Is journalism a transnational field? Asymmetrical relations and symbolic domination in online news

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Abstract: Are all transnational exchanges 'fielded'? This article explores the limits of the concept of transnational field by focusing on the case of journalism. At first glance, journalism might seem to be the perfect example of a transnational field. The frequency, speed and extent of international exchanges between media outlets has increased dramatically with the development of online news, leading media scholars to develop the concept of 'global news'. Yet I argue that such international exchanges do not necessarily constitute a field. Using ethnographic methods, I analyse the circulation of online news between the United States and France, two countries with strikingly different journalistic traditions. Specifically, I compare two editorial partnerships between US and French websites, one linking prestigious online magazines across the Atlantic and the other connecting tabloid-oriented news sites. I find that editorial content does not circulate seamlessly between the two countries. Based on this study, the article proposes three criteria that must be met for transnational fields to exist: competition over the legitimate definition of the field, reciprocal field effects, and the existence of common stakes. More broadly, the article contributes to defining the limits of the concept of 'transnational field' for the study of international exchanges.

Keywords: field, transnationalism, journalism, online news, France, United States

Introduction

Over the past decades, transnational exchanges have become a major subject of sociological inquiry. Field theory plays a growing role in this research program. Cultural, political and economic phenomena taking place at the transnational or global level have been reconceptualized as social fields, drawing on Bourdieu's definition (Bourdieu, 1971, 1996a; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Sapiro, 2013). For instance, researchers have analysed the internationalization of cultural fields, including the field of television (Kuipers, 2011) and the literary field (Sapiro, 2008). They have studied the transnational production and reception of the social sciences (Heilbron *et al.*, 2008), hard sciences (Gingras, 2002), economics

(Dezalay and Garth, 2002; Fourcade, 2006), philosophy (Hauchecorne, 2009), and law (Dezalay and Garth, 1998, 2002). In the political arena, sociologists and political scientists have relied on the concept of field to examine a broad range of transnational phenomena, including colonial empires (Go, 2008; Steinmetz, 2008) and European integration (Mudge and Vauchez, 2012; Wagner, 2005). Existing research demonstrates the benefits of applying the concept of field to phenomena reaching beyond national borders, as well as the limits of 'methodological nationalism' (Wimmer and Schiller, 2003).

Yet there has been relatively little research to date focusing on the possible *limits* of the concept of transnational field. Are all transnational exchanges 'fielded'? What are the criteria associated with different degrees of 'fieldness'? What can we learn about the usefulness of the concept of 'transnational field' by studying a limit case? The article explores these questions by focusing on the example of journalism, specifically the circulation of online news between news sites located in the United States and France. At first glance, journalism might seem to be an emblematic example of a transnational field. Breaking news occurring in Sierra Leone, Scotland and Syria make the headlines of the websites of *The New York Times*, *Le Monde* and *Al Jazeera*. Every day, millions of readers around the world scroll through the online versions of newspapers both local and distant. Over the past decade, the frequency, speed and extent of international exchanges between news websites has increased dramatically, leading media scholars to describe our time as an age of globalized news.

Yet the multiplication of international exchanges between news outlets should not mask the national and even local character of news-making. Thus, it is essential to examine the different features of national fields in order to understand the distinct sets of constraints – both material and symbolic – that shape the production of information. National journalistic fields may indeed differ in important ways. This is the case in the United States and France: the media structures and journalistic cultures of the two countries are often described as polar opposites in terms of market forces, role of the state and form of the news (Benson, 2013; Benson and Saguy, 2005; Chalaby, 1996; Padioleau, 1985). Because of these structural and cultural differences between the United States and France, examining the circulation of online media content between the two countries provides a limit case for studying whether journalism is indeed a transnational field.

The analysis proceeds in three steps. First, I introduce journalism and online news in the United States and France. Second, drawing on a multi-sited ethnographic study of online news organizations, I analyse two partnerships between French and American news sites: one linking two publications specializing in political analysis (*TheNotebook* in the United States and *LaPlace* in France) (the publications' names, as well as those of interviewees, have been changed), the second between two sites more oriented toward tabloid news and celebrity gossip (*AmericanMag* in the United States and *FrenchMag* in France). In both cases, problems arose when editors sought to share articles between the two countries: editorial content did not travel smoothly across the Atlantic. Third, drawing on Bourdieu's definition of the concept of field, I examine whether online news in

the United States and France is a transnational field. I delineate three criteria that must be met for a transnational journalistic field to exist: first, a struggle for the legitimate definition of 'good journalism'; second, the presence of reciprocal field effects; and third, the existence of common stakes (eg audiences, awards and jobs). Based on these three criteria, I argue that the exchanges taking place between US and French news sites constitute a weak transatlantic field. The article concludes by discussing the range of application and potential limits of the concept of transnational field.

Online news as a global or national field? Comparing the United States and France

Contemporary journalism has a double nature. On the one hand, the production of information is a deeply transnational type of activity: journalists routinely collect, process and disseminate news across borders. The Internet has amplified these international exchanges of information, leading media scholars to craft the concept of 'global news' to characterize the current media system. On the other hand, journalism is a decidedly national activity shaped by the specific structures and rules of the game of domestic journalistic fields, as exemplified by the comparison of the United States and France.

From news agencies to 'global journalism'

News has always travelled across national borders: a large mass of trade news, diplomatic secrets, and political gossip circulated across Europe as early as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Pettegree, 2014). It was mostly over the course of the nineteenth century, however, that news-making became an organized field of activity routinely crossing national borders.

The first major news actors at the global level were news agencies, including Agence France-Presse (AFP, formerly Havas, created in France in 1835), The Associated Press (AP, created in the United States in 1846), and Reuters (created in the United Kingdom in 1851). Over time, news agencies developed highly formalized procedures for gathering, translating, verifying, and disseminating information coming from around the world. In so doing, they became the primary producers of the global commodity called 'news' (Bielsa and Bassnett, 2009; Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen, 1998; Palmer, 1983).

In the nineteenth century, newspapers also started to rely on foreign correspondents in order to report international news. The position of foreign correspondent was traditionally one of the most high-profile roles within newspapers. Foreign correspondents were described as 'cosmopolitans among cosmopolitans, [men] in gray flannels who rank very high in the hierarchy of reporters' (Hamilton and Jenner, 2004: 301). Foreign correspondents typically acted as anthropologists in a foreign place: they translated and reframed exotic news for a national audience (Hannerz, 2012; Willnat and Weaver, 2003). Because of financial constraints and a perceived lack of interest among readers and viewers, the number

of foreign correspondents decreased starkly over the past twenty years, leading observers to worry about the future of international news (Hamilton and Jenner, 2004; Utley, 1997).

Yet new forms of international circulations have emerged. Existing research focuses on three concurrent trends. First, the news media have become deterritorialized in many ways by the Internet. Bloggers in different countries can upload real-time updates about local events. Social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook have become increasingly important communication channels for citizens, bloggers and journalists around the world (Lasorsa *et al.*, 2012; Reese *et al.*, 2007). On the reception side, news websites are readily accessible from everywhere, provided that one has an Internet connection and that the Internet is not subject to government censorship (van Dijk, 2006). Consequently, prestigious English-language news outlets with a strong online presence such as *The New York Times*, CNN, and the BBC have become increasingly important in assessing newsworthiness at the global level (Usher, 2014; Thurman, 2007).

A second trend is the transformation of the journalistic workforce around the world. Journalists have become more educated, multilingual and cosmopolitan over time (Reese, 2010). In many countries, the number of journalism degree programmes increased rapidly between the 1970s and the 2000s (Frőhlich and Holtz-Bacha, 2003; Lafarge and Marchetti, 2011; Ruellan, 1993). This contributed to a relative standardization of journalistic training. In most journalism schools' core curriculum, the US or broadly 'liberal' model of presenting 'facts' in an objective, impartial way is presented as an example to follow (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Journalists are usually expected to be fluent in English in order to be accepted in these top journalism programmes.

The third trend stems from the first two and consists of the emergence of a 'global news style' (Berglez, 2008). This results in journalists in web newsrooms across the globe using increasingly similar narrative forms and angles to cover topics of worldwide interest (Gurevitch and Levy, 1990). Writing styles have become more informal in online news compared to print publications, which contributes to a relative convergence of news styles. In part, this is said to be due to the blurring of the boundary between different formats such as hard news, stories, blog posts, and tweets (Schudson, 2011). In addition, what is deemed 'newsworthy' usually mirrors existing power relations at the global level. Thus, media outlets around the world have increased the proportion of their coverage of events in the United States (Benson and Saguy, 2005; Janssen *et al.*, 2008). Consequently, media experts increasingly rely on the concept of 'global journalism' in order to describe the transnational circulation of information in the digital age (Berglez, 2008; Deuze, 2006; Herbert, 2000; Loeffelhoz *et al.*, 2009; Reese, 2010).

Based on this line of analysis, one might characterize journalism as a global arena in which editors, staff writers, freelancers, bloggers and whistleblowers rely on each other in order to gather, verify and publish relevant information regardless of national borders. In this view, media content would circulate seamlessly across borders. Yet a closer examination of journalism in the United States and France reveals enduring differences in news production between the two national

contexts. The next section outlines the current situation of online news in the United States and France before mapping the journalistic fields to which they belong.

Enduring national differences: online news in the United States and France

The Internet has dramatically transformed the media landscape over the past twenty years. The first news websites were created in the United States in the mid-1990s. The number of news websites increased rapidly. In 2010, for the first time, more Americans read news online than in print (American Society of News Editors, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2014). Online news followed the same path in many Western countries, though not always at the same time. In France, there was a delay in the mass availability of broadband Internet compared to the United States: with the exception of *LeMonde.fr*, which was created in December 1995, French news websites and news blogs only started developing in the mid-2000s.

In the United States as well as in France, two main types of online news organizations emerged over time. The first category includes the online sites of legacy media companies (ie, newspapers, magazines, television and radio networks). These sites typically draw their prestige and some of their revenues from the legacy media supporting them. For instance, the online sites of *The New York Times* and *Le Monde* have large amounts of both cultural and economic capital, like their print counterpart, whereas the online versions of the *New York Post* and *Le Parisien* have high amounts of economic capital but little cultural capital.

The second category of actors consists of 'digital native' or 'pure-play' sites, that is, web-only publications without a print or television counterpart. Most of them enjoyed an exponential increase in traffic, revenue and number of employees over the past five years. The positions of these new entrants may be more or less autonomous or heteronomous. For instance, sites such as *ProPublica* in the United States or *Mediapart* in France were founded by high-status print journalists and offer in-depth investigative reporting, whereas sites such as *BuzzFeed* and *TMZ* seek out tabloid news and celebrity gossip, have high levels of economic capital, but are not prestigious among the journalistic occupation.

Yet these similarities between US and French online news should not mask important differences between the two countries. Take the role of market forces: the amount of capital invested in news websites is much higher in the United States than France, consistent with the stronger role of corporate money in US media (Benson, 2013; Krause, 2011). In the United States, major companies such as AOL, Time Warner, Comcast and Microsoft, as well as venture capital funds, have invested massively in the online news business. In France, to the contrary, there are few venture capitalists and media companies willing to invest in new media startups. More generally, the amount of capital managed by venture capitalists in France is 33 times smaller than in the United States, relative to a GDP only six times smaller (Filloux, 2014). As a result, French news sites typically have modest financial means.

Similarly, the role of the state in shaping the development of online media differs significantly between the two countries. In the United States, there is no system of public support for online news. This is consistent with the dominant interpretation of the First Amendment according to which any type of public interference encroaches on the freedom of the press. In France, the wide-ranging system of public aid to the press has been extended to include online news. A special public budget line ('*Fonds d'aide au développement des services de presse en ligne*') was created in 2010 to support the development of news websites in France (Charon and Le Floch, 2011). In 2014, the parliament voted a law that lowered the Value Added Tax to 2.1 per cent for news websites instead of the general rate of 20 per cent, thus granting them the same tax privileges as print publications.

These distinctive features of online news in the United States and France are in line with the findings of existing research examining the differences between the two countries' journalistic traditions (Benson, 2013; Benson and Neveu, 2005). In his comparative study of news coverage about immigration in US and French media, Benson argues in favour of using Bourdieu's concept of field to analyse journalistic production at the national level: 'Journalism is a field in most if not all Western democratic nation-states, in that it has developed some limited amount of autonomy from the state and the capitalist market and that it is an arena of contestation and struggle operating according to "rules of the game" consciously or unconsciously enacted by actors in the field' (Benson, 2013: 12). In addition, Benson argues that the US and French journalistic fields 'represent opposite "ideal types"' (Benson, 2013: 15): the influence of market forces on the media is much stronger in the United States, whereas the state plays a more important role in the media sector in France. According to Benson, this has important consequences on the form of the news in the two countries: in the United States, immigration news tends to be based on personalized narratives, whereas in France it is usually framed in more abstract terms.

Benson's analysis primarily focuses on newspapers, magazines and television networks, but US and French news websites present similar characteristics. Thus the framework of national journalistic fields is helpful for understanding the differences between US and French online news. In many ways, the overall cohesion of national journalistic fields has increased with the emergence of online media. Not only are radio and television networks now in direct competition for the same online audience with newspapers and magazines through their respective websites, but journalistic careers also increasingly unfold across news sites associated with these different types of media (radio, television, printed press, etc.).

In other words, contrary to the 'global journalism' narrative of the seamless circulation of news across borders, the 'national journalistic fields' perspective indicates that enduring national differences might affect the circulation of online media between countries.

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Seamless circulations? A comparison of two editorial partnerships between US and French news sites

In the media world, partnerships are more or less formalized agreements between news organizations allowing them to exchange and translate content published on each other's site. Such partnerships are prevalent in online news. Over the past decade, several partnerships were created between US and French news websites. The first partnership studied in this analysis took place between 2007 and 2009 between *TheNotebook* (New York) and *LaPlace* (Paris). Both sites were created by well-known print journalists and specialize in political news, opinions and analysis. The second partnership connects *AmericanMag* (New York) and *FrenchMag* (Paris), two sites created by journalists with little prior experience in print media; these two sites feature a more tabloid-oriented editorial line.

This section draws on a multi-sited ethnographic study (Hine, 2007) conducted between 2011 and 2013 at these four websites (Christin, 2014a, 2014b). I interviewed 36 journalists working for *LaPlace* and conducted several months of observations at the French newsroom. I also conducted a week of ethnographic observation at *FrenchMag* and interviewed eight journalists and bloggers there. In New York, I interviewed 28 journalists working for *TheNotebook* and spent several weeks observing the American newsroom; I also interviewed nine people working for *AmericanMag*.

Most online publications are secretive about their craft: owners and editors fear that external observers will steal their formulas for maximizing the visibility of their content on Google, Facebook and Twitter. They are also adamant about protecting the 'culture' of their newsroom, which they believe contributes in a crucial way to the alchemy of the publication's success. Hence, it took significant time – between three months and a year – and efforts to receive permission to spend time in each of the newsrooms studied in this project. In each case, I had to win the trust of the editors-in-chief and the section editors before being allowed to spend time with the journalists, who themselves asked me many questions about my project, researched my previous work, and often required thorough anonymization, before agreeing to spend time with me.

Once I had gained the trust of the editors and journalists, I organized my days of observation in a similar way in each newsroom. I shadowed web journalists and followed them in their daily work routines, from editorial meetings where they pitched their ideas to coffee breaks when they engaged in heated arguments about the quality of articles, writers, and other publications. I asked journalists questions about their work and their careers, both informally and during semi-structured interviews. Following these discussions and interviews, I often asked journalists and editors to provide me with emails, articles or archival material they had mentioned during our conversation.

Based on this ethnographic material, I find that, despite important differences between the two partnerships, the journalists in charge of creating and implementing the partnerships faced similar issues.

Four sites with different characteristics

Before turning to the findings, however, it is essential to provide additional information about the different news organizations under consideration.

TheNotebook is the oldest of the news websites under examination. It was founded in the mid-1990s by a famous journalist of the New York magazine world, under the patronage of a leading US company. The site does not charge for access, instead relying on advertising revenue as its main source of income. In 2004, *TheNotebook* was acquired by a large media group for about $15 million. In 2012, the website attracted about ten million unique visitors per month. During my years of fieldwork, the website had not reached financial equilibrium, but, according to its managers and editors, it was close to making a profit. In 2013, *TheNotebook*'s editorial team was composed of 46 journalists and editors.

The other US site under consideration, *AmericanMag*, though created more recently than *TheNotebook*, is a much larger enterprise. It was founded in the mid-2000s by several people with experience in technology startups and television networks. *AmericanMag* rapidly specialized in news aggregation and tabloid content; it expanded exponentially over the years. The site was acquired by a large technology company in 2011 for more than $300 million. In 2012, *AmericanMag* attracted about 45 million unique visitors per month, published more than 500 stories per day, and had its own streaming video network. It now employs several hundred staffers, though no precise employee count is available.

On the French side, *LaPlace.com* was created in Paris in the mid-2000s by several journalists formerly employed by a leading national newspaper. In 2011, the website was still not profitable. The founders hence decided to sell the company to a larger media group for about $8 million. In 2013, *LaPlace* had slightly more than two million unique visitors each month but was still not profitable; the organization had 25 employees, including 15 journalists.

Finally, *FrenchMag* was created more recently, in the early 2010s. *AmericanMag* owns 51 per cent of its shares and provides all the technological support, as well as a large proportion of the content translated and featured on the French site. The amount of capital invested in the creation of the website was kept secret. In 2013, *FrenchMag* attracted about the same traffic as *LaPlace*, around two millions unique visitors per month. The website employs 19 journalists.

As this summary makes clear, the French news organizations are more recent creations than their US counterparts. They are also far smaller, both in terms of economic capital and with respect to the size of their editorial staff. With these elements in minds, we can turn to the partnerships, first between *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* and second between *AmericanMag* and *FrenchMag*.

TheNotebook and LaPlace

In the mid-2000s, shortly after its creation, the Parisian website *LaPlace* proudly announced its partnership with *TheNotebook*. At the time, the editors and journalists of the French site lauded this as an opportunity for the French public to read the most up-to-date American articles translated into French on their

favourite news site. Two years later, however, the partnership ended. By then, *LaPlace* had translated and published about fifty articles from *TheNotebook*. Yet the arrangement was hardly symmetrical: *TheNotebook* never translated any articles from *LaPlace*.

How was this partnership negotiated? Philippe, one of *LaPlace*'s founders and its editor-in-chief, explained that it was all due to the connections he made when he was foreign correspondent in the United States. Philippe, who graduated from the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris ('Sciences Po'), an elite institution of higher education, before receiving a Master's from a top journalism school in France, started as an economic journalist at a leading French daily national newspaper, eventually becoming their Washington correspondent. Philippe remembers his excitement during his time on the East Coast:

> *Philippe* (founder and editor-in-chief, *LaPlace*): When I arrived in the United States … I really discovered the Internet there. Of course I was using it before, but there I started surfing a lot, I saw what was going on, websites such as *TheNotebook* or *Talking Points Memo* […] Everything new, interesting, everything counter-intuitive was there. And the blogosphere is very rich in the U.S., they even have conservative blogs … It was very lively, people talked to each other … In France it was less the case.

At that time, *TheNotebook* was one of the most prestigious online news sites. It was staffed with journalists who had worked previously at prestigious publications such as *The New Republic* or *The New Yorker*. The site offered analysis and commentary about politics, news, and culture with an editorial line expressing a witty and conversational take on current events.

When Philippe came back to Paris, he started talking with two colleagues – also foreign correspondents at the same newspaper – about launching a news website. Their project explicitly sought to replicate and improve on some of the innovations that they had witnessed in the United States. *TheNotebook* was a particular source of inspiration. After six months of discussions and negotiations, the founders had amassed enough money to start the project. Philippe then travelled to New York to negotiate an editorial partnership with *TheNotebook*. He took advantage of his visit to videotape *TheNotebook*'s newsroom and an editorial meeting in order to show to his staff the daily functioning of a 'modern' American web newsroom.

> *Philippe*: We had a partnership with *TheNotebook* for a while, because I knew the editor-in-chief, Sam. I even went to visit their newsroom! I have a video of it … I had a tiny video camera, I entered their newsroom during the editorial meeting. I wanted to show their newsroom to the staff here at *LaPlace*. At the beginning we had an agreement, we could translate some of their articles and put them on our website … and they could do the same. They never did it. We did it quite a lot. But … translating American articles for a French audience is not easy. They are too long … And it didn't work well in French, their pieces had to be completely re-written.

During my days of observation at *LaPlace*, I noted that most staff writers took pride in this proximity with *TheNotebook*: many of them read *TheNotebook* every morning, they knew the names of several prominent journalists working there,

and they emphasized strong feelings of affinity and admiration for *TheNotebook*. This respect for and conscious imitation of *TheNotebook* exemplifies the symbolic domination of US media in Europe. It also resonates with Bourdieu's insight that 'the economic-technical, and especially, symbolic dominance of American [media], serves a good many [non-American] journalists as both a model and a source of ideas, formulas and tactics' (Bourdieu, 1999: 41; see also Benson and Saguy, 2005; Kuipers, 2011).

The situation in New York was rather different. When I started conducting fieldwork at *TheNotebook* in 2012, I soon realized that the US staff writers and editors barely knew about *LaPlace*. This was made clear when I interviewed Sam, the editor-in-chief of *TheNotebook*:

> *Sam* (editor-in-chief, *TheNotebook*): I met Philippe through a friend. He said he was starting *LaPlace* and we set this kind of casual partnership, it was probably during the first year that the site was up. I don't even remember what it was, it was very casual, we let them run our stories, they would tell us when they had something … There was no money, no investment or anything. […] My French is much worse than it used to be 20 years ago. Once in a while I go to their website and check, 'oh, what's going on.' But it's not … I don't follow what they do closely. I don't know if they're successful, I don't know if they're popular, I have no idea.

This asymmetry in the relationship between the editors of *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* is mirrored by the unequal circulation of journalistic content between the two sites during the partnership. Whereas *LaPlace* translated and published many articles from *TheNotebook*, *TheNotebook* never published a single article from *LaPlace*, probably because no one in their newsroom spoke French fluently or was particularly interested in French domestic news.

Even on the French side, translating content from *TheNotebook* and packaging it for a French audience was not a straightforward process. Philippe explains that it is 'not easy' to publish American articles for a French audience. He points out that US pieces tend to be 'too long', do not 'work well', and often have to be 'completely rewritten'. During my days of fieldwork at *LaPlace*, I witnessed many conversations among French staff writers who held similar views: they usually found US news articles interesting, funny and stimulating, but also noted that they would not be easily comprehensible to an average French reader. For example, even though *TheNotebook* has a centre-left editorial line in the US media landscape, *LaPlace*'s journalists often criticized *TheNotebook*'s articles for being too right-wing, especially regarding the financial crisis, health care policies, or the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Similarly, the Parisian journalists often explained that *TheNotebook*'s humour would not make sense to a French audience: the contrarian headlines that made the reputation of the US web magazine were too different from the French tradition regarding newspaper humour, which tends to rely more on irony, sarcasm, and witty 'puns' in the headlines. According to the French writers, the only US articles that 'worked' well for a French audience were snarky pieces about hipsters in New York, opinionated articles about net neutrality, and descriptions of the latest US debates about Beyoncé's

feminist ideology. Notably, the only US articles that could easily be translated and adapted for a French audience were not articles about international news or politics, but rather opinion pieces about American urban, tech and pop culture.

AmericanMag and FrenchMag

In October 2011, the New-York based site *AmericanMag* announced that it would launch an affiliate site in France in early 2012. The new website would be called *FrenchMag* and its French editor-in-chief would be a famous and controversial television journalist.

Many French media experts reacted to this announcement negatively. They expressed concern about the intrusion of tabloid-style Anglo-American media into the French landscape. Since its creation in the mid-2000s, *AmericanMag*'s trademark has been to mix political opinions, fast-paced breaking news, and tabloid news. Claire, the new editor-in-chief of *FrenchMag*, explained that she intended to replicate this mix of political opinions and celebrity gossip. She also pointed out that she would invite prominent political figures to contribute to the website. This mix of 'high' political opinion and 'low' celebrity gossip was unheard of in France.

Both the French and the American editors were highly conscious of the necessity to adapt the editorial line of *AmericanMag* for a French audience. Josh, *AmericanMag*'s international editor, explains:

> *Josh* (international editor, *AmericanMag*): With *FrenchMag* … We did the hiring and we gave them our technology. It's important for us to keep the same platform and the same philosophy, but in a new market: we try to take the spirit of the American website and apply it in France. We don't want them to be an exact copy of the American site, we want them to be as successful in France as we are in the U.S. … It's a site for experimentation. For example, we capitalize our headlines, in France they don't. It's true that it looks a little weird with small letters … That's okay, we're not hegemonic. But they have to have the same mix of serious news and shallow news. In France, there is not the same tabloid culture. So the website is not really 'low.' When the French journalists took a look at our 'side boobs' pages, they were, like, 'What is this?!!' They don't have the same puritanical American culture.

Josh is well aware of the challenges associated with international expansion. On the one hand, he repeatedly emphasizes that *FrenchMag* needs to keep the 'same philosophy' as *AmericanMag*, exporting its mix of political opinions and tabloid news and more broadly its 'spirit'. Yet he also explains that *AmericanMag* is 'not hegemonic': *FrenchMag* should adapt to its national market. Thus, some formatting issues like the capitalization of headlines adhere to national tradition. Similarly, the content of the 'tabloid' section varies, since French readers are less interested in sensationalistic tabloid news than their American counterparts. In other words, Josh, one of the main actors in the transnational diffusion of online news, behaves as a careful observer of foreign media cultures (Hannerz, 2012), drawing fine-grained distinctions between the national preferences of the readers.

This close monitoring of audience preferences also takes place among the editors and staff writers of *FrenchMag*. Edouard, *FrenchMag*'s managing editor, describes the complex ways in which they distinguish themselves from *AmericanMag*:

> *Edouard* (Managing Editor, *FrenchMag*): Our editorial line is very much inspired by *AmericanMag* … But at the same time we have total freedom. We don't mimic the line of *AmericanMag*. Actually, we do the same kind of journalism we've always done and we look at *AmericanMag* at the same time. I mean, we're clearly more French than they are, in the sense that we provide more background information and more analysis in our articles. Often they put a flashy headline and then a news wire and that's it. We're reluctant to do this. We don't like to post stupid news wires. And we publish a lot of political analysis and opinions, this is something we try to promote. […] Compared to *AmericanMag*, we always try to have a good reason to post something, it has to be breaking news or important in some way … For example we don't do 'side boobs' or actresses in mini-bikinis … We don't want to post something without a good reason. Maybe it's a cultural difference?

Later in the interview, Edouard argued that he was particularly sensitive to these cultural differences because of his own 'atypical' background (in his own words): his mother was American and he grew up in Switzerland before moving to Paris. Based on Josh and Edouard's quotes, it seems that journalists at *FrenchMag* are trying to do two opposite things at once: they draw heavily on the editorial line of *AmericanMag*, while at the same trying to do something completely different. Though *FrenchMag* is a subsidiary of *AmericanMag*, the French journalists and editors carefully distinguish themselves from the American company. They argue that they provide more in-depth analysis, refusing merely to cut-and-paste news wires and pictures of 'mini-bikinis'.

Editorial prestige and distinction in the US and French fields of online news

To conclude this analysis of the relations between *TheNotebook*, *LaPlace*, *AmericanMag* and *FrenchMag*, it is essential to note that within each country, the relationship between the higher status site and the lower status site is strikingly similar.

In the United States, editors and journalists working for *TheNotebook* strongly distinguish what they do from what *AmericanMag* does. They repeatedly explain that their editorial line is deeper, more interesting, and more original than the mere aggregation of news wires and celebrity gossip provided by *AmericanMag*, while also acknowledging the success of *AmericanMag* in terms of traffic. At *TheNotebook*, Sam explains:

> *Sam* (editor-in-chief, *TheNotebook*): *AmericanMag* is in a completely different business, they're doing something completely different … I'm sure that they have advertising that we would love to have and they have readers that we would love to have … but we're not in the same set. What they're trying to do … they do create good journalism, I'm not saying that everything they do is bad, but their basic business is this

quick aggregation, quick recapitulation of the news, and that's not our business. Our business is analysis, understanding, it's something richer than that.

In France, Philippe holds a similar opinion about *FrenchMag*:

> *Philippe* (editor-in-chief, *LaPlace*): *FrenchMag* relies on a well-known brand and they're using well-known recipes that worked in the United States. But is it also going to work in France? Are they going to do serious journalism? I don't know. If they only publish stupid blog posts and steal information from other people ... the added value is not great. Same for gossip. I mean ... The first piece ever published on *FrenchMag* is about a supposed affair between [*a famous actor and the then-Minister of Justice*] ... We don't do that. We don't write about celebrities just to write about them.

Thus, despite the journalists' constant efforts to distinguish themselves from *AmericanMag*, *FrenchMag* is still perceived as the Trojan horse of American tabloid news infiltrating the French media landscape, especially by journalists writing from more prestigious sites such as *LaPlace*. This impression was confirmed by an incident that I observed during my ethnographic fieldwork.

Ethnographic observation
FrenchMag, 17 April 2013

During a day of ethnographic observation in the newsroom of *FrenchMag*, I witnessed a curt exchange on Twitter between Edouard, the managing editor of *FrenchMag*, and Gael, the managing editor of *LaPlace*.

FrenchMag had just translated and posted an article from *AmericanMag* about one of Beyoncé's revealing costumes at a show. The headline was a pun based on an old-fashioned word in French used to describe women's breasts. Half an hour after the article was published, Edouard sneered and said out loud, with an ironic tone and added emphasis: 'Gael [from *LaPlace*] just tweeted that our Beyoncé article is "*degrading*" ... That this is not "*his* vision of journalism...*"' [*his emphasis*].

All the staff writers in the newsroom took a couple of seconds to look at the incriminating tweet. One of them commented: 'What a hypocrite ... It means that he clicked on the article! Such bad faith!' Another writer concurred: 'They always pick the wrong battle at *LaPlace* ... I mean, I never check their website, I don't find it relevant, so why do they keep checking our site?'

Approaching transnational fields

Based on the study of these exchanges between US and French news sites, what can we say about the existence of a transatlantic journalistic field? Based on the two cases of editorial partnerships examined above, this final section analyses the criteria needed for such a transnational field to exist.

According to Bourdieu, fields are relatively autonomous configurations of relations between social positions (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; see also Go and Krause, this volume). Bourdieu uses the metaphor of the 'game', in which players

who have stakes in the game (*illusio*) compete for the monopoly to define what the field is about. Such strategies are determined by people's relative position in the field, which in turn stems from their overall amount of capital and its structure (eg the respective importance of economic, cultural and social capital). Individual strategies also depend on the actor's *habitus*, the incorporated system of dispositions and representations that is mostly shaped by primary socialization but may evolve depending on one's social trajectory. According to Bourdieu, fields of cultural production are typically organized around two conflicting orders of legitimacy: an autonomous logic, based on the degree of specific consecration ('art for art's sake'), and a heteronomous logic that relies either on various measures of market success or on political approval by the dominant figures of the field of power (Bourdieu, 1994; Bourdieu, 1996a).[1]

Drawing on this definition, I now examine the extent to which the transnational exchanges between US and French journalists are 'fielded' and focus on three criteria: competition between journalists to define 'good journalism', the presence of reciprocal field effects, and the existence of common stakes for US and French journalists and news organizations.

What is 'good journalism'? Competition and distinction in the US and France

As we saw earlier, a large number of exchanges take place between US and French online media: journalists routinely translate and publish US articles into French and frequently travel between the two countries. These transnational exchanges involve intense competition between different actors to define what journalism – and more specifically web journalism – should be. Thus, Edouard from *FrenchMag* explicitly criticizes *AmericanMag* for its 'stupid news wires' whereas Josh from *AmericanMag* characterizes *FrenchMag* as 'not having the same tabloid culture' and describes its homepage display as 'weird'. Similarly, journalists from *LaPlace* distinguish what they do from what *TheNotebook* does: they criticize the US site's articles as being 'too long' and not politically engaged. Last, Sam in New York and Philippe in Paris respectively criticize the editorial line of *AmericanMag* and *Frenchmag* as 'not serious' and 'degrading'.

These disputes about what constitutes good journalism in online news are interesting in several respects. First, they indicate that French and US web journalists are engaged in an intense symbolic struggle to define the norms of journalistic excellence in a period of rapid economic and technological transformations. Second, national patterns of distinction and domination emerge in these disputes. French journalists both admire and criticize US journalism: they explain that the articles published on US websites are exciting and well written but also emphasize that they tend to be shallow and ignore important political questions. Last, these debates show that the exchanges taking place between US and French online media are structured in ways that mirror the internal structure of each national journalistic field. In Bourdieusian terms, one partnership connects sites located at the autonomous end of the US and French fields of online news, whereas the other partnership takes place between sites
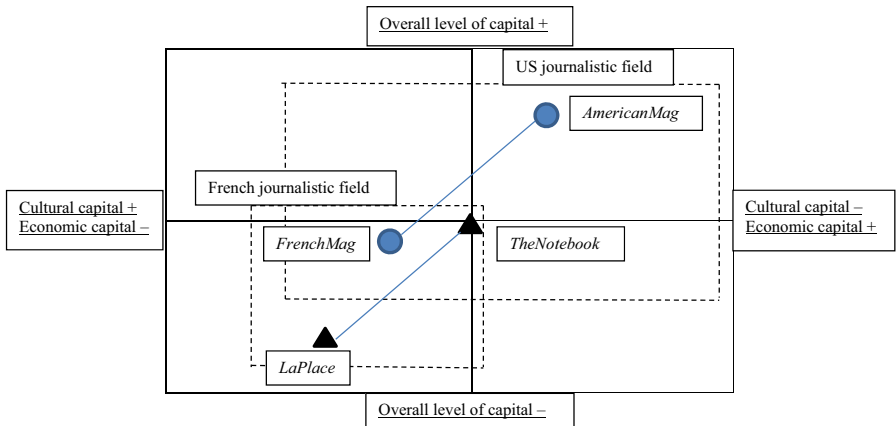
Figure 1 *The transatlantic journalistic field*

located at the heteronomous end of their respective national field: *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* both have high amounts of cultural capital and relatively little economic capital, whereas *AmericanMag* and *FrenchMag* have a tabloid-oriented editorial line and high amounts of economic capital.

In other words, the journalistic exchanges between the United States and France appear to have the structure of a transnational cultural field, in the sense that they are organized around an autonomous and a heteronomous pole. Following Bourdieu's analysis of the literary field (Bourdieu, 1996a) and the field of aesthetic taste (Bourdieu, 1994), Figure 1 summarizes the respective positions of the four websites in the US and French fields of online news and sketches the structure of this transatlantic journalistic field.

As can be seen in Figure 1, the transatlantic journalistic field seems structured around two axes: the vertical axis is determined by the overall amount of capital whereas the horizontal axis is determined by the structure of capital, that is, by the relative amounts of economic and cultural capital. News organizations in the United States overall have a higher amount of capital than French news organizations; they also have more economic capital than cultural capital compared to French organizations. Therefore, the US journalistic field is located on the upper right corner of the transatlantic field, whereas the French journalistic field is located on the lower left corner. In addition, the US journalistic field is larger than the French journalistic field (in terms of overall number of news organizations, journalist workforce and size of the audience), which appears in the graph. Within each national field, the four websites under consideration occupy distinct positions. In France, *LaPlace* has low amounts of economic capital and high amounts of cultural capital. *TheNotebook* also has more cultural capital than economic capital, but, simply by virtue of belonging to the US journalistic field, it has more revenues than *LaPlace*. *FrenchMag* occupies a heteronomous position in the French journalistic field and has more economic capital than cultural

capital, which makes it closer to the US journalistic field. Finally, *AmericanMag* has high amounts of economic capital and little cultural capital within the US journalistic field, which explains its position on the upper right side of the graph. The two partnerships are represented by parallel lines between the different websites.

Two comments – or notes of caution – should be added at this point. First, do the partnerships represented in this graph constitute 'relations' or 'interactions' between news organizations? This distinction matters because, whereas Bourdieu defines fields as structures of *objective relations* between sets of positions, other approaches such as symbolic interactionism and the study of 'art worlds' (Becker, 1982) focus instead on *actual interactions* between social actors. At first glance, the ethnographic method and specific partnerships analysed in this project seem to be closer to the latter approach than the former, since studying such partnerships brings our attention to cases of actual interactions between web journalists and news organizations. Yet one should not draw too strong a distinction between interactions and relations in this case. As the graph makes clear, the partnerships between French and US journalists could only take place in a context of structural similarity between the different sites (thus the parallel lines between the four websites). In other words, it is *because* of the similarities between the amount and the structure of their capitals and the proximity between their objective positions in the field that *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*, as well as *FrenchMag* and *American-Mag,* were able to develop editorial partnerships.

Second, the analysis so far interpreted Figure 1 as representing a transatlantic journalistic field. Yet an alternative approach would be to analyse the similarities between the positions of the different websites as structural homologies between two national fields, independently of their internationalization. In other words, the criterion of symbolic struggles at the international level might not be sufficient to assess whether a transatlantic journalistic field does in fact exist.

Field effects and the problem of asymmetry

A second important criterion regards the form and direction of field effects. According to Bourdieu, the boundaries of a field can be delineated by looking at the 'effects' of the field on social agents. For example, when writing about the field of 'grandes écoles' (French elite institutions of higher education), Bourdieu points out that 'the existence of field effects … is one of the chief indicators of the fact that a set of agents and institutions functions as a field, as well as one of the reliable instruments for empirically determining the limits of this field, which are simply the point at which these effects are no longer found' (Bourdieu, 1996b: 132).

What are the effects, then, of the transnational field of online news? French web journalists strongly feel the influence and symbolic domination of American journalism, but the opposite is hardly true. French web journalists are all able to read fluently in English; they follow English-language websites, know the names of famous US bloggers and journalists, and follow US domestic news;

they regularly translate and adapt US news articles for a French audience. The French sites that have partnerships with US sites also compete for the definition of who is more 'cosmopolitan' and 'knows' the US media better, which in turn translates into symbolic and material benefits within the French journalistic field. But the effects of this transnational field of online news are much less clear in the United States. The American journalists and editors only rarely read or speak French. They neither follow French websites nor pay attention to French domestic news. In the cases of the partnerships that I studied, the two US sites never translated or published a single French article.

In sum, the effects of transnational exchanges are strongly asymmetrical in the case of journalism. As in other cases of symbolic and economic domination at the international level (Dezalay and Garth, 2002), peripheral actors pay attention to and draw legitimacy from the dominant actor, but the dominant actor does not reciprocate. Following Bourdieu's definition, this calls for a reconceptualization of the transnational exchanges between US and French news sites as being weakly 'fielded' at best.

The stakes of the game

Finally, the concept of transnational fields raises the question of the stakes of the game. According to Bourdieu, all the participants in a given field share at least one thing in common: an interest in the specific stakes of the field (*illusio*). It is possible to further distinguish between symbolic stakes (ie, defining what the field is about) and concrete or institutionalized stakes (ie, streams of revenue, awards or jobs). In order for a transnational field to exist, actors need to share at least some common stakes. As we saw earlier, web journalists in France certainly share with their American counterparts a belief in the importance of journalism; they engage in a constant struggle to define what 'good journalism' in the digital age should be. But do they also share more concrete types of stakes? I examine three types of stakes in turn: audiences (and advertising revenues), awards and jobs.

As far as audiences are concerned, French and American journalists have very little in common, for two main reasons. First, because of the language difference, the number of people in France who read US news sites is low; the number of people in the United States reading French news is probably even lower. There are no available figures about the exact number of people engaging in news readership in other languages, but one might note that in 2014 all of the 100 most-visited websites in the United States and France are respectively US and French sites.[2] Second, even when international readers access a given website, the news organization is typically unable to get advertising revenue for these readers. Not only are most websites unable to collect sufficient socio-demographic information about their international readers, but advertisers themselves are reluctant to engage in international marketing campaigns and still predominantly focus on national audiences (Sternberg, 2013). As a result, many news sites do not take their international audience into account in their negotiations with advertisers (Thurman, 2007).

Journalistic awards are also overwhelmingly national in character. For the Pulitzer Prize, only articles 'coming from a United States newspaper or news site' can enter the competition, thus excluding international publications;[3] the eligibility criteria are similar for the Prix Albert Londres, the most prestigious journalistic award in France (Gatien, 2013). A notable exception are the awards of the Online News Association (ONA), the Online Journalism Awards, which are 'open to work published in any language worldwide'.[4] Yet an overwhelming majority of the ONA judges are affiliated with US and British publications and most of the Online Journalism Awards go each year to English-language publications.[5]

Finally, language differences complicate job mobility between the United States and France. As the previous sections showed, journalists always write in a specific language and style, with a specific audience in mind, and using specific formats and angles designed for their national audience. This makes it difficult for web journalists to start writing in another language for another audience. During the three years of fieldwork that I conducted at online news sites in New York and Paris, almost all of my French interviewees read English and spoke it fluently. Yet I only met one journalist who was able to write in both English and French: she was 24 years old, had just graduated from a joint journalism programme between Columbia and Sciences-Po, and grew up in a bilingual family. When I interviewed her in early 2012, she was planning to go back to Paris, where she grew up and did most of her training, because she felt more at ease writing for French news outlets. She also thought that she had a 'competitive advantage' (her words) in France because of her American training and her knowledge of the New York media world.

Hence, US and French journalists do not compete for the same jobs, news organizations in the two countries do not compete for similar audiences, and the most prestigious journalistic awards are restricted to national publications. In other words, the two fields do not appear to have concrete stakes in common.

A weak transnational field?

Let me now return to the original question motivating this article: based on this study of online news in the United States and France, is it possible to reach a conclusion about the existence of a transatlantic journalistic field?

The findings are mixed. If one relies on the idea of a struggle for the legitimate definition of journalism, then US and French web journalists do belong to a common, transnational journalistic field. Conversely, if one focuses on the question of reciprocal field effects and mutual awareness, then US and French web journalists do not belong to the same transnational field, since US journalists are barely aware of the existence of French media, while French journalists follow US news obsessively. Finally, if one takes into account the criterion of concrete stakes in common, once again US and French news organizations and web journalists do not seem to belong to the same field.

Interestingly, this situation resembles the 'weak field' of European studies analysed by Mudge and Vauchez (2012). As the authors explain, 'one marker

of the field's weakness is that the orienting stakes of scholarly production about Europe are often external: scholars of Europe are rarely oriented toward the pursuit of a career as strictly 'European' scholars, partly because there are few professional avenues that allow it' (Mudge and Vauchez, 2012: 451). Scholars who study the European Union might engage in constant negotiations at the international level over the legitimate course of action for European integration, but most careers still take place at the national level. The case of online news is even more complicated due to the absence of common material stakes and the issue of asymmetrical field effects. This makes the transatlantic journalistic space an even weaker field than the 'weak field' of European studies.

Conclusion

This article focused on a limit case to explore what is needed for transnational exchanges to be characterized as a field. At first glance, journalism might seem to be an emblematic example of a global field. Yet I showed that the existence of frequent transnational exchanges between news organizations does not necessarily mean that they are 'fielded'. Specifically, this article examines how online news travels between two countries with strikingly different journalistic traditions. Drawing on an ethnographic study of two editorial partnerships between US and French news sites, I argue that one characteristic of Bourdieusian fields is indeed met: journalists share symbolic stakes and compete for the legitimate definition of 'good journalism'. Nonetheless, two other features indicate that these exchanges are, in fact, only weakly 'fielded': the flow of media content between the two countries is deeply asymmetrical and news organizations and individual journalists do not share concrete stakes. Hence, the exchanges taking place between US and French news sites are still strongly mediated by the structure and culture of their respective national fields, indicating that this transnational space only weakly qualifies as an autonomous cultural field with strong 'vertical' differentiation from the national level (Sapiro, 2013; see also Buchholz, this volume).

In other words, based on the cases presented in this article, it appears that 'news' still does not mean the same thing in the United States and France. Far from being a neutral medium, 'language' here stands for the broader and elusive sets of meanings and expectations elaborated over time within each country's journalistic field. National writing styles incorporate highly specific and complex skills, habits, and informal know-how that together constitute a national media culture. Thus, journalists emphasize how most articles written in another language become irrelevant when they are translated into their mother tongue. 'Texts without contexts' (Bourdieu, 2002), these articles lose a significant part of their interest when they are extracted from their national field of production and presented to another audience with different dispositions and expectations. The example of online journalism illustrates that, in some cases, despite strong technological and economic pressure towards internationalization and convergence, national fields can retain most of their influence in shaping the production and

reception of symbolic goods. One could expand these findings by exploring other cases of transnational journalistic exchanges. What happens when news travels between countries sharing the same language (for example, the United States and the United Kingdom) or drawing on similar traditions of news production (for example, Germany and Scandinavian countries) (Hallin and Mancini, 2004)? Further empirical research is needed in order to explore the fine-grained manifestations of globalization on the production of information in the digital age.

Last, and more broadly, this article demonstrated the range of application and potential limits of the concept of 'transnational field' in making sense of international and global phenomena. Not all social spaces are fielded: the transnational level is no exception. The conclusions of this article raise three promising paths for future research. First, we need more studies of cases in which language differences hinder international exchanges. Second, it is important to develop a diverse set of methods for examining different facets of the emergence and institutionalization of transnational fields. Though historical methods, interviews and correspondence analysis are obvious choices for studying fields, this article showed that multi-sited ethnographies can also shed light on the fine-grained modalities associated with transnational exchanges, thus challenging taken-for-granted claims about how 'global' a given social space really is. Third, we need to be more specific about the range of application and limits of the concept of transnational field. The article makes a first step in that direction by identifying three criteria that need to be met for transnational exchanges to qualify as 'fielded'.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 This 'heteronomous' logic is sometimes analysed as consisting of two different logics: the political logic and the economic logic, which are not necessarily correlated. Journalism is thus seen as being characterized by a 'double dependency' on these different logics (Benson and Neveu, 2005).
2 http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries (updated on 1 March 2015; accessed on 6 March 2015).
3 http://www.pulitzer.org/how_to_enter (updated on 12 December 2014; accessed on 6 March 2015)
4 http://journalists.org/awards/online-journalism-awards-rules-eligibility/ (updated on 8 October 2014; accessed on 5 March 2015).
5 For instance, in 2014, only one ONA award out of 34 went to a non-English language article (only four non-English outlets were among the many finalists). Out of the 12 judges involved in the final round of evaluation, two were affiliated to non-English language news organizations (*Zeit Online* and *La Nación*).

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