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The Transformations of Traditional Mass Media Involvement in the Political and Electoral Process. A Case Study on Political Journalism in France and Italy since the 80s.

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Abstract:

The comparison between France and Italy questions the idea that traditional mass media in Europe are withdrawing from electoral issues, and more generally from politics. Although in both countries parties can no longer count on the support of affiliated newspapers, the Italian case study shows that the press's political involvement has not actually disappeared, but that it has taken on transformed and diversified forms. From partners aligned on the parties' positions in the 50s and 60s, Italian newspapers have become competitors to parties from the late 70s, maintaining a strong interest for politics.

Some comparative studies suggest a convergence or a *homogenisation* process of journalism in western democracies (Hallin and Mancini 2004). The journalistic model based on a core work ethic consisting mainly of objectivity, fairness and detachment, of which the United States would embody the “purest” form (Schudson 1978; Donsbach 1995), would become dominant. Yet, some other authors propose a concept of *hybridisation* (Esser and Pfetsch 2004) as opposed to *Americanisation*, suggesting that the American model is facing strong factors of resistance. However, the comparison of the transformations of Italian and French political journalism since the 80s, which I analysed in my PhD research on national daily press, sheds light on divergences between the two countries in their support for the ideal of objective journalism, although they belong to the same “Mediterranean” ideal-type of media system (Hallin and Mancini 2004).

This comparison relies on about sixty interviews with French and Italian political journalists and political communication staff, and on direct observations in political news departments of the reference newspapers *Le Monde* and *Corriere della Sera*. It calls into question the idea that the process of “commercialisation” of information, i.e. the reinforcement of an economic rationale in editorial politics and in human resource management in the media, which was initiated in the 70s in both countries, would automatically lead to the “neutralisation” of the press and its content.

France has undergone a triple depoliticisation process. First, from the late 70s and the early 80s, there has been a depoliticisation of the journalistic field, i.e. a partisan disengagement of newspapers (Darras 1998; Juhem 2001). Second, within the newsrooms of the national daily newspapers, the depoliticisation of the journalistic field has led to a decrease in the coverage of politics. Moreover, political journalists are no longer encouraged to write political analysis and commentary: they are progressively being dispossessed of their overhanging position on current events by external experts. Third, since the 90s, there has been a decrease in journalists’ belief in the capacity of politics to change the world, i.e. a weakening so-called political *illusio* (Bourdieu). This triple depoliticisation converges towards the model of objective and neutral journalism.

In Italy, on the other hand, we observe opposite trends. National daily newspapers do not conceive of themselves as mediators between the political sphere and the public, but as full political actors. Over the last twenty years, political information has acquired strong and growing exposure for the last twenty years in the pages of Italian daily newspapers. The professional figures who are promoted in Italy remain the editorialists, that is to say high status journalists producing normative judgements and comments and often having an initial

experience as activists and sometimes having assumed political functions or mandates. The Italian case seems to have gone through a hybridisation process.

These contrasting evolutions between French and Italian political journalism from the 80s can be explained by differences in the way political journalists perceive their role (Donsbach 1995). If the national daily newspapers' propensity to adopt partisan endorsement strategies increases during electoral campaigns, as illustrated by the coverage of political information by *la Repubblica* and *Il Giornale* during the 2001 legislative elections (Roncarolo 2002), the role they maintain as political actors does not limit itself to electoral campaigns. It is, on the contrary, a routine characteristic of Italian political journalism, all the more so because political life today is characterised by a multiplication of election days and continuous attention to public opinion. We are therefore, from a media point of view, in a state of permanent campaigning.

This paper will be divided into three parts dealing with: 1) the autonomisation and depoliticisation process of the journalistic field in France and Italy; 2) the consequences of this process within the newsrooms of the French and Italian national daily newspapers, focusing on the organisational level (transformations in the coverage of politics and in the models of journalistic excellence); 3) the degree of political *illusio* among French and Italian political journalists.

1- Autonomisation and depoliticisation process of the journalistic field

In Italy, the commercialisation of information produces, for example, new forms of committed journalism, while the traditional advocacy press endures. Recent newspapers with a wide circulation such as *la Repubblica* (1976) and *Il Giornale* (1974) hold a strong political identity combined with an aggressive commercial strategy. Since the beginning of 2000 numerous broadsheet newspapers with a restricted circulation have appeared and aim at a niche in the readership defined principally through its political identity. Grossi and Mazzoleni (1992) describe this phenomenon as “competitive parallelism”, a concept which indicates a strong convergence of interests and functions between journalists and politicians, as illustrated by the example of *la Repubblica* which proclaimed itself a “newspaper-party” (“*giornale-partito*”) at its creation. In France, on the contrary, the advocacy press is a disintegrating press family. The few newspapers still existing, like for example the communist daily newspaper *L'Humanité*, have a very declining circulation and important financial difficulties.

The decline in the opinion press

In France and Italy, the second part of the 20th century is characterised by the decline in the opinion press, which is embodied in both countries by the closure of numerous newspapers and a decrease in their circulation. However this decline has not taken place at the same pace or with the same intensity in both countries.

In France, the opinion press today forms a press family that is disappearing so fast that we could say it is disintegrating. There are only a few opinion newspapers left, such as *L'Humanité*, *Présent* and a small number of regional communist daily newspapers like *La Marseillaise*, *Le Populaire du Centre*, *l'Echo de la Haute-Vienne*, which do not on their own form a structured sub-space comparable to any other, for example to news magazines. The decline in the opinion press began in the 50s but was mostly felt in the 60s. The election of François Mitterrand as President in 1981 contributed to the neutralisation of the left-wing newspapers (Juhem 2001). As regards the national daily newspapers, which are maintaining their opinion press characteristic, *L'Humanité* and *La Croix* are the only ones to have survived, but they have chronic financial difficulties, offset by external funding from such sources as subscriptions from “Les amis de *L'Humanité*” or from “la fête de *L'Huma*” in the case of *L'Humanité*, and from the Bayard Press Group, to which it belongs, for *La Croix*. Attempts to create opinion newspapers in the 70s, such as *L'Humanité Rouge*, *Combat Socialiste*, *Le Matin de Paris* and *le Quotidien du Peuple* failed, and they disappeared after just a few months.

In Italy, the national daily press landscape belies the idea of a disintegrating opinion press. The Italian national daily press consists of numerous opinion newspapers. It includes a number of party newspapers, such as *L'Unità* (*Democratici di Sinistra*), *Il Secolo d'Italia* (*Alleanza Nazionale*), *La Padania* (*Lega*), and *Liberazione* (*Rifondazione comunista*). Moreover, since 2000, the resurgence of former party newspapers, like *La Voce Repubblicana* (*partito repubblicano italiano*), *L'Avanti* (*socialisti italiani*), and *L'Europa* (*Margherita*), which has succeeded *Il Popolo* (*Democrazia Cristiana*), complete the press party overview and demonstrate the persistence of a quite high level of external pluralism in the national daily press, which more or less expresses the positions of the different political parties.

But the persistence of the party press in Italy does not cover the entire reality of the Italian opinion press. The party press corresponds to the definition proposed par Seymour-Ure (1974) of press / party parallelism: i.e. implication of parties in the ownership and the management of newspapers; partisanship of the editorial line defended by each newspaper; homogeneity of readerships from the point of view of their political sympathies. Other forms of newspaper belong to the opinion press without necessarily responding to these criteria. This includes committed newspapers, openly displaying a strong political identity without necessarily joining a political party, as is the case of *Il Manifesto*, a monthly magazine created in 1969 by a group of dissidents removed from the PCI, and transformed into a daily newspaper in 1971. But the renewal of the Italian opinion press forms is above all illustrated by the creation in the late 90s of the daily newspaper *Il Foglio*, which proclaims its commitment without being affiliated to a party. Its director is Giuliano Ferrara, former communist activist, and former minister in Berlusconi's first government: "*It's an opinion newspaper, critical, about politics, about the economy, about culture, very personalised, and linked to its founder. With ideas which are very liberal, a newspaper in which there are right-wing editorialists and critics, with right-wing experience and culture. And there are numerous ex-communists – I – and then Catholics, not left-wing Catholics but from a more traditionalist church. But only people of mobilisation ("di mobilitazione"). So a curious, nonconformist and strange newspaper*", explains its director and founder¹. He claims its lack of neutrality and at the same time of party affiliation: "*We are liberal but not liberal orthodox. [...] It's a pro-American, Pro-Israeli newspaper, very combative and assertive on some very important issues. But we don't have any orthodoxy or idée fixe.*"² It participates in and organises political debate, it intervenes in the political sphere. All issues, whether Roberto Begnini's film "*La vita è bella*" or international politics, are covered with a critical and polemical frame. *Il Foglio* fits into a journalistic model of mobilisation, opposition and advocacy journalism. This role conception is embodied in the journalistic practice of analysis and commentary: "*You will never find in Il Foglio an article in which information is naked or raw*"³. This newspaper adopts a positioning strategy that is not only political, but also commercial. According to its director, it is a "second" newspaper (i.e. a newspaper which is read after a general or *omnibus* one), with a weak circulation, mainly directed at the elite, with a classical lay-out: text only, long articles, "*an elegant lay-out*".

¹ Interview (November 2002).

² *Idem.*

³ *Idem.*

In the same vein, a series of daily newspapers has been published since early 2000, including *Il Riformista* in 2002, equivalent to *Il Foglio* on the left-wing spectrum; *La Gazzetta Politica* created in 2002 by Claudio Signorile, former minister of the Craxi's government and former vice-president of the PSI; and *Liberio*, a centre right-wing newspaper created by Vittorio Feltri in 2000. All in all, there are about twenty national daily newspapers in Italy which belong to the opinion press category⁴. Admittedly, their circulation is limited (66,000 copies a day for *L'Unità*, 32,000 for *Il Manifesto*⁵, 15,000 for *Il Foglio*) but this weak circulation has to be put into perspective with the press audience ratings in Italy which are among the lowest in Europe.

These different elements show the persistence and the renewal of forms of committed journalism in Italy. The commercialisation of information since the 70s and the 80s in Italy has not mechanically led to its neutralisation. For example, *la Repubblica*, created in 1976, has become the second, sometimes the first, daily newspaper in circulation terms; it has adopted assertive commercial strategies, although it has also openly proclaimed its political commitment. *La Repubblica*, but also *Il Giornale*, created in 1974, have a strong political identity (left-wing for the first, left-wing for the second) and are also sales successes, whereas attempts to create independent newspapers have failed. Originally used by the founder of *la Repubblica*, Eugenio Scalfari, the notion of *giornale-partito* has been taken by Italian academics to express the idea that *la Repubblica* is not a daily newspaper linked to a party but rather a newspaper that organizes campaigns on intervention themes. Angelo Agostini (2004) distinguishes three types of Italian daily newspapers: the institution daily (“*quotidiano-istituzione*”) such as *Il Corriere della Sera* or *La Stampa*; the agenda daily (“*quotidiano-agenda*”) such as *la Repubblica*; and the activist daily (“*quotidiano-attivista*”) such as *Il Foglio*, *Liberio* or *L'Unità*. The first group is composed of traditional daily newspapers strongly linked to a geographical zone of development and circulation, whose readership covers the entire political spectrum.

The second kind of daily newspapers sets not only the agenda of political preferences but also cultural and leisure ones; in brief it sets the intellectual preferences of its readership. The newspaper brings a sense of belonging to a given readership area, whose political positions are much broader than those of any single given party. The third kind of daily newspapers is the most recent type, and has only appeared in recent years. It regularly

⁴ About 30 newspapers get State subventions to party press in Italy.

⁵ Sources: Fieg 2003.

organises mobilisation: from the struggle against immigration initiated by *Liberio*, to the USA-day proposed by *Il Foglio* to support the United States after 11 September 2001, or the rounds (*girotondi*) organised by *L'Unità* to protest against war in Iraq. The activist daily newspapers “are something more than the mutation of party press. They have definitively taken note of the presence of the agenda-newspaper” (Agostini 2004, p. 139). The activist daily newspaper, from the point of view of its mobilisation dimension, acts as a “public problem entrepreneur” (Becker 1963) or as a journalistic crusader by analogy with the notion of “moral crusade” used by Gusfield (1963).

So, the landscape of the national daily press in Italy presents a continuum of forms and levels of political involvement: from the originally party press to the press “above-the-parties” such as *La Stampa* and *Corriere della Sera*; from the weak circulation political press to the “*giornale-partito*” of *la Repubblica*, which combines a strong political identity with large-scale circulation. The supply of the national daily press seems to be more diversified in Italy than in France, not only because of the number of newspapers but also because of their both political and commercial positions. The dominant journalistic model is advocacy journalism, which relates and interprets facts according to the social representations to which journalists are closest. Newspapers represent different views of the world which can be interpreted, evaluated and therefore attacked or defended. Denunciation journalism, which is similar to the advocacy journalism born in the United States as an alternative to the liberal-bourgeois press and to its claim to objectivity, developed into two ways in Italy from the early 70s onwards: on the one hand the press which adopted a dominated class point of view; and on the other, news magazines and *la Repubblica*, less radical, non-revolutionary. In both its forms, denunciation journalism is due less to an opposition to so-called journalistic objectivity, as was the case in the United States, than it is to the conformity of Italian journalism, which reproduced the government positions and was at that time pejoratively defined as “regime press”. Italian denunciation journalism was less an opposition to a journalistic model than a political opposition (Sorrentino 1999, p. 9-23).

2- The depoliticisation process within the newsroom (media contents and journalistic role conceptions)

Over the last twenty years, political information has acquired strong and growing exposure in the pages of Italian daily newspapers, whereas in France the proportion of the

pages labelled as political has kept on falling. Indeed the political section is often considered by peers as boring and less appealing to the readership, too esoteric, and too empathic, and as conniving with political sources.

Furthermore, the professional figures who are promoted in Italy remain the editorialists, that is to say high status journalists producing normative judgements and comments and often having an initial experience as activists and sometimes having assumed political functions or mandates, whereas in France these professional figures are progressively becoming stigmatised, and increasingly dispossessed of their overhanging position on current events by external experts. This division of labour between political journalists and external contributors overlaps a formal separation between facts and comments in the pages of French daily newspapers, so that any form of explicit bias does not involve the newspapers but the experts alone who express their own opinion. In Italy, on the contrary, a formal separation between opinions and information does not exist; the newspapers agree with the opinions expressed by internal or external experts in their pages (Lettieri 2002).

Political information - loss of exposure

In France, the political section in the national daily newspapers has received less and less exposure, as we can see on graph n°1 (v. infra) which shows changes in the pagination dedicated to political information in the pages of the French newspapers *Le Figaro*, *Libération* and *Le Monde*.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT THERE

The average number of pages given to political information goes from 8.9% of the total number of pages in 1981 to 7.7% in 2002: i.e. a decrease of 1/7 in the space dedicated to political information over the past two decades. Today, the disparities observed in 1981 between the three newspapers have decreased to the point where they are now quite homogeneous.

A more detailed analysis of the changes in pagination allotted to the political section in the national daily press (v. infra) confirms the hypothesis of a generalised decline in the exposure given to the political section in the French national daily press. On the one hand, if mixed pages (i.e. pages dealing not only with political issues) are taken into account, loss of exposure becomes more pronounced in the case of *Le Figaro* and of *Libération*. On the other hand, in the case of *Libération*, politics lose quite considerable exposure in the more

showcase section of the newspaper, i.e. the “Event” section which opens the newspaper’s inner pages.

TABLE 1 ABOUT THERE

A more precise analysis of the newspaper *Le Monde* highlights the factors which explain the decline in the exposure given to political news in the national daily newspapers. The table below represents the changes in the pagination dedicated to each section of *Le Monde* over the past two decades.

TABLE 2 ABOUT THERE

Between 1981 and 2002, the political section (called “France”) has lost two places in the ranking of the sections given most exposure. It suffers greatly from the creation of new sections, such as one of those allocated the most pagination, called “Today” (“Aujourd’hui”), which satisfies commercial objectives because of its appeal to readership and advertisers alike, what Tunstall (1971) calls the circulation goal and advertising goal.

*“When what we have today are young journalists who every week have to produce articles on gardening, fashion and minor issues, which are interesting in fact, but that Le Monde previously despised or neglected. The newspaper has to find sufficient and adequate space for these. In a context in which pages are reduced in size and much tighter, this space is found to the detriment of the International section and the work produced by the political and economic sections.”*⁶

The doubling of the number of sections between 1981 and 2002⁷ has led to greater competition for space between the different sections⁸. While in 1981 only 5 sections shared the main part of the newspaper’s space (more than 50% of the total pages were shared between Economics, International, Culture, Politics and Society) with considerable space allotted to advertising (about 16.9%), the distribution between sections in 2004 is more fragmented.

In Italy, on the contrary, the political section has gained exposure in the national daily newspapers, as illustrated in the graph below which represents changes in the pagination allotted to the political section in the newspapers *Il Corriere della Sera*, *la Repubblica*, *La Stampa* between 1981 and 2002. The average proportion of space given over to political

⁶ Interview (February 2004).

⁷ From 7 sections in 1981 to 13 in 2002.

⁸ The number of sections increased by 86% from 1981 to 2002, whereas the number of newspaper pages only increased by 9%.

information in these three newspapers has gone from 8% to 12%; it has risen by a quarter over the last 20 years, which is a huge increase.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT THERE

However, the results vary strongly from one newspaper to another. Firstly, while in *La Stampa* the pagination dedicated to political information was the lowest of the three newspapers in the early 80s, it became the highest in the early 2000s, having been multiplied by 4. Secondly, *la Repubblica* shows the opposite trend to the other two newspapers, although the decrease is limited (1/6). But this decrease has to be put into perspective, because *la Repubblica* combines a great number of mixed pages: if added to the political pages, the trend becomes positive. In fact, it goes from 11.8% to 14.7% (V. infra). Furthermore, if we compare the total number of political pages in the three newspapers, *la Repubblica* produces the highest number of political pages, i.e. 159 pages or 5.5 pages a day. In addition, the percentage of political pages in the first section of the newspaper called “*Primo Piano*” (the most exposed section) is high, demonstrating that political information constitutes a priority in the hierarchical system of *la Repubblica*.

TABLE 3 ABOUT THERE

The pagination allotted to political information in the early 80s was very different between *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa* on the one hand, and *la Repubblica* on the other: there was a 7-point gap between *la Repubblica* and *Il Corriere della Sera* and a 10-point gap between *la Repubblica* and *La Stampa*. The history and the structure of Italy’s journalistic field explain this difference. Until the late 70s and early 80s (and the creation of *la Repubblica* in 1976), the Italian daily newspapers such as *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa* were not real national daily newspapers; their geographical area of circulation was restricted to the region in which each of them had its headquarters: Piedmont for *La Stampa* and Lombardy for *Corriere della Sera*. The readership of both these newspapers had two main characteristics: the first was linked to its place of residence; the second to its social class - the major part of their readership came from industrial and financial circles. These characteristics had an impact on the contents of the newspapers, which allotted considerable space to local and regional information and were less focused on Rome, where political life was mainly concentrated. Only very late on did Italy’s journalistic field undergo a nationalisation process, which can be explained by several factors. First, Italy only became linguistically united fairly late on, essentially after WWII. Second, a proper media market has only really emerged since the 70s because until then, the economy was mainly based on

small-scale retailing which did not require the development of an advertising market. Confronted with these limits, the Italian daily press was condemned to a restricted circulation, which, combined with Italian polycentrism, was essentially regional.

If the differences between the three daily newspapers in the pagination allocated to politics were strong in the early 80s, they diminished to the point where they had practically disappeared by the early 2000s. Two elements explain this homogenisation towards the strong showcasing of political information in the Italian national daily press.

Firstly, the creation of *la Repubblica* in 1976 was something original in the daily press landscape. The first real national daily newspaper, *la Repubblica* did not have a preferential circulation area. Its circulation was spread out in a quite homogenous way across the whole of Italy, with strong circulation points in the largest towns. On the one hand, *la Repubblica* adopted a national sections-type structure, i.e. it did not provide a section with local information about Rome, and for the main part was made up of national and international information sections, more precisely politics, international, economics and culture; and on the other hand, *la Repubblica* has, since its creation, proclaimed its left-wing political involvement and the primacy of politics both in its pages and its areas of interest.

Secondly, the shifting of Italian political life towards Milan and north Italy, as a result of the emergence of new political actors such as *La Lega Nord* or the role played by the Milanese magistrates during the “Clean Hands” (“*Mani Pulite*”) operation, has led to an increase in *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa*’s interest in politics, the readership of both these daily newspapers still today living mainly in northern Italy.

To sum up, politics has gained space and exposure in the Italian national daily press in spite of a more competitive organisation of sections within the newspapers’ pages. The lack of a predetermined section in the first inner pages of the newspapers (any issue is eligible each day) benefits political journalists; they can propose a political framework for issues covered by other groups of journalist. If political information has increased in the Italian newspapers’ pages, this is not only due to a mechanical effect of the change in lay-out but also to an editorial line encouraging political reading of news and the supremacy of political interpretation of facts.

Calling into question of the professional political analyst and commentator figure

In France and Italy, the role of the editorialist (“*opinionista*”) and the exercise of critical-expertise (Padioleau 1976), commentary and analysis have increasingly been taken on by another group composed of non-journalists competing with political journalists since the 90s. We seem to be witnessing the ascent of external experts and expertise. “*The issue can go as far as a real expropriation of journalistic know-how, which is forced to give up part of its pagination to contributors with knowledge over which they have no control[...] when the analysis of political life postulates the intervention of legal knowledge (constitutional law) or knowledge of social-science based issues (electoral sociology analysis)*” (Neveu 1993). In Italy there are several periods corresponding to the entry of these external contributors who are called in by newspapers to compensate for their journalists’ lack of skills in certain specific fields. Such was the case in the 50s during Italy’s economic development, faced with which, the journalists’ literary background was no help. This process has particularly intensified since the early 90s, transformations in the Italian political system having encouraged contributions by lawyers or political scientists such as Giovanni Sartori (political science professor), and Renato Mannheimer (poll analysis and quantitative methods specialist), who both write in *Il Corriere della Sera*. Contributions by magistrates, lawyers, experts in geopolitics and international relations specialists (such as the former diplomat Sergio Romano) were also encouraged because of political scandals and the break-up of the USSR. Although external expertise feeds on the lack of journalistic competence in France and in Italy, it does not have the same proportions and it does not respond to the same objectives in both countries. This has led to diverse consequences on the competitive-collaborative relationships between political journalists and external experts.

In France, there is an externalisation process of commentary and analysis, i.e. an externalisation of articles expressing an opinion that is clearly partisan or simply normative. External expertise is embodied by the creation of sections dedicated to external speakers, such as “Debate and Opinions” in *Le Figaro*, “Rebounds” in *Libération*, “Horizons-Debates” in *Le Monde*. This formal boundary shows the will to both separate facts from commentaries (organisation of a formal journalistic objectivity), and to promote the names of external specialists as part of a commercial strategy that is adapted to an “intellectual” readership. The French national daily press, by highlighting their external contributors (with a description of the status, function, title of the contributor) and by opening up their pages quite generously to these external names, produce two effects: on the one hand, the newspaper distances itself

from the opinions expressed by these contributors in its pages; on the other hand, the newspaper organises the opinion debate in accordance with a principle of formal objectivity, that is contradictory debate. This consists in allowing a certain number of points of view and analyses to be expressed, and in organising the polyphony of discourse by balancing the opinions of non-journalists. Carmela Lettieri (2002), in analysing forums for debates in the French and Italian national daily press, assesses the degree to which national daily newspapers open up to external names, i.e. the propensity of the newspapers to receive a great number and variety of articles signed by external contributors: she calculates the average number of articles written by a same contributor. French newspapers are far more open than Italian ones because the average number of articles written by each external contributor is lower: 1.3 in France and 3 in Italy. These data show that in the Italian daily newspapers a small number of external contributors share the production of editorials, comments column and forums for debate, whereas in French daily newspapers, external contributors are more numerous but each one writes fewer articles. Among the three newspapers analysed, *Il Corriere della Sera* is the one which is the least “open” to a variety of contributors with an average of 4 articles per contributor; it gives priority to a smaller number of contributors. In fact, the contributors most published write in *Corriere della Sera*, such as Sergio Romano, Renato Mannheimer, Angelo Panebianco, Ernesto Galli della Loggia. The number of “unusual” contributors (who have only written one article) is higher in France than in Italy: they account for 86% of the sample, while “regular” contributors make up 1%. In Italy, 12% of contributors are “regular”.

TABLE 4 ABOUT THERE

In Italy, external contributors are not used for the same purpose as in France. To begin with, such use is not an attempt by newspapers to dissociate themselves from any form of partisanship or political involvement. On the contrary, external contributors embrace the editorial line of the newspaper in which they are writing and the newspaper takes on the opinions expressed in its pages. This is why articles written by external contributors are not formally identified, either by their location⁹ or by an indication of the non-journalist status of the contributor. Identifying editorials, comments column and so on in Italian newspapers is not easy because opinions seem to be widespread. In addition, these articles are aimed at an

⁹ Only *la Repubblica* has a central section entitled “Commentaries” (“*Commenti*”).

elite and decision-making readership, so that it is not necessary to specify the contributor's functions.

Second, Italian daily newspapers do not aim to give a variety of points of view on such or such a debate, but to offer a uniform and homogeneous line. This is why the number of "regular" contributors is higher in Italy than in France. These contributions form a restricted and closed market; the newspaper's "circle of friends" has close ties with the newspaper's director, with whom they negotiate directly the publication of articles. This reinforces the concordance between the opinion expressed in the contribution and the editorial line. External contributors are, in a way, considered by journalists as belonging to the same community, which explains the lesser feeling of dispossession of Italian political journalists. They are often described by journalists as colleagues ("*collaboratori*") or as belonging to the same family. Relationships between contributors and political journalists are not based on rivalry or competition but on confidence. In Italy, there are "double men" (Charle 1992) situated at the frontiers between many social fields: journalists/editorialists having an activity as writer and considered as such (Gianni Riotta, editorial vice-director of *La Stampa*); journalists having a political activity as members of Parliament; academics with a high journalistic activity (Mario Deaglio, international economics professor at the university of Turin and editorialist for *La Stampa*, former editorial director of *Il Sole 24 Ore*).

To sum up, the production of a meta-discourse on political events remains shared between political journalists and external contributors in the Italian daily press, whereas in France critical-expertise is gradually being removed from the scope covered by political journalists in response to an objectivity constraint. Both these conceptions of the usefulness of external contributions lead to different relationship between political journalists and external experts, less competitive in Italy than in France where "*the status of these two expertises [internal and external] is the subject of struggles between political journalists and external specialists. Imitation of wording, appropriation of knowledge, permanent reinvention of ways of writing, are the tactics of this struggle*" (Neveu 1993, p. 7-27).

3- Weakening of the political *illusio*, i.e. the journalists' belief in the capacity of politics to change the world

French disenchantment

Professional and political socialisation

In France, the presidential election in 1981, which brought about a political change in power (“*alternance*”) for the first time in the fifth Republic, represents a pivotal event, after which the French political field went through complete transformation alongside the journalistic field. The previous generation of political journalists was socialised to politics in a very different context to the generation that arrived during the late 80s and the 90s.

Born in the “baby boom” of the 40s and 50s, this “old” generation did its apprenticeship in a political universe characterised by the lack of change of power and strong antagonism between the political supply of right-wing and left-wing parties, as acutely expressed during the Algerian war and May 1968, and which increased from 1972 with the uniting of the opposition parties into the “*Programme commun*”¹⁰. The reinforcement of political antagonism and the introduction of a presidential system with election by majority vote, helped to increase the political sympathies of numerous proportions of the electorate.

The “new” generation, on the contrary, has undergone a “negative” familiarisation to politics, characterised by successive changes in power, disfunctioning (such as “*cohabitation*”¹¹, and financial-political scandals also implicating journalists, etc.) and a decrease in political sympathy of the electorate (Juhem 2001).

Moreover, the “old” and “new” generations of political journalists have not experienced the same political involvement. The “old” generation experienced political journalism in a journalistic field where the recruitment of journalists was based above all on partisan criteria, where the national daily press and the newsmagazines explicitly expressed a political position according to a right / left division, and where the readership was homogeneous from the point of view of its partisanship. The “new” generation, on the other hand, entered the journalistic profession while the journalistic field was characterised by a progressive neutralisation of left-wing newspapers (Juhem 2001). The political polarisation of newspapers was de-differentiating; explicitly politicised newspapers disappeared from the journalistic landscape. This “disengagement” has been increased by the professionalisation of journalists, more and more of whom have had professional training.

¹⁰ The “*Programme commun*” would have led to the nationalisation of huge sectors of the economy and to the communists’ participation in government.

¹¹ Situation where the French President is in opposition to the majority in the National Assembly.

To sum up, these socialisation elements encourage a journalistic figure which is no longer partisan and committed, but instead professional and “objective”. The ability to be objective has become a strong component of journalistic identity along with the growth in journalists’ cultural capital and the increasing use of polls.

Meaningful social transformations: increase in cultural capital and feminisation

The increase in the cultural capital (Bourdieu) of political journalists from the “new” generation, in comparison to their elders, comes mainly from the fact that they have familiarised themselves with sociological know-how and knowledge. From the 70s onwards, the use of polls in political debate in TV has enabled political journalists to express themselves on behalf of public opinion and to create a balance of power with politicians who benefit from the legitimacy of electoral suffrage (Eric Darras 1998). The legitimate model of the political journalist has changed from one of being a spokesperson for a political family to that of an objective journalist, a neutral umpire of political debate who represents public opinion.

These transformations concern political journalists who have entered the profession during the 80s. More recently, other morphological evolutions, such as the feminisation of political journalism, have also helped to increase political journalists’ autonomy.

A *double bind* (Norbert Elias) is exerted on the “new” generation for female political journalists. They have to keep a certain distance between themselves and the politician in order to keep within the bounds of legitimate representations of what a “good” journalist should be in a journalistic field developing towards autonomisation, while they work in a world, i.e. politics, which is still mainly male-dominated and marked by stories of seductive relationships and shared intimacy between the most visible women in political journalism (TV journalists like Anne Sinclair, Christine Ockrent, etc.) and politicians.

Although they represent only a minority (albeit a particularly visible minority), these female political journalists married to politicians are considered as a counter-model by the “new” generation of women who entered into political journalism in the 90s. They are perceived as being too much in connivance with their sources.

“When we speak of our elders, female political journalists, there are actually many of them; there were Michèle Cotta, Françoise Giroud, Sylvie Pierre-Brossolète, and Catherine Nay. They were women who gave us – as I felt personally – the feeling that they were married to politics. It was their lives,

*they lived politics, breathed politics, they were politics right into their private lives, they did politics, and they lived politics. And that is something that female political journalists have rejected. But really I believe... It is very strange because I remember a conversation where we were talking together when we were travelling with other female journalists, and we said amongst ourselves that it was really something... the idea of living with a politician, that was the real taboo”.*¹²

This *double bind* leads female political journalists to double their efforts to distance themselves, not only as they go about their daily work, but also in the way they write and claim a distance from their sources. For example, the use of irony to write about politics is a way to express a lesser deference to political sources and can be interpreted as being part of this intensification of distancing.

Withdrawal from the journalistic profession and political journalism

The disenchantment felt by political journalists as regards the journalistic profession, and more precisely political journalism as a journalistic speciality, covers a variety of dimensions linked firstly to the process of devaluation of journalism, and secondly, to the devaluation of political journalism within the newsrooms. Political journalism has in fact progressively lost its prerogatives due to its “noble” status and is becoming a sector like any other.

These advantages were linked to its *non-revenue* or *prestige goal* characteristics (Tunstall 1971) which were challenged during the 90s, notably by competition from the more commercial sections, whose legitimacy lay elsewhere (*circulation goal, advertising goal*). The decreasing exposure given to political information is an indicator of the penetration of commercial strategies and labour rationalisation into the national daily press within an overall context of economic crisis. Several other factors may also be noted: the weakening of the political sector’s autonomy in deciding on the contents of its own pages in a process of centralisation whereby strategic choices are made by the editorial director; encouragement of journalists’ turn-over between sectors, which weakens the degree of specialisation of political journalists - the very foundation of their authority and legitimacy - and weakens their sense of belonging to the political sector (de-identification process); the fact that political journalists are being dispossessed of analysis and commentary in favour of external experts; and a

¹² Entretien (May 2003).

renewal in the way politics are covered, by rival sections, such as “Society”, which promote information focusing on the impacts political decisions have on ordinary lives.

The Italian re-enchantment

Political and professional socialisation

In Italy, the “new” generation of political journalists are admittedly entering political journalism at a time when the traditional political actors of the so-called “First Republic” and the political system are undergoing strong de-legitimisation as a result of *Tangentopoli*. The “Clean Hand” operation has accelerated the disintegration of the party system which began back in the 80s. This disintegration has resulted firstly in a restructured political supply, with the disappearance of both main government parties, DC and PCI, the renewal of political actors as illustrated by the 1994 legislative elections where 90% of the deputies did not have more than one term in Parliament behind them, and the birth of new political parties (*Forza Italia* and *La Lega*); and secondly, in institutional transformations (from a proportional to a mixed vote in 1993) leading to an “imperfect bipolarism” (Pasquino 2001).

But, on the one hand, the “new” generation is also aware that it is living through a historical phase, “*a very important time for Italian politics*”, where transformations in the political system, often described as the passage to the “Second Republic”, are taking place. Its feeling of being at the centre of Italian political history, at the centre of “power”, is partly linked to these political transformations, which in its eyes, represent a high cognitive stake - to understand towards which kind of political system Italy is heading:

*«Here we are still in an instable balance, at a junction, in a still immature bipolarism linked to the personage of Berlusconi. One thing that could happen, if there is an end for Berlusconi, is that we go backwards. But it is not sure. The most interesting aspect of this phase is to study this phenomenon. To see if what really was a kind of technical engineering determined in 1992 in response to the parties crisis and the moral crisis, if such a thing can go through a process that marches forward and comes to a conclusion or if, on the contrary, you can see a turning back, a reaction”.*¹³

On the other hand, the period 1992-1994, delimited by the beginnings of “*Mani Pulite*” and the legislative victory of *Forza Italia* (Briquet 1995), is characterised by a high

¹³ Interview (November 2002).

increase in the number of political pages which “*have exploded in all Italian newspapers: in the opinion press such as L’Unità, but in la Repubblica and in Corriere della Sera which was the point of reference*”¹⁴. Political journalists interpret this increase as a revival in the interest of civil society and readership for politics¹⁵.

Like in France, the “new” generation of political journalists in the national daily press is less politically involved than its elders. The “old” generation is characterised by a more political profile, like that of the political editor-in-chief of *Il Corriere della Sera* who began in 1972 in “*a very political newspaper*”¹⁶, *Voce Repubblicana*, affiliated to the Republican Party, and then became spokesperson of the Chairman of the Council, Giovanni Spadolini, in 1981, before returning to journalism. But the specialist skills of the elders, linked to their carefully-maintained proximity to political sources, and to possible political involvement or a previous experience in the opinion press, are recognised by their peers, as illustrated by their status and their coverage in the newspapers’ pages. Far from been considered as counter-model by the “new” generation, they represent the logical culmination of a career as political journalist, such as Indro Montanelli or Eugenio Scalfari, who have directed newspapers (*Il Giornale* from 1974 to 1994 for the former; *la Repubblica* from 1976 to 1996 for the latter) and have had a declared political involvement, or even a term of political office.

*“But maybe because the generation of our predecessors, those in the 40/50 year old bracket, were very often those who had been in politics, the best political journalists are journalists who come from political newspapers, because their imprint is one of political understanding, and because political understanding takes mental training. And so this generation, which was formed in these newspapers and then arrived at Corriere della Sera, was more ideological. It was a generation that made politics and liked being an activist in a political newspaper.”*¹⁷

Despite the legitimacy crisis undergone by political actors in the early 90s, the feeling that they are living through a historical moment in Italian political life has maintained their *illusio*. The withdrawal from political journalism has been slowed down by the fact that the political section remains a prestigious section within the newsrooms, and also because the political disengagement of the “new” generation is offset by the majority presence and dominant model of the elders, who are politically involved and well-informed journalistic figures, particularly thanks to their proximity (not only partisan) to the political sphere.

¹⁴ Interview (February 2004).

¹⁶ The last legislative election in Italy (2001) has shown a re-politicisation process (Mannheimer 2001).

¹⁶ Interview (November 2002).

¹⁷ Interview (February 2004).

Unpronounced social transformations: variable increase in cultural capital and the feminisation process

In Italy, the change in the level of qualifications of journalists is not linear and has seen downward phases. The eighties in particular are considered an anomaly, as the educational level of new journalists entering the employment market went down. Paolo Mancini (1999) shows that the proportion of journalists who have a master's degree ("*laurea*") is lowest for the youngest among them: 42% of journalists born after 1958; 48% of journalists born between 1948 and 1957; 47% of journalists born between 1938 and 1947. During this period, a journalist's social capital, whether inherited (familial or friendly) or acquired (political channel), became a more important resource in the journalistic profession than cultural capital was. A majority of new journalists did not have the level of educational qualifications required by their social origins and found in journalism a refuge-profession decreasing their feeling of social relegation. A minority of new journalists came from underprivileged social classes, entering via the political channel.

The partial reversal in the balance of power between political journalists and politicians that has come about in France since the 70s and 80s, encouraged by the increase in journalists' cultural capital, does not fit the Italian situation.

As regards the feminisation of political journalism, the phenomenon is weaker than in France. The discrimination exerted between women and men in the share of competences within the newsroom has led to a restriction of women's capacity to innovate; they are restricted to raw information, have no access to the most prestigious articles, and respond to orders rather than having the capacity to propose or initiate.

In other words, the two elements in the general morphological evolution of political journalists, i.e. professionalisation and feminisation, which reinforce the distancing of political journalists from their sources and decrease political domination over them, do not enter into full play in the Italian case.

There are obvious and notable differences between French and Italian political journalists with respect to the weakening of their political *illusio*. In accordance with Daniel Gaxie (2001) in an analysis of ordinary criticisms of politics, I put forward the hypothesis that the "new" generation of French political journalists are supporters of "politicised criticism" and have a disenchanted relationship with politics, whereas their Italian counterparts stand

more in line with a process of “immunisation against critical mood” and have a re-enchanting relationship with politics. In the Italian case, three of the factors explaining the anti-politicism found in French political journalists are missing. The first of these is the labour division, which increases the delimitation of the political corporation and turns it into a separate world. The Italian political field is marked by a de-professionalisation process, as shown by the “return of the notable” among deputies since the mid-nineties and the high proportion of journalists serving terms in political office. The second factor is the expression of social suffering, which reinforces dissatisfaction with respect to political expectations. Italian political journalists are not undergoing any devaluation of their journalistic speciality within the newsrooms of the daily press comparable to the decline of political journalism in France. The third factor is the increase in the number of actors with the requisite resources and provisions for exercising tight critical control over their representatives. In Italy, we have seen that the cultural capital of political journalists has not really increased. Through Italian political journalists, anti-politicism appears as a mixed form where critical discourse stands next to auto-referentiality inherited from the Italian political journalism tradition.

To conclude, the centrality of political journalism in the Italian national daily press has not been undermined by the commercialising of the journalistic field. This centrality is embodied by: newspapers’ political involvement; political journalism and editorialist (“*opinionisti*”) prestige and high coverage of political issues; high degree of political *illusio* of political journalists “immunised against critical mood”.

How can the differences observed in France and Italy be explained? The comparative method sheds light on factors explaining the diversity of the daily newspapers’ involvement in the political and electoral process. The different types of political systems (Lijphart 1984), with their diverse evolutions and institutional contexts, appear to be central to the comprehension of the function of the media in political communication (Mancini 1991). In fact, France and Italy belong to different models of democracy according to the typology proposed by Lijphart (1994): majoritarian democracy for the former, consociative democracy for the latter. In France, there is a clear demarcation between majority and opposition with a possible change in power. In Italy, the process by which majority government is formed is based on coalition systems, sustained by several parties. The relationship between majority and opposition are characterised by the constant search for common ground, compromise, and mediation and not by stark confrontation. Moreover, there is a vote of belonging, by which

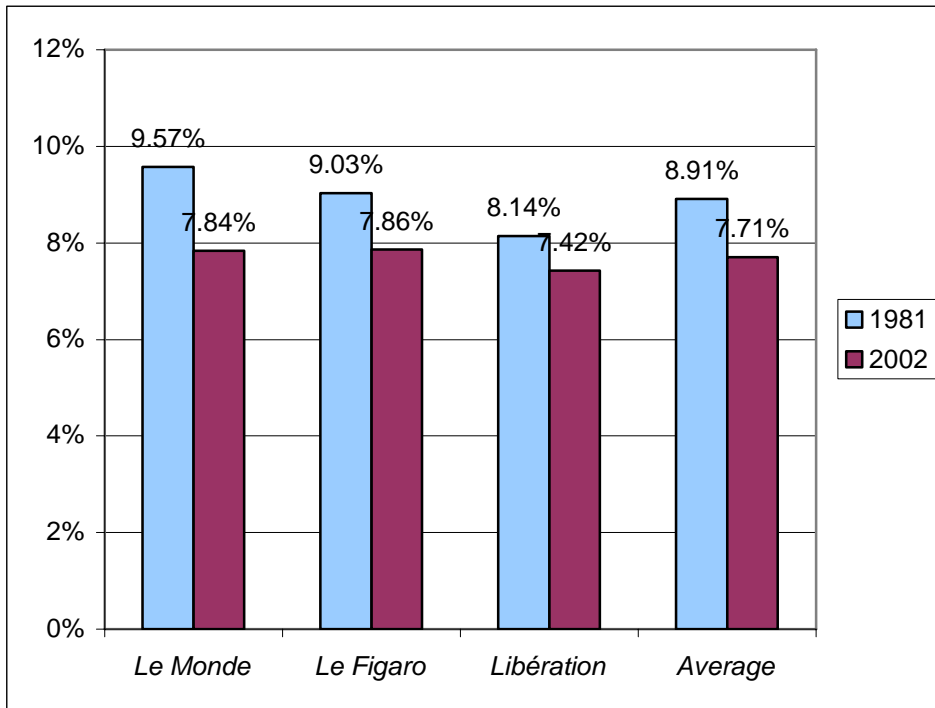
the readership has already made its choice and searches for information confirming its belief. These elements have consequences on media systems. In a majoritarian democracy, the media hold a vertical communication function; they mediate between public sphere and the public. On the contrary, in Italy the media participate in what Paolo Mancini (1991) calls the “*negotiation function of political communication*”. The national daily press holds a horizontal communication function directed firstly at politicians, who are the sources, subject and public of political information, all at the same time. This negotiation function plays an intermediation role between majority and government, on the one hand, and between governmental coalitions groups, on the other.

The as yet unfinished institutional transition, which began in Italy in the 90s, has not radically transformed the role of political actors taken on by Italian political journalists and newspapers, although they adopt critical views towards the political world.

Figures and tables:

The figures and tables below have been elaborated on the basis of a corpus of articles published in the political sections of *Le Monde* and *Corriere della Sera* for one month in 1981 and 2002.

Graph 1: Changes in pagination dedicated to politics in the national daily press in France between 1981 and 2002



Graph 2: Changes in pagination dedicated to politics in the national daily press in Italy between 1981 and 2002

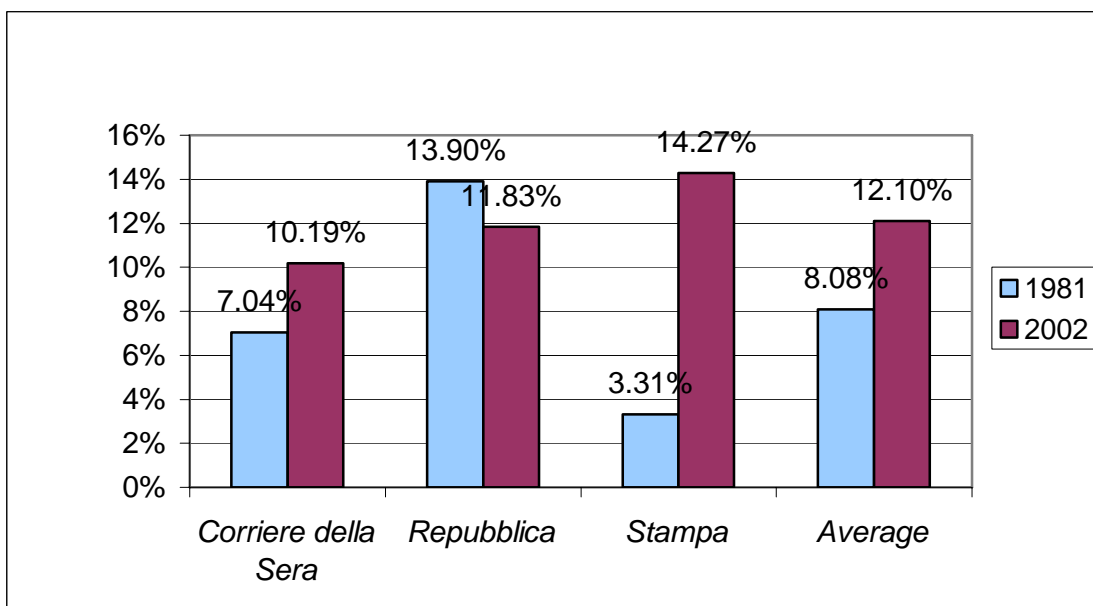


Table 1: Changes in pagination dedicated to the political section in the French national daily press

	1981			2002		
	Total number of political pages	Average number of political pages a day	Average percentage of political pages	Total number of political pages	Average number of political pages a day	Average percentage of political pages
<i>Le Monde</i>	Politics: 71	Politics: 2.84	Politics: 9.57%	France: 63	France: 2.52	France: 7.84%
<i>Le Figaro</i>	Politics: 51 mixed : 18	Politics: 1.96 mixed : 0.69	Politics: 9.03% mixed : 3.19%	France- Politics: 53	France- Politics: 2.04	France- Politics: 7.86%
<i>Libération</i>	Event: 19 Politics: 48 mixed: 16	Event: 0.76 Politics: 1.92 mixed: 0.64	Event: 2.31% Politics: 5.83% mixed: 1.94%	Event: 15 Politics: 65 mixed: 8	Event: 0,58 Politics: 2.5 mixed: 0.31	Event: 1.39% Politics: 6.03% mixed: 0.74%

Table 2: Changes in pagination as per sections in *Le Monde* between 1981 and 2002

Sections in <i>Le Monde</i> in 1981	Number of pages per day	Percentage of total no. of pages in newspaper	Ranking of sections according to their pagination	Sections of <i>Le Monde</i> in 2002	Number of pages a day	Percentage of total no. of pages in newspaper	Ranking of the sections according to their pagination
International:	3.92	13.21%	1 Economics	International	4.16	12.87%	1 Business news*
Dossier:	1.32	4.45%					
Politics	2.84	9.57%	2 International	France	2.52	7.84%	2 Today*
Society	2.78	9.16%	3 Culture	Society	2.44	7.51%	3 Culture
Culture:	3.28	11.05%	4 Politics	Culture	4.24	13.12%	4 International
<i>Le Monde arts et spectacles/ Le Monde des livres:</i>	3.04	10.24%					
Economics	4.12	13.61%	5 Society	Firms	5	15.47%	5 Horizons*
<i>Le Monde économie:</i>	0.8	2.70%					
				EU	0.64	1.98%	6 France*
				Regions	0.76	2.35%	7 Society
				Horizons	3.84	11.88%	8 Radio-TV*
				Today	4.56	14.11%	9 Regions*
				Radio-TV	1	3.10%	10 EU*

* New or modified sections

NB.: Totals are not 100% (columns entitled “Percentage of total no. of pages in newspaper”) because full pages of advertising and some minor sections are not represented in this table.

Tableau 3: Changes in pagination dedicated to the political section in the Italian national daily press

	1981			2002		
	Total number of political pages	Average number of political pages a day	Average percent of political pages	Total number of political pages	Average number of political pages a day	Average percent of political pages
<i>Il Corriere della Sera</i>	Politics: 36 mixed: 7	Politics: 1.38 mixed: 0.27	Politics: 7.04% mixed: 1.37%	Politics: -first pages*: 51 -next pages**: 44 mixed***: 3	Politics: - first pages: 1.76 - next pages: 1.52 mixed: 0.1	Politics: - first pages: 5.47% - next pages: 4.72% mixed: 0.32%
<i>La Stampa</i>	Politics: 14 mixed: 18	Politics: 0.61 mixed: 0.78	Politics: 3.31% mixed: 4.26%	Politics: 132 mixed: 8	Politics: 4.55 mixed: 0.86	Politics: 14.27% mixed: 0.28%
<i>la Repubblica</i>	Politics: 98	Politics: 4.08	Politics: 13.9%	Politics: - first pages: 102 - next pages: 57 mixed: 39	Politics: - first pages: 3.52 - next pages: 1.97 mixed: 1.34	Politics: - first pages: 7.59% - next pages: 4.24% mixed: 2.90%

* i.e. event section (“*Primo Piano*”) and first inner pages

** i.e. classical sections (politics, etc.) and next inner pages

*** i.e. pages dealing with political information, but not only

Table 4: Frequency of external contributors’ publications in the French and Italian national daily press (1999)

Contributor’s category	“Unusual” contributors	“Average” contributors	“Regular” contributors
Newspapers			
Italian national daily newspapers (<i>la Repubblica, La Stampa, Corriere della Sera</i>)	68%	20%	12%
French national daily newspapers (<i>Le Monde, Libération, le Figaro</i>)	86%	13%	1%

(Source: Lettieri 2002, p. 185)

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