

The political/literary model of French journalism: change and continuity in immigration news coverage, 1973–1991

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In recent years, a number of French intellectuals and scholars, including the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, have lamented the increased commercialism of the French media and its deleterious effects on news and public political debate.¹ Yet both elements of this criticism remain to be clearly established. Although French television has indeed become more commercialized, can we say the same for the press? To what extent has there been significant continuity in governmental regulations of media and in journalistic attitudes and practices? And has there in fact been a significant change in the content and form of French news since the 1970s? Drawing on a political economy and institutional analysis of the French media and a content analysis of French news coverage of immigration between 1973 and 1991, this article seeks to shed further light on these questions.²

Immigration offers a good case study because it is a multi-faceted social and political issue that received heavy media attention throughout the period under study. Between 1973 and 1991, the dominant public framing of the immigration problem shifted, starting from generally altruistic concerns with the social suffering of ‘immigrant workers’ and progressively moving toward the politics of fear: fear of rioting North African youths, fear of a resurgent Far Right and fear that France’s national ‘culture’ would disintegrate unless forceful efforts were undertaken to facilitate immigrant integration.³ Some scholars have posited that the French media played an independent role in amplifying, sensationalizing

¹ The most visible critiques during the 1990s were those of Pierre Bourdieu, *Sur la télévision*, Paris 1996, and Serge Halimi, *Les nouveaux chiens de garde*, Paris 1997. See also the articles by Patrick Champagne, Dominique Marchetti, Alain Accardo and Julien Duval in special issues of *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, No. 101–102/1994 and No. 131–132/2000 devoted to journalism, and the excellent critical review of the research literature in Erik Neveu, *Sociologie du journalisme*, Paris 2001.

² The research reported here was conducted from 1997 through 2000 in Paris and Berkeley, with the support of grants from the Center for German and European Area Studies and the Center for Culture, Organizations and Politics, both at the University of California–Berkeley, and the U.S. Foreign Languages and Area Studies Program.

³ For solid overviews of these political-media debates, see Adrian Favell, *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain*, New York 1998 and Elaine R. Thomas, ‘Competing Visions of Citizenship and Integration in France’s Headscarves Affair’, *Journal of European Area Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2/2000, pp. 167–85

and distorting policies and public perceptions about immigration.⁴ While offering intriguing hypotheses, this mostly anecdotal literature offers little in the way of systematic evidence to support its claims.⁵

In order to trace changes in the form and content of French journalistic discourse, this article analyzes page one immigration-related stories in the three major national newspapers – *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, and *Libération* – as well as the television evening news broadcasts of TF1 (privatized since 1987) and France 2 (still state-owned), drawing on a comprehensive search of microfiche records for the newspapers and of the computerized data base at the French National Television Archives (INA-Bibliothèque Nationale) for the television news broadcast stories. The article focuses on three ‘peak media attention’ years in which media attention to the immigration issue was highest during each of the last three decades: 1973, 1983 and 1991.⁶

In short, this historical study of immigration news coverage provides a way of answering the general question: has change or continuity been decisive in shaping the contemporary French media landscape, that is, in shaping the content and form of journalistic discourse on public affairs? Reviewing the basic data on change and continuity in the French media system and drawing on previous research on news production, we suggest how the French news ought to look depending on which of these institutional influences – change or continuity – has had a more powerful effect. We then put these hypotheses to the test via a content analysis of French media coverage of immigration since the 1970s.

To preview the general tone of the findings, the form and content of French news, at least of immigration, have not changed as much as Bourdieu and other critics seem to suggest. However, in explaining the greater than expected degree of continuity, Bourdieu’s concept of the journalistic ‘field’ is crucial. Building on Weber, Bourdieu sees the contemporary West as increasingly differentiated into a number of semi-autonomous fields. Against Levi-Straussian cultural structuralism or Marxist economic determinism, Bourdieu argues that social action cannot be fully understood without taking into account the constraints imposed by these mezzo-level institutional environments. Thus, external pressures such as increased commercialism do not act directly on journalists or news organizations, but are refracted according to the pre-existing structure of

⁴ See, for example, Alain Battégay and Ahmed Boubeker, *Les Images Publiques de l’Immigration*, Paris 1993 and Alec Hargreaves, ‘La Responsabilité des médias dans l’image des populations immigrées’, *Migrations Société*, Vol. 4/1992, pp. 99–103.

⁵ But see Simone Bonnafous, *L’Immigration Prise aux Mots: Les immigrés dans la presse au tournant des années 80*, Paris 1991 and Philippe Juhem, ‘La participation des médias à l’émergence des mouvements sociaux: le cas de SOS-Racisme’, *Réseaux*, No. 98/1999, pp. 121–52.

⁶ Because *Libération* was only a small, alternative newspaper in 1973 and did not publish continuously that year, we only provide quantitative analysis of *Libération* for 1983 and 1991. The corpus of prominent domestic-oriented immigration stories totaled 115 for 1973, 283 for 1983 and 637 for 1991. Page one stories include all stories in which a significant headline or headline with text at least begins the story on the front page.

the field and its taken-for-granted 'rules of the game.'⁷ The 'inertial effects' of the French journalistic field along with relative continuity in state regulation of the media sector perhaps offer the best explanation for the limited amount of change in French news content through the early 1990s despite the dramatic commercialization of the French television sector during the preceding decade.

The French media since the 1970s

Institutional change and continuity

Since the 1970s, structural changes have indeed taken place in the French media, though most prominently in the audio-visual sector. Whereas in 1973, advertising made up just 21.4 percent of total television resources, by 1991, it constituted 85.1 percent for TF 1 and 42.2 percent for France 2.⁸ With the creation of new private television channels Canal + and M6, and the privatization of the public television channel TF1, all during the mid-1980s, the resources and audiences commanded by privately owned and commercially-funded television channels came to decisively outweigh those of the public channels France 2 and 3.⁹ With the adoption of Audimat technology in 1983, French television gained a Nielsen-style means of closely and constantly monitoring audience viewing choices.¹⁰

As television has become more commercial and thus more oriented toward the single goal of attracting mass audiences, the working class has systematically abandoned (or been abandoned by) working class newspapers such as *France-Soir* and elite newspapers such as *Le Monde*, the latter seeing a decline in its working class readership from 14 percent in 1973 to 6 percent in 1991.¹¹ At the same time as the readership of the national press has been increasingly drawn from elite social strata, so have the journalists who work for the major newspapers, newsmagazines, radio stations and television channels. The percentage of French journalists with a post-high school degree increased from 46 percent in 1973 to 69 percent in 1990. In addition, an increasing percentage of Paris-based journalists have earned degrees from the prestigious Institut d'Etudes Politiques, nearly 25 percent by the early 1980s.¹²

Finally, some French journalists and journalistic institutions have sought, directly or indirectly, to 'Americanize' the French media, that is, to make it less opinionated and more information-oriented. For example, prominent television

⁷ For a more complete synopsis and critique of Bourdieu's field theory in relation to media studies, see Rodney Benson, 'Field theory in comparative context: a new paradigm for media studies', *Theory and Society*, 29, pp. 463–498.

⁸ Jean-Charles Paracuellos, *La Télévision: Clefs d'une Economie Invisible*, Paris 1993.

⁹ Jérôme Bourdon, *Haute Fidélité: Pouvoir et télévision, 1935–1994*, Paris 1994

¹⁰ Jérôme Bourdon, 'Alone in the desert of 50 million viewers: audience ratings in French television', *Media, Culture & Society*, Vol. 16/1994, pp. 375–394.

¹¹ From yearly reports on demographic characteristics of newspaper readers published by the Centre d'Etude des supports de publicité (CESP) Paris, gathered by the author, spring 1997.

¹² Rémy Rieffel, *L'Elite des Journalistes*, Paris 1984.

journalist Christine Ockrent learned her trade working as a producer for the American television news show *60 Minutes* and has been a vocal advocate in France for a more 'objective', informational approach to the news.¹³ The increasingly visible French graduate schools in journalism, the first of which was founded by Americans more than a century ago and modelled along the lines of the Columbia Journalism School, have been agents of a more 'professionalized', less overtly political style of journalism. The 'Americanization' of French journalism has also been posited by Bourdieu, who has argued that the global 'symbolic dominance' of American television makes it a 'model and a source of ideas, formulas, and tactics' for many French journalists.¹⁴

Yet despite these indicators of change, much has remained the same with the French media. Although television advertising expenditures have increased, advertising's percentage of gross domestic product has stayed virtually the same since the mid-1980s at about six-tenths of one percent, that is, one-fourth the relative level of advertising in the United States.¹⁵ Advertising continues to provide just 40 percent of revenues for the print press as a whole and less than one-third for many of the leading national dailies (in contrast to three-quarters of revenues for most American newspapers).¹⁶ For example, in 1997, the percentage of total income from advertising was just 30 percent for *Le Monde*, 23 percent for *Libération*, 8 percent for *La Croix*, and reportedly less than 50 percent for *Le Figaro*.¹⁷

The French national government's financial and regulatory role vis-à-vis both television and the press has also remained quite constant since the 1970s. Between 1970 and 1990, total state aid to the press as a percentage of total press revenues ranged between 10 and 15 percent, among the highest levels of state aid to the press of any European nation-states.¹⁸ Targeted subsidies in defense of 'pluralism', provided to national newspapers with low advertising revenues and circulation, have benefited at various times *Libération*, *La Croix*, *L'Humanité* and even the far right *Présent*. At the same time, harsh defamation laws and wide-ranging restrictions on access to government documents continue to make it difficult for French journalists to investigate either the private lives of politicians or the inner workings of government agencies.¹⁹

¹³ Christine Ockrent, cited in: Jacques Asline, *La Bataille du 20 Heures: Quarante ans de journaux télévisés*, Paris 1990, p. 151.

¹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television and Journalism*, London 1998, p. 41.

¹⁵ Michel Forsé, Jean-Pierre Jaslin, Yannick Lemel, Henri Mendras, Denis Stoclet, and Jean-Hugues Déchaux, *Recent Social Trends in France, 1960–1990*, Montreal 1993; Raymond Kuhn, *The Media in France*, London 1995; Zenithmedia and McCann-Erickson figures on advertising and GNP.

¹⁶ Daniel Junqua, *La presse, le citoyen et l'argent*, Paris 1999, p. 201; C. Edwin Baker, *Advertising and a Democratic Press*, Princeton, NJ 1994.

¹⁷ Figures are from Junqua, p. 202. Junqua notes that *Le Figaro* does not make its financial data publicly available.

¹⁸ Kuhn, p. 40, reports that state aid to the press in France is, in raw terms, second only to that of Italy.

¹⁹ Mark Hunter, *Le journalisme d'investigation*, Paris 1997. See also Emmanuel Derieux, *Droit des Médias*, Paris 2001, who confirms these restrictions but notes recent modest expansion in journalists' access to government information.

Finally, we see continuity in the professional norms and everyday practice of journalism, as well as public criticism of those journalists who openly advocate Americanization. Historically, journalistic professionalism in France has been defined not as a detachment or distance from political or ideological allegiances, but as the right to hold and defend a set of ideas. In France, a 'political/literary' model of journalism has developed over two centuries of heavy-handed state censorship and the political and intellectual dominance of Paris literary culture. In contrast to the 'fact-centered discursive practice' of 'Anglo-American' journalism, the French press placed greater emphasis on political critique and literary style, and leading intellectuals such as Zola, Sartre, Aron, Baudrillard, Touraine and even Bourdieu on occasion have been far more likely than in Britain or the United States to take up a journalistic pen.²⁰ Thomas Ferenczi, whose own dual status as a *Le Monde* editor and a respected press historian illustrates the continuing close journalistic identification with a scholarly heritage, documents that fears of an Americanization of the French press date to the mid-nineteenth century. The French press, he suggests, developed its unique character neither by entirely welcoming nor rejecting American news practices, but by 'accommodating them in its own way [and] from this original combination was born the French version of modern journalism'.²¹

The continuing strength of this political/literary model was evident in the sharp opprobrium directed at editor Francois Olivier-Giesbert, when in 1988 he moved from the leftist *Le Nouvel Observateur* to the conservative *Le Figaro*. Giesbert publicly defended his move as an attempt to 'Americanize' the French press so that major newspapers and newsmagazines would no longer be identified according to political lines. However, many of his colleagues saw his action as indicating a lack of political and moral integrity.²² In a 1994 interview, *Libération* director Serge July, a former *gauchiste* though now considered one of the Parisian press divas, defined his newspaper in the kind of overt civic terms that would be unlikely to come from the lips of American editors: 'I believe that *Libération* must be more than ever, in a society confused with its representations, confused with itself, a citizen-newspaper, a citizen's organ, vigilant,

²⁰ This is the argument in part of Jean Chalaby in his 'Journalism as an Anglo-American Invention', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 11/1996, pp. 303–326. Although American journalism was initially deeply influenced by its British roots, its distinct path since the mid-nineteenth century and especially the influence of the Progressive movement in the early twentieth-century make any easy conglomeration of contemporary American and British journalism rather problematic.

²¹ Thomas Ferenczi, *L'invention du journalisme en France: Naissance de la presse moderne à la fin du XIXe siècle*, Paris 1993, p. 42.

²² See, for example, Philippe Romon and Henri Guirchoun, 'Coeur à droite, portefeuille à gauche; Quand *Le Figaro* joue l'ouverture!', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 16 September 1988. In James Markham, 'Can Leftist Pull French Daily to Center?', *International Herald Tribune*, 24–25 September 1988, Giesbert justified his move as part of a 'depoliticization' and 'Americanization' of the French press: 'I often have more respect for the American press than for the French press.' When I interviewed Giesbert in his office at *Le Figaro* (25 June 1997), he continued to justify his taking the helm of the conservative *Le Figaro* as consistent with his non-partisan understanding of journalistic professionalism.

useful ... for its readers, who are all, in one manner or another, actors in French society.’²³

For the immigration issue in particular, a number of French journalists have prominently supported various immigrant rights associations or promoted particular immigration policies. At *Le Monde*, Jean Benoit was instrumental during the 1970s in raising public awareness of inadequate housing and workplace problems for immigrants.²⁴ *Libération*, from its beginnings as a small-circulation *gauchiste* journal founded by Jean-Paul Sartre, also vocally promoted the cause of immigrants during this period.²⁵ During the early 1980s, journalists at the now much more visible and ‘respectable’ *Libération* self-consciously sought to aid the politicization and autonomous cultural expression of immigrant and ‘second-generation’ youths. During the early to mid-1980s, *Libération* had close and sympathetic relations with a number of grassroots immigrant groups, as well as the immigrant/second generation newspaper *Sans Frontière*. During the mid-1980s, *Libération* managing editor Laurent Joffrin was a close advisor to the leading anti-racism organization SOS-Racisme. And during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the political mood turned clearly against American-style multiculturalism in education and employment policies vis-à-vis immigrants and other minorities, *Le Monde* social issues (‘société’) editor Robert Solé promoted culturally-integrationist policies. Finally, despite Giesbert’s promise to make *Le Figaro* an apolitical, information-oriented newspaper, certain editors and commentators at *Le Figaro* and especially the weekend supplement *Le Figaro Magazine* were closely allied to conservative party efforts to re-appropriate the immigration issue during the early 1990s.

Change versus continuity: effects on news coverage

As the foregoing analysis of French journalism shows, while changes have occurred in the French news media, there also remain significant forces of institutional and cultural continuity. The question remains: to what extent, and in what ways, have the actual content and form of French public affairs journalism changed or remained the same?

Previous media research (the bulk of which has been limited to the United States and the United Kingdom) suggests that the increasing commercialization of French television would transform its news coverage of immigration, and by extension other political and social issues as well, in the following ways: towards an ideological narrowing and de-politicization of news content in order not to offend any potential audience members/consumers; towards a more pro-business and anti-labour framing of the news; and towards a trivialization and sensationalization of the news in order to attract audiences and ultimately

²³ Yves-Marie Labé and Alain Salles, ‘Un entretien avec le directeur de *Libération*’, Serge July: la reconquête de la presse quotidienne se fera sur le terrain des magazines’, *Le Monde*, 17 September 1994.

²⁴ Patrick Weil, *La France et ses étrangers*, Paris 1991.

²⁵ F.M. Samuelson, *Il était une fois Libération*, Paris 1979, pp. 76–77.

advertisers.²⁶ For the daily press, the major change has been the increased elitism of both its journalists and its audiences, during a time period when an increasing portion of French elites are involved either directly or indirectly with the business sector. This demographic change might conceivably lead to a more 'neo-liberal' capitalist selection of news topics or framing within particular news stories.²⁷ In *Sur la télévision*, Bourdieu argued that the commercialization of the most powerful player in the media field, in this case TF1, would transform the 'economy of information' within the entire field so that even those news organizations with high cultural capital (specific to journalism) would be forced to follow the leader. Evidence for this stronger claim about commercial television's effects would be an ideological narrowing and increased sensationalism among even such widely-respected newspapers as *Le Monde*.²⁸ Finally, as noted above, increasing awareness of American-style journalism via French graduate journalism schools and international exchanges (and perhaps reinforced by television's increased dependence on advertising) could create pressures for a more 'informational' journalism à l'américaine. To the extent that this hypothesis is correct, we should expect to see some shift toward more politically-neutral, fact-oriented journalistic discourse, and the abandonment of such hallmarks of the French political/literary model of journalism as the page one commentary, 'reaction' stories and the interview transcript.

What if an analysis of French media coverage of immigration shows only limited or no change? Just as discursive changes may only be partially due to institutional factors specific to the mass media, lack of change also ought to be interpreted carefully. Nevertheless, continuity in the form or content of French news discourse may indicate the constraining power of state intervention and professional self-regulation, as well as the internalized beliefs and habitual practices of journalists. It may also be the case, however, that such commonly criticized features of the media as ideological homogeneity, sensationalism and de-politicization, are not fully explicable in terms of the standard 'market vs. state' dichotomy. In other words, other factors, such as the spatial structuration of the journalistic field as well as the historically-contingent alliances and struggles among media organizations and other political actors, may also play an important role in accounting for the particular character of the mediated immigration debate since the 1970s. We will return to these questions of the

²⁶ It is not the purpose of this article to discuss at length the extensive body of research on media commercialism. But important recent works that comprehensively review this literature include Daniel C. Hallin, *We Keep America on Top of the World*, London 1994; Timothy C. Cook, *Governing with the News*, Chicago 1998; and Howard Tumber, *News: A Reader*, Oxford 1999.

²⁷ For this view, see Halimi. But to the extent that the French state continues sharply to limit and regulate the market sphere, and the highest positions in both government and industry are apportioned by state-run elite *grandes écoles*, increasing elitism would not necessarily promote a neo-liberal ideology that in fact runs counter to the interests of many French elites.

²⁸ Indeed, researchers associated with Bourdieu have emphasized *Le Monde's* role in legitimating a new form of economically-determined journalism in France. See especially Patrick Champagne, 'Le médiateur entre deux Monde', *Actes de la recherches en sciences sociales*, No. 131-132/March 2000, pp. 8-29.

relations among various levels and types of structural constraints and the production of news discourse after looking more closely at the actual immigration news coverage between 1973 and 1991.

French immigration news discourse: 1973, 1983 and 1991

Ideological narrowing?

Ideological diversity can be measured according to the social actors who are given voice, or the content of the pronouncements, regardless of source, which are mentioned in journalistic accounts.

At the moment when immigration emerged on to the political scene in France, a high percentage of social actors cited were on the ideological margins. Far right sources made up 9 percent of all sources for *Le Monde*, 11 percent for *Le Figaro*, and 5 percent for French television, while far left sources made up 23 percent of all sources for *Le Monde*, 17 percent for *Le Figaro*, and 13 percent for French television.²⁹ Frequently cited ‘marginal’ sources in French immigration news stories in 1973 included such small *gauchiste* organizations and parties as the Movement for Algerian Workers (MTA, Mouvement des travailleurs algériens) and the Communist League (Ligue communiste); labour unions, particularly the CGT, CFDT and FO; and the far right party New Order (Ordre Nouveau), a predecessor of the National Front.

By 1991, the percentage of sources on the far right had fallen somewhat (to 7 percent for *Le Monde*, 4 percent for *Le Figaro*, and 1 percent for television), but the drop in far left citations was precipitous (8 percent for *Libération* – down from 14 percent in 1983; 7 percent for television; 5 percent for *Le Figaro* and 3 percent for *Le Monde*). Between 1973 and 1991, of course, the French left itself had changed in a number of ways. The French communist party (PCF) lost a significant number of its members and voters. With the socialist left in power, far left (*gauchiste*) parties could not so easily summon the spectre of the Right to mobilize its troops. And far left associations such as the MTA had simply dissolved. On the other hand, labour unions continued to be politically active and endowed by the state with legal bargaining power, yet their visibility in the French news coverage of immigration also dropped sharply: from constituting an average of 10 percent of all sources in 1973 (10 percent for *Le Monde* and French television, 11 percent for *Le Figaro*) to 3 percent in 1991 (5 percent for

²⁹ Through the use of categories such as ‘far left’ and ‘far right’ we do not attempt to characterize the absolute ideological character of political actors cited in the press, but rather the extent to which actors on the margins — relative to the ideological centre at a particular historical conjuncture — are presented in news discourse. Generally speaking, however, far left actors include those associations, trade unions and small political parties that offer critiques of the capitalist system and emphasize issues of economic injustice. The French communist party (PCF) would thus be included in this category, but the Socialist party (PS, or in its earlier incarnations) and various humanitarian and cultural identity organizations were coded as ‘centre left’. In the ‘far right’ category, we included those right-leaning organizations identifying themselves as such or stigmatized as ‘extreme’ by the dominant conservative parties in France.

Libération, 4 percent for *Le Figaro*, 3 percent for TF 1 and Antenne 2 combined, and 1 percent for *Le Monde*).

When we aggregate the use of all centrist or non-partisan sources (sources on neither the far left nor far right), as in Chart 1 (see Appendix to this article), we can see a progressive narrowing of the ideological debate, and some evidence for television drawing the national daily press with it toward the centre.

French news coverage of a major racism demonstration in 1992, however, shows that left viewpoints have in no sense been silenced in France, especially in comparison to the United States. Similar anti-racism demonstrations were held in Paris (on behalf of immigrant rights and against the National Front) and Los Angeles (against the anti-immigrant Proposition 187) in 1992 and 1994 respectively. In each case, about 70 associations, labour unions, religious organizations and political parties on the left and far left organized the marches. Yet the French press, including television, gave far greater prominence to its leftist sponsoring organizations, with 81 to 87 percent of all social actors mentioned being left of centre, versus 58 percent in the American media. Only 3 percent of sources mentioned on TF1 were far left, the same as the American average. But TF1 seems to have had little or no influence on the three French national dailies – *Libération*, *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* – where citations of far left actors made up respectively 12, 20 and 22 percent of total sources cited. This comparison shows that a French media system supposedly dominated by a privatized TF1 was still quite capable of making room for left of centre viewpoints.³⁰

If there was only a limited ideological narrowing in terms of source citations, what about the specific framing of the immigration issue? In 1973, French journalistic discourse emphasized above all the ‘social suffering’ of immigrant workers. This theme is evident in such headlines as *Le Monde*’s ‘Eighteen months of struggle against slum hostels’ (13 January 1973), *Le Figaro*’s ‘[Government] proposes bill for immigrant worker social rights’ (26 September 1973), and a channel 1 ‘news magazine’ entitled: ‘Immigrant workers: How to reduce inequalities’ (23 May 1973). (See Chart 2 in Appendix)

By 1991, the immigrant ‘social suffering’ frame had been replaced largely by a focus on social problems (supposedly) caused by immigrants, including ‘illegal’ immigration, crime, drugs and street riots. Many of these stories were generated by politicians attempting to stimulate racist sentiments to their benefit, as in Jacques Chirac’s infamous ‘noise and smell’ speech in which he railed against a hypothetical immigrant worker with ‘four or five wives and 20 or so children, who receives 50,000 francs in welfare payments without, naturally, working!’³¹ Other ‘word scandals’ included socialist prime minister Cresson’s statement about needing ‘charters’ to send illegal immigrants home and former president Giscard d’Estaing’s article in *Le Figaro Magazine* warning of an ‘invasion’

³⁰ Rodney Benson, ‘The Mediated Public Sphere: A Model for Cross-National Research’, Center for Culture, Organizations and Politics, University of California, Berkeley, Working Paper 2001 Series (<http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~iir/culture/papers.html>).

³¹ Régis Guyotat, ‘La polémique sur l’immigration’, *Le Monde*, 21 June 1991, pp. 1, 40

of immigrants. The other major event-related articles were linked to ‘riots’ in Parisian housing projects. These kinds of events did not dictate a single ‘framing’ of the immigration problem. And indeed, *Libération*, which covered the banlieue riots extensively, featured a ‘social suffering’ frame in its stories almost as often as the ‘immigrants causing trouble’ frame. (See Chart 3, Appendix)

Yet if French news coverage shifted toward more negative coverage of immigrants, the data do not strongly support the claim that commercialized television led the way. In 1973 and 1983, television’s minimal scapegoating of immigrants was no doubt linked to the character of the respective French governments during those periods, which for different reasons favoured relatively lenient policies toward immigration. But even in 1991, after the vaunted privatization of TF1, it was the public (state-owned, partially advertising-funded) Antenne 2 that gave greater attention than the private TF1 to sensational violence in the Parisian banlieues, both in raw numbers (15 versus 10 evening news stories) and as a percentage of total stories (21 percent versus 12 percent). If one needs to point the finger at the news organization that did the most to shift the immigration public debate to the right, it would probably be *Le Figaro*, which had covered immigration only peremptorily during the 1970s and 1980s, but whose 149 page-one immigration stories in 1991 exceeded all of its national daily competitors, including *Le Monde* (139), *Libération* (132), TF 1 (121) and Antenne 2 (96).

In sum, between 1973 and 1991, the ideological lens through which the French media viewed immigration – both in terms of sources and issue framings – narrowed and shifted to the right (though not necessarily the ‘neo-liberal’ right).³² But an analysis of immigration news coverage during 1973, 1983 and 1991 provides only mixed evidence that commercial television was the leading edge in this process.

Increased sensationalism?

Sensationalism is a frequent accusation aimed at the press. But what precisely does it mean? Critics often use it to disparage an overly dramatized or emotional tone of coverage, especially in the use of headlines, photographs or moving

³² What would be a ‘neo-liberal’ immigration frame? Some American free-market conservatives have advocated ‘open borders’ as well as free trade as part of a consistent global free markets policy (for example, former Housing and Urban Development secretary and congressman Jack Kemp). However, this is not a position that has generally been ‘culturally-available’ in France, to use a term from Michele Lamont’s account of French and American differences in racist and anti-racist attitudes (*The Dignity of Working Men*, Cambridge, MA 2000). From a neo-Marxist viewpoint, most immigrant advocacy positions as well as immigrant scapegoating serve the purposes of conservative (‘neo-liberal’) politics in that they help deflect attention from the social suffering of non-immigrant workers due to globalization (corporate downsizing and outsourcing, downward wage pressures, forced job ‘flexibility’ and instability, etc.). Thus, to the extent that immigration has remained high on the French media/political agenda, it is difficult to trace, at least via the immigration issue, any increase in ‘neo-liberal’ ideology.

images. Sensational headlines appeared during all three peak media attention years. And often the most extreme-sounding headlines – such as *Libération's* ‘Socialists: the descent into hell’ (28 January 1992) – were driven by political as much as commercial motives. Another definition of sensationalism refers to the balance of all kinds of news stories, that is, the extent to which crime or other traumatic events (usually without any reference to the larger social context) come to dominate the news budget. Since this study only examines the immigration issue, it cannot comment on this question. However, even a casual perusal of the French media today, both television and print, would show that the kind of journalism promoted by London tabloids or Los Angeles local television has yet to make significant inroads in France.

Sensationalism also connotes exaggeration and hyperbole, finding a problem where none actually exists or at best stretching the truth. As we noted in the previous section, the dominant news frames shifted from ‘immigrant social suffering’ to ‘immigrants causing trouble’. To what extent did this discursive shift accord with the social reality of immigration, as best we can determine it via demographic and other social scientific evidence?

In 1973, immigrant workers clearly suffered from a lack of decent housing, poor working conditions and an overall high level of poverty.³³ Since news coverage at that time also focused on these themes, we can say that it was not that sensationalistic, at least in this sense. By 1991, news coverage paid much less attention to the social suffering of immigrants, even though the percentage of non-European immigrants living in ‘degraded’ housing continued to outstrip the national average five-fold and Maghrebin unemployment topped 30 percent.³⁴ Likewise, the prominence of the ‘immigrants causing trouble’ news frame in 1991 was not well-anchored in social reality. Illegal immigration (*immigration clandestine*) was actually highest during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when an estimated 80 percent of French immigrants had entered the country illegally, if only because the standard procedure of the time was to permit such illegal entry and routinely regularize immigrant workers after they had found employment.³⁵ In 1991, when illegal immigration became the centre of French public debate for several months, total apprehensions of illegal immigrants were only 11,354, up from the previous year by less than 1,000. Certainly, the total numbers are minuscule, even as a percentage of total national population, compared to the average of more than 1 million illegal immigrant apprehensions in the United States during the same period. More importantly, French demographers estimate that the total population of illegal immigrants in France, estimated to be between 150,000 and 350,000, has remained quite constant since the late 1970s.³⁶ As for

³³ Philippe Bernard, *L'immigration*, Paris 1993.

³⁴ French census data cited by Martine Aubry and Olivier Duhamel, *Petit Dictionnaire pour Lutter contre L'Extrême Droite*, Paris 1995.

³⁵ Don Dignan, ‘Europe’s melting pot: a century of large-scale immigration into France’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2/April 1981, pp. 137–152.

³⁶ Data from French Border Control, cited in ‘Combien de clandestins?’, *Le Figaro*, 10 July 1991; Bernard.

the crime issue, although immigrants and their children were in fact more likely to commit crimes, the difference between them and other French residents was negligible, even non-existent, when controlled for class.³⁷ By these measures, the increased prominence of the ‘immigrants causing trouble’ frame can be taken as an indicator of increased sensationalism. (Although it is interesting to note that this increased focus on the *sur-delinquance* of immigrant youths was seen by many French journalists at the time as a ‘return to reality’ and more honest reporting.)

To be fair, by this definition of non-sensational coverage, probably few news outlets would measure up. The ‘reality’ that most news organizations aspire to represent is that of political debate and conflict. From this perspective, the more sympathetic coverage of immigration during the early 1970s can be accounted for by the government/business consensus that cheap immigrant labour was a necessity for the French economy, along with intra-left conflicts (among the communist, socialist and far left parties) in which one’s position vis-à-vis immigrants became a marker of political distinction. After the socialists came to power in 1981, and especially after they were forced to abandon their leftist economic policies in 1983, the incentive and opportunity to use the immigration issue as a political weapon shifted to the right and far right, with the predictable result that a more punitive anti-immigrant rhetoric emerged. The question, difficult to answer definitively, is the extent to which the French media reflected this political climate change or contributed to it.

During the late 1980s, French television was sharply criticized for giving too much attention to Jean-Marie Le Pen’s National Front. Indeed, the number of news stories mentioning Le Pen or his lieutenants increased sharply during the decade, rising from 15 each at TF1 and Antenne 2 in 1983 to 100 at TF1 and about 60 at Antenne 2 in 1988. But thereafter, attention to Le Pen dropped considerably.

During 1991, as in 1973 and 1983, it was *Le Monde* which devoted the greatest number of news stories to the National Front and quoted its leaders more frequently than any other news outlet. This coverage was unambiguously critical, but keeping up with the latest outrageous statement of the National Front also became a sort of professional and political trademark for the newspaper. Thus, in November 1991, when Bruno Megret, Le Pen’s lieutenant at the time, delivered a speech at a colloquium in Marseilles about the FN’s policies concerning immigration, most of the French media did not immediately recognize this event as newsworthy. The day after the event, only *Le Monde* gave the National Front’s ‘50 measures’ front page treatment. Even though there was nothing new in the proposals, *Le Monde* sub-editor Robert Solé later justified the prominent coverage since only a few weeks previously a SOFRES poll had shown 38 percent of the French sharing the ideas of the National Front on immigration, demonstrating in Solé’s view why the declarations of Chirac (on the ‘noise and the smell’) and Giscard d’Estaing (‘invasion’) had ‘played very

³⁷ Bernard, pp. 149–151; Aubrey and Duhamel, pp. 55–56.

well'. What Solé failed to mention is that *Le Monde* itself had sponsored the SOFRES poll and that *Le Monde*, more than any other newspaper, had prominently and heavily covered Chirac's and Giscard d'Estaing's anti-immigration statements. Although *Le Monde* was initially alone, within two days all the other major national media had taken up the story. TF1's lead story even showed the *Le Monde* headline as an indicator of the story's significance.

To sum up so far, between 1973 and 1991 the mediated immigration debate in France arguably became more remote from the everyday social reality of immigration – the actual problems suffered by immigrants or caused by immigrants and their descendants. But this change is due at least as much to the transformations in French politics as to those in the media. The media may have played a role in promoting the National Front, but *Le Monde* as much or more than TF1 led the way in this effort.

A final useful definition of sensationalism is offered by Freiberg in his study of the French press. Freiberg notes that all news media cover crisis situations (riots, scandals, etc.), but that a serious, less-sensationalistic press should also provide 'continual, non-crisis oriented coverage' of the social world.³⁸ Thus, we may say that a media system is more sensationalistic to the extent that its news coverage is crisis-oriented. An 'index of sensationalism' may be constructed simply by calculating the extent to which the total news coverage for the year is made up of crisis event coverage.³⁹

In its selection and emphasis of news, the French media coverage of immigration became more sensationalistic between 1973 and 1991, though the change over time is not strictly linear. During all three periods, *Le Figaro's* coverage of immigration was highly sensational. But what is notable is that by 1991 this sensationalism had become a feature of all the major national news organs. Moreover, this relative sensationalism (as a percentage of total stories) was also accompanied by a raw increase in sensationalism (number of stories). Because Chart 4 (see Appendix) refers only to percentages, television's seeming lower level of sensationalism is somewhat misleading. In 1991, each of the two major channels devoted as many or more stories to each sensationalistic event as the major newspapers, and also nearly twice as many stories to immigration overall. Moreover, the origin of crisis events changed between 1973 and 1991. In 1973, the major crises were generated from 'below': the anti-immigrant protest of the far-right *Ordre Nouveau* which prompted a *gauchiste* counter-protest and clashes with the police protecting the *Ordre Nouveau*, and the murder of a bus-driver by an Algerian immigrant which prompted a wave of anti-Algerian violence which in turn led the Algerian government to halt further emigration. Likewise, in 1983 immigrant worker-led car industry strikes, along with the surprising electoral success of the National Front at Dreux, were major media events.

³⁸ J.W. Freiberg, *French Press: Class, State, and Ideology*, New York 1981, p. 223.

³⁹ We define 'crisis events' as stories involving violence, disruption or controversial political statements, and which captured the attention of the major media for a sustained period of time (generally, three or more days).

In contrast, in 1991, crises from below (violent confrontations between immigrant youths in the Parisian banlieues) were overwhelmed by media events linked to the already noted anti-immigration statements by leading socialist and conservative politicians. Whereas the crises of 1973 and 1983 were relatively spontaneous, the 1991 events (even the banlieue 'riots' to a certain extent) were often self-consciously made for television, and promoted on television. In this sense, the French media by 1991 played a far larger role in shaping public political debate than it had in 1973.

Moreover, between 1973 and 1991, the major media organizations came to focus not only on crisis events in general, but the same crisis events. During 1973, coverage of immigration was highly fragmented, that is to say, the form and content of information and commentary presented varied widely from one media outlet to another. Stories or issues emphasized by one media outlet were often entirely ignored, or downplayed, by others. When the government deported Swiss pastor Berthier Perregaux, a representative of the immigrant-advocacy organization CIMADE in Marseilles, *Le Monde* covered the event extensively for nearly a week. *Le Monde* proclaimed that the deportation had provoked 'strong emotions' in Marseilles, but the event evoked no emotion at all, even silence, at *Le Figaro* and state-owned television.⁴⁰ In 1983, the selection of news stories continued to be highly fragmented. Stories covered heavily by *Libération*, such as the March of the Beurs, were ignored by *Le Figaro* and covered less prominently by *Le Monde*. Likewise, the election of National Front members to the Dreux municipal council, covered heavily by *Libération* and *Le Monde*, and somewhat less by French television, was virtually ignored by *Le Figaro*. Conversely, immigrant-led motor industry strikes were covered prominently by *Le Figaro* and much less so by *Le Monde* and *Libération*. In contrast, in 1991, the Chirac, Cresson and Giscard d'Estaing political 'word' scandals as well as the major Mantes-la-Jolie and Sartrouville 'riots' were all covered heavily by the three national dailies, TF 1 and Antenne 2.

Although there is clearly a shift toward greater sensationalism, what is also striking is the relatively high degree of sensationalism during all three peak media attention years. The politically sensationalistic character of the French news media, well before the recent wave of commercialization, is put in sharper relief via comparison with the highly commercialized American news media. During comparable 'high media attention' years in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, a much lower percentage of American news media coverage of immigration was generated by crisis events. Whereas crisis events accounted for more than 30 percent of all French immigration coverage in 1973 and 1991, they made up barely 10 percent of U.S. immigration coverage during comparable peak media attention years (1974 and 1994).

In sum, French media coverage of immigration became more sensationalistic

⁴⁰ 'Après plusieurs actions en faveur des immigrés; Le pasteur Berthier Perregaux a été expulsé de France', *Le Monde*, 5 September 1973, pp. 1, 9; 'La condition des travailleurs immigrés; L'expulsion du pasteur Berthier Perregaux provoque une vive émotion à Marseille', *Le Monde*, 6 September 1973, pp. 1, 6.

between 1973 and 1991. Yet increased media commercialism alone cannot explain this trend. Between 1973 and 1983, despite a significant increase in advertising on French television, both television and press coverage of immigration became less sensationalistic. At *Le Figaro*, a highly commercial and advertising-dependent newspaper during all three peak media attention years, the conservative political leanings of the publisher seemed to have played a more important role. Even *Le Monde*, in its very efforts to stigmatize the National Front, may have contributed to more widely diffusing the far right party's most outrageous claims.

Decline of the French 'political/literary' model?

Important aspects of the French 'political/literary' approach to journalism include the use of particular narrative formats, such as the interview, the commentary, and the reactions story, and secondly, a style of writing that mixes to a significant extent descriptive and normative statements.

This study of immigration news coverage does find a decline in the use of page-one commentaries by the national daily press, both those authored by journalists (from an average of 17 percent of all page one stories in 1973 to 7 percent in 1991) and by non-journalists such as academics, activists, etc. (from 20 percent in 1973 to 9 percent in 1991). Rather than representing an absolute decline in the use of commentaries, some of this decline can be accounted for by the creation of special inside opinion pages, such as *Le Monde's* current *Horizons/Analyses* and *Horizons/Débats* pages. Such a more formalized separation of 'news' and 'views' could however be fairly interpreted as convergence toward a more 'American' style of journalism.

In contrast, the percentage of interviews remained steady, even increasing slightly. This distinctive element of the French 'political/literary' model of journalism shows no signs of waning, and continues to be commonly used even among the most commercialized media outlets (*Le Figaro* and TF1 broadcasts). The interviews are generally quite 'soft' and often sympathetic, particularly in *Le Figaro*, which often interviews politicians whose views it favours in its own editorials. Leading politicians reserve the right to edit and have been known to even rewrite entirely the texts of interviews.⁴¹ But in *Libération* and *Le Monde*, academics and other intellectuals are often interviewed and this format provides much needed space to correct stereotypes or introduce new ways of understanding immigration or other issues ignored or distorted by political actors. In 1991, when former president Giscard d'Estaing called for a 'return' to a French citizenship policy based on 'blood' descendance, historian Patrick Weil was interviewed in *Libération* to set the record straight on the actual history

⁴¹ Author interview with a *Le Monde* editor, October 1998. See also Cyril Lemieux, *Mauvaise presse*, Paris 2000, p. 146.

Table 1: Commentaries and Interview Transcripts in the French Press, 1973–1991 (Proportion of All Page One Immigration Stories)

	1973	1983	1991
Commentary-Journalist-authored			
<i>Liberation</i>	—	.14	.07
<i>Le Monde</i>	.21	.07	.06
<i>Le Figaro</i>	.13	.18	.09
Interview Transcript			
<i>Liberation</i>	—	.08	.05
<i>Le Monde</i>	.02	.11	.04
<i>Le Figaro</i>	.07	.03	.12

of French immigration policies.⁴² For its part in response to Giscard d'Estaing's sensationalistic statements, *Le Monde* published a full-page interview with Marceau Long, the president of the French High Council on Integration which had just completed a multi-year study of French immigration policies.⁴³

One notices in these examples a change in the context in which commentaries and interviews appear in the press. Whereas in 1973, interviews and commentaries were often published without any reference to specific topical events, by the 1990s, they had become subject to the logic of the *événement*, subsumed within rather than offering an alternative to event-driven journalism.

Another aspect of the French 'model' which remained largely intact through the 1990s is the greater admixture of descriptive and normative language in news stories. Although the most 'American' of the French national newspapers in its dependence on advertising revenues, *Le Figaro* retained an aggressive tone toward immigrants and its political opponents during all three peak media attention years. For example, in a 27 January 1983 *Le Figaro* article on car industry strikes, headlined 'Meetings and card games' (*Meetings et jeux de cartes*), the journalist poked malicious fun at the striking and idle immigrant workers:

[According to the union leaders], immigrants don't want to spread disorder at Renault nor anywhere else in French industry. 'Besides', they explained, 'It's not a strike by immigrants. It's a strike of paint workers, it's a strike of French and immigrants.' Which is false, it is very much an immigrants' strike. A dozen immigrants are finally brought together. They are ready to talk and they speak easily, clearly enjoying themselves. 'Do you live far from here?' Response: At most, 90 kilometers. 'Are you married?' No response.

⁴² 'Le modèle allemand? Une régression'; Pour Patrick Weil, spécialiste de l'immigration, c'est à tort que VGE invoque la "tradition française" pour proposer le droit du sang appliqué en Allemagne', Interview with Patrick Weil by François Reynaert, *Libération*, 22 September 1991, p. 5.

⁴³ 'Un entretien avec M. Marceau Long; "Droit du sol et droit du sang doivent coexister" nous déclare le président du Haut Conseil à l'intégration', (Interview with Marceau Long), Philippe Bernard and Robert Solé, *Le Monde*, 28 September 1991, pp. 1, 5.

Then one of them gets angry, rolls his big eyes, moves forward, retreats. He is held back by his friends and calms down quickly. Another group leaves to find a worker injured in May 1981 who had been badly reimbursed by the factory. 'That', they said, 'is shameful.' To the question, 'Are there any French who work with you?' the immigrants all answered 'Yes.' Then they were off to find the French workers and finally returned with one who said, 'Yes, it's me'.

A paragraph-by-paragraph analysis of a random sample of political news stories in *Le Figaro* during 1995, 1996 and 1997 showed that about one-third of the paragraphs offered interpretation or opinion (rather than factual description). In contrast, just 10 percent of the paragraphs in a comparable sample of *New York Times* news stories served interpretive or opinion functions.⁴⁴

Conclusion: the journalistic field and institutional inertia

In contrast to dire warnings of dramatic change in the French media, this study shows some changes but also considerable continuity between 1973 and 1991. While there has been an ideological narrowing of the immigration debate, at least in terms of the sources given voice in the media, there has been no significant ideological change (at least toward neo-liberalism). The French press became increasingly sensationalistic, at least in its crisis-orientation to immigration news, but at no point was it 'politically' sensationalistic, at least by comparison with the American news media. Finally, many elements of the distinctive French 'political/literary' style, including the interview transcript and the mixing of factual and normative writing, remain largely intact.

While these findings run counter to some of the recent prominent criticisms of the French media by Bourdieu (and others), they confirm the power of inertia of cultural 'fields' to slow and even resist increasing economic pressures. We want to suggest that two aspects of fields are crucial: the historical formation of the field and the structure of competition within the field. Historical formation is important because the field's taken-for-granted rules of the game are established when the field is founded, and once 'routinized' tend to persist over time. As American 'new institutionalist' theorists Neil Fligstein and Douglas McAdam explain, fields 'are born of the concerted efforts of collective actors to fashion a stable consensus regarding rules of conduct and membership criteria that routinize action in pursuit of collective interests. If the initial consensus should prove effective in creating an arena advantageous to those who fashioned it, then it is likely to prove highly resistant to internal challenge!'⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Daniel C. Hallin and Rodney Benson, 'Two Models of Political Journalism: The French and American news media, 1965–1997', forthcoming, (based on content analysis of more than 1,000 randomly selected articles in *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* and the *New York Times* from 1965–67 and 1995–97).

⁴⁵ Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam, 'A Political-Cultural Approach to the Problem of Strategic Action', 1995 Manuscript. Revision of Paper originally presented for the Annual Meetings of the American Sociological Association, Washington, D.C., August 1990, pp. 22–23.

Bourdieu describes fields as ‘tightly-coupled’ networks which put a premium on the exercise of strategies of distinction in order for agents to exist socially as well as discursively. But we want to suggest that fields may vary precisely in this property, and one of the distinctive aspects of the French journalistic field is its highly centralized character in which all the major news outlets are based in Paris and in which political, professional and economic competition are thus all closely intertwined. These aspects of the French journalistic field help explain in part the continuity, as well as change, we see in the form and content of French news.

While far left perspectives on immigration became less visible in the French media between 1973 and 1991, they did not disappear as was the case in the United States during the same time period. In situations when the unions and other left parties and associations have mobilized, such as during December 1995 or in various anti-globalization conflicts, the French media have paid attention.⁴⁶ While fringe parties and associations, as well as serious intellectuals, are not likely to get the attention they feel they deserve even in France, the enduring cultural power of the ‘political/literary’ press tradition plays a role in ensuring that a relatively broad range of voices continues to be heard. It appears even that the ‘political/literary’ model is gradually becoming another French tradition that must be saved, a part of the *patrimoine*. The editor of the communist *L’Humanité* implied as much in a story about the big business bailout of the communist newspaper ‘founded by Jean Jaurès’: ‘I was fascinated by the historic attachment of certain corporate heads in regard to *L’Humanité*’, citing notably Patrick Le Lay, head of TF1.⁴⁷

As noted, external commercial pressures act on the journalistic field according to the internal structure and functioning of the field. And the centralized, concentrated French media system in combination with the greater weight of the political field means more political stories more often get magnified, perhaps even exaggerated in importance. Part of this is structural and the way that commercial competition is structured in the field. French national newspapers, especially the big three, compete on a daily basis for many of the same readers. Most readers do not subscribe but make a daily decision, or not, to purchase a newspaper at their local press kiosk. To the extent that sales are contingent on daily purchase decisions even for the prestige national press, politics is going to be covered in a more sensationalized fashion. In a highly concentrated field, strategies of distinction also become all important. Media outlets are able to emerge, survive and thrive only to the extent that they can distinguish themselves from what is already on offer.

From the mid-1960s until the early 1980s, *Le Monde* was the unquestioned dominant national newspaper in France, combining left-leaning political engage-

⁴⁶ This is not to deny that the coverage has often been distorted, as noted in Bourdieu, 1998. It is only to emphasize that the French polity, including the media, continues to make room for a significant expression of far left viewpoints.

⁴⁷ Michel Delberghé, ‘Des entreprises privées s’engagent dans le sauvetage de *L’Humanité*’, *Le Monde*, 17 May 2001, p. 19.

ment with high professional standards. When François Mitterrand came to power in 1981, *Le Monde's* close association with the socialist party led to a decline in both its professional credibility and its readership.⁴⁸ *Libération*, a small, far-left journal founded by Jean-Paul Sartre in 1973, was able to establish itself after 1981 as a national newspaper in part because of the chance occurrence of *Le Monde's* decline. To take advantage of this opportunity, *Libération* distinguished itself from *Le Monde* politically, but to an even greater extent, stylistically. As its long-time editor Serge July has openly proclaimed, Libé's goal was to capture the 'emotion of the news'. *Libération's* emphasis on dramatic photographs and extra-large, bold page-one headlines has brought the logic of television visuality into the heart of the national press (in turn influencing French television, among whose journalists *Libération* is reportedly the most frequently read newspaper). Although *Le Monde* seems no longer seriously threatened by *Libération*, the older newspaper's successive 'new formulas' have brought it closer and closer to its chief competitor: increasing use of colour photographs, even on the front page, and toward a single major story above the fold. Likewise, *Le Figaro* recently reshaped its own graphic design to provide a cleaner, more modern and dramatic look. To the extent that the 'big three' newspapers have converged ideologically, a sensationalism of style may continue to serve as the chief strategy of distinction.

As for its relation to American 'fact-based' journalism, the French press seems to continue to maintain an ambivalent relationship. *Le Monde*, under the editorship of investigative journalist Edwy Plenel, has apparently embraced significant changes in form and content. During the autumn of 2000 (20 October 2000), *Le Monde* even published a special 10 franc issue with the *New York Times* that included a 36-page insert on 'America' and seven pages entirely in English reprinted from the American paper. In the inaugural issue of its 2002 new formula (13–14 January 2002), Plenel wrote about *Le Monde's* new 'contract with its readers':

'A journalist at *Le Monde* should always ask himself what happened factually (what, who, where, when, how?) before worrying about what to think of it intellectually. He must force himself to tell before judging, explain before commenting upon, demonstrate before condemning. To accept, day in day out, proof of the facts, is to admit that they are not immediately reducible to a single, unique explanatory scheme of which journalists in general and those at *Le Monde* in particular would be the favored guardians.'

Lest this be taken as a ringing endorsement of Anglo-American fact-based discourse, Plenel concludes the essay with a defence of 'pluralism', by which he means the obligation of a *Le Monde* journalist 'always to seek out contrary and opposing points of view, even marginal' and 'to give voice to those without, to the left-behind and the forgotten, seeking out the realities hidden by the dominant currents in the news'.

⁴⁸ Serge July, cited in Jean-Claude Perrier, *Le roman vrai de Libération*, Paris 1994, p. 201.

The most accurate portrayal of recent developments may be historian Ferenczi's description of the French press at the turn of the last century, that once again, it is 'accommodating' American influences 'in its own way'. In the new *Le Monde*, the interview format has survived and thrived, but with an important modification in favour of transparency. To illustrate, a transcript of an interview with presidential candidate Jean-Pierre Chevènement begins with a disclaimer that would rarely if ever have appeared a decade earlier: 'We publish below an interview with Jean-Pierre Chevènement, the text of which he has re-read and amended'.⁴⁹ In interviews conducted by the author with Paris and Los Angeles immigration reporters in 1997 and 1998, the Parisian journalists much more freely offered their personal and intellectual views than the American journalists (Los Angeles region). For instance, *Le Monde* reporter Philippe Bernard explained the paper's approach to immigration not in terms of objectivity or balance, but in terms of the newspaper's past political *engagements* – its support for the socialist party, its flirtation with the 'right to difference' politics of the early 1980s followed by its advocacy on behalf of integration, all in the context of its tradition of 'left Catholicism'.⁵⁰ Yet Bernard himself has been widely respected for his comprehensive, fair and rarely opinionated coverage of immigration.

In sum, change has clearly come to the French news media in recent years, in the form of an increasingly elitist, competitive, professional workforce, greater advertising expenditures which have especially buttressed the power of television, and even a limited entry of news organizations into the stock market (including *Le Monde* in 2001). However, these changes as Bourdieu predicted, have been crucially mediated and limited by the French journalistic 'field'. Since this study examines only one major political issue, it is of course possible that some of the findings would not hold for French media coverage of other issues. Far from being the last word, this study will hopefully be the first of many content analyses that will put to the test the strong claims made in recent years about the 'transformation' of media due to increased commercialization not only in France but across Europe, North America and indeed the world.

⁴⁹ *Le Monde*, 29 March 2002, p. 10.

⁵⁰ Interview with author, 16 June 1997

Chart 1

Ideological Narrowing: Combined Center Right, Center Left and Non-partisan Sources in French Media Coverage of Immigration, 1973-1991

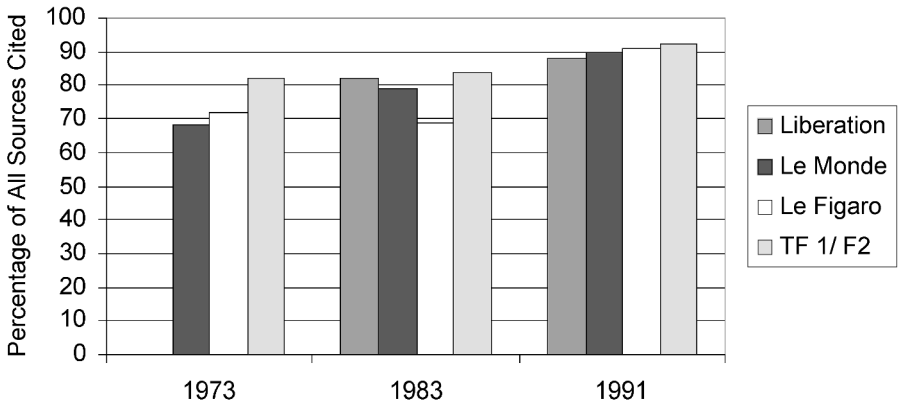


Chart 2

'Social suffering of immigrants' frame in the French national media, 1973-1991

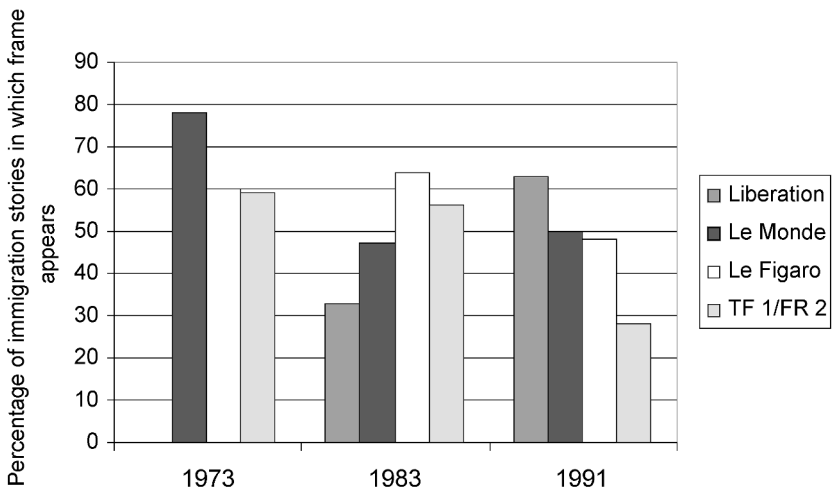


Chart 3

'Immigrants Causing Trouble' frame in the French national media, 1973-1991

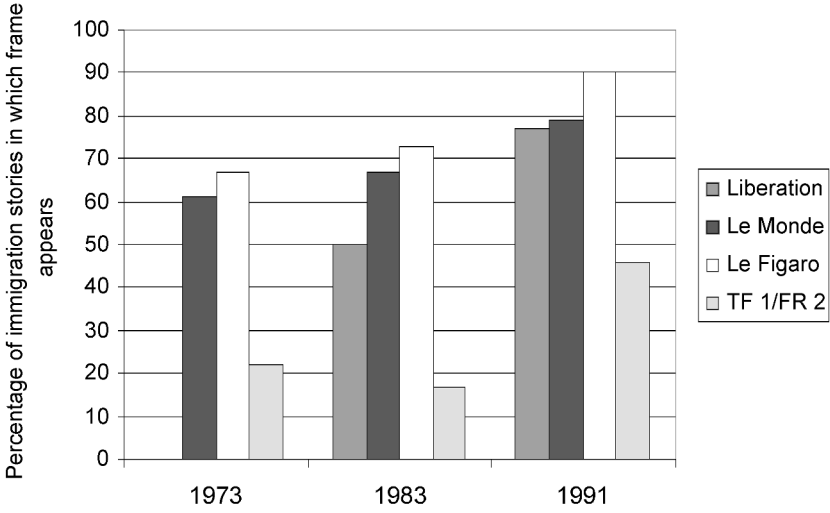
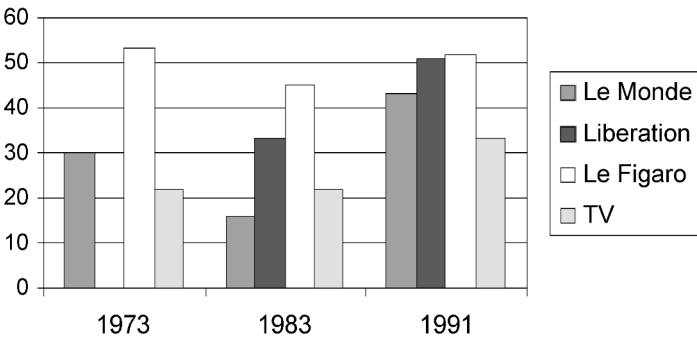


Chart 4

'Index of Sensationalism' in French Media Field: Percentage of Immigration Stories Linked to Sensational Events



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