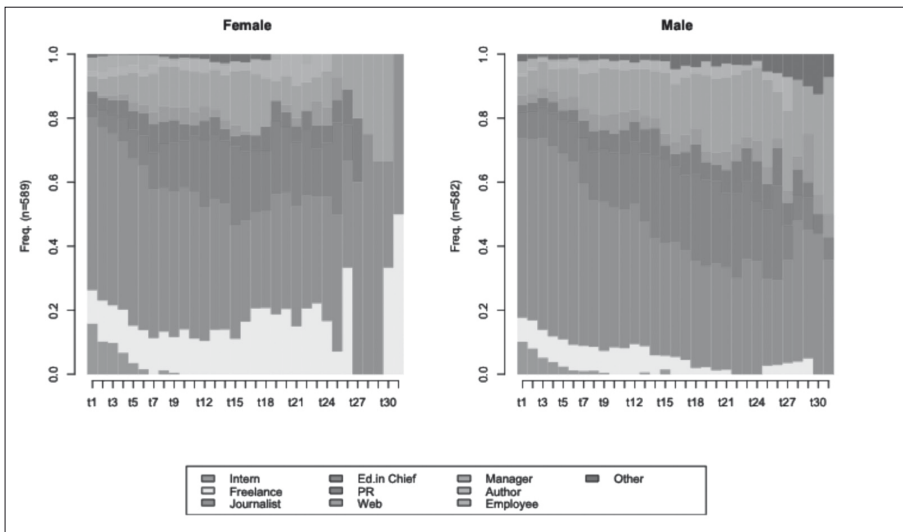
### *Careers in journalism: a gender perspective*

The same data was plotted again using gender as a covariate. As can be observed in Figure 4, the patterns of men's and women's careers in journalism are quite different. Our findings indicate that men move out of flexible jobs early in their careers. Freelance jobs tend to be marginal after t20 and one observes a steady upward vertical integration in the sector (with a growing share of editor-in-chief positions occupied by the male subjects in the dataset). However, men also tend to abandon the profession in great numbers. If one crosses the public relations 'buffer zone' on the chronogram that separates editor-in-chief positions from

other forms of employment, a male exodus to other professions, most notably in management, is quite evident.

On the other hand, women tend to build lasting careers in journalism. Few abandon the discipline t7; nevertheless, the percentage of women who move on to managerial positions later on in their careers is much smaller compared to the number of men. It is important to note that women remain in flexible employment situations (freelance jobs) much longer than men do, a very high and rising frequency for this state can be observed as their careers progress. In other words, women appear to be much more immune to the temptation to abandon journalism than men and have a greater tendency to stick by their original commitment to this career.

Figure 4. Chronograms plotting state distribution of all journalists in the dataset by gender



#### 4. Conclusion

The findings of this paper indicate that men and women do not forge the same kind of careers in journalism, nor do they leave the profession the same way and with the same regularity. Whereas men tend to begin to abandon journalism three years after they enter the field and do so in proportions that result in shift of approximately 30% of the total population to other disciplines 25 years after the initial point of their careers, women appear to begin to abandon journalism after only one year, but by the seventh year tend to develop a firm commitment to their careers in this field, and the majority of women journalists who reach the seven-year mark tend to stick with the profession. They also continue to hold flexible and freelance jobs at a later stage of their careers than men. Whether this

pattern is a result of personal choice or imposed by market conditions is a question that goes beyond the scope of this study, but if 'time matters' (Abbott, 2001), there is a strong indication that women make stronger commitments to careers in journalism than men.

It is clear that a more detailed analysis of the data used in this study and the application of a larger scale sample method that allowed the research to cover a more extensive geographic area could provide a much richer picture of careers in journalism. Nevertheless, the present study does indicate that longitudinal data can offer a new and original perspective on journalism today.

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