

**Cross-Border Journalism: Trajectories and Processes of Identification  
Work in Tijuana, Mexico, and San Diego, United States****Periodismo transfronterizo: Trayectorias y procesos de identificación laboral  
en Tijuana, México, y San Diego, Estados Unidos**Sofía Beatriz Ángeles Díaz<sup>1</sup> & Marlene Celia Solís Pérez<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article was to analyze the work-related biography of a group of journalists working across the border between Tijuana, Mexico, and San Diego, United States. The discussion focuses on the influence of the nature of journalism on the configuration of the professional identities of ten journalists interviewed during the second half of 2015. Based on an analysis of work-related trajectories and forms of identification, we found that multiple activities and independent work are two strategies used by cross-border journalists to stay active in the field, but also as areas of rupture with the profession. This exploratory study brings new questions to the analysis of professions, and particularly journalism, in complex contexts such as the Mexico-U.S. border.

Keywords: 1. work identity, 2. professional field, 3. journalists, 4. cross-border, 5. Tijuana-San Diego.

## RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar la biografía laboral de un grupo de periodistas que ejerce en el campo profesional transfronterizo de la región Tijuana, México, y San Diego, Estados Unidos. La propuesta explica la influencia de este campo particular en la configuración de las identidades profesionales de diez periodistas que fueron entrevistados durante la segunda mitad de 2015. Utilizando el análisis de trayectorias laborales y las formas de identificación, se encontró que la multiactividad y la modalidad de trabajo independiente son, al mismo tiempo, tanto estrategias del periodista transfronterizo para mantenerse en el campo, como formas de ruptura con la profesión. Se trata de un estudio exploratorio que aporta nuevas interrogantes para el análisis de las profesiones y del periodismo en contextos complejos, como los que se presentan en la frontera norte de México.

*Palabras clave:* 1. identidad laboral, 2. campo profesional, 3. periodistas, 4. transfronterizo, 5. Tijuana-San Diego.

Date received: August 29, 2018

Date accepted: November 20, 2018

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## INTRODUCTION

The present article aims to present an interpretative analysis of the economic life of a group of journalists who carry out their activity in a cross-border territorial and labor space. One of the main practices of everyday life in border cities such as Tijuana, in Baja California (Mexico) and San Diego, California (United States of America), is the constant flow of people across the border for work purposes. In the case of journalism, a professional field that can be described as cross-border has emerged to convolute the configuration of journalists' professional identities throughout their careers.

This cross-border professional field exerts an influence on people who work in printed media in Tijuana and San Diego. As a result of their life experiences at work, these journalists develop identity strategies to confront and understand the social and cultural differences present in their everyday personal and professional lives in the neighboring city across the border. Through this experience, journalists acquire a more complete vision of the local facts and the problems faced when covering or processing information in addition to practical knowledge and advantages that increase their opportunities to further their professional and economic development.

As a result of their constant need to rethink their sense of belonging, both to their countries and their professional fields, journalists experience considerable stress; this sociocultural problem was the focus of a study (Ángeles, 2016) whose results are presented in the present article.

Based on the narratives of the group of journalists interviewed in this study, we identified the main categories concerning the experiences, working conditions, and relationships established by the interviewees with the different dimensions of their professional field, as well as the resources and strategies that they develop and use to cope with difficulties in their daily activities.

Our starting point is cultural studies, particularly the theoretical approach to the professional field proposed by Bourdieu (1990), as well as the specific nature of the cross-border condition of this sociocultural space. At the same time, we consider the theoretical developments in the sociology of professions in order to understand how professional identity is built, increasing precarity, and types of professional careers, as a theoretical and methodological tool to understand the economic life of journalists in the region.

The purpose of this article is to provide a local overview of journalistic practices based on a comparison of the perspectives and duties of journalists in a city in Southern California and a city in the north of Mexico. These different visions have an important influence on how information is covered and treated on both sides of the border.

The interviewees were ten journalists, seven women and three men between 27 and 61 years of age, with bachelor and master's degrees, were working or used to work in print media in the American cities of San Diego and Los Angeles and the Mexican city of

Tijuana; these journalists were correspondents for national and international agencies and were both in-house and freelance reporters.

The study cases were selected using the “snowball” method, that is, key informants connected us to other cases meeting the selection criteria of working or having worked as reporters in print media in the cities of Tijuana and San Diego<sup>3</sup> and having experience in the coverage of border management and migration issues. These criteria were defined based on the research focus and the theoretical reference framework; our basis was the concept of cross-border professional field.

The United States-Mexico border acts not only as a spatial reference point but also as a sociopolitical context, since it is associated with one of the critical moments in the formation of the journalistic professional field in the region, that is, the closing of the borders between United States with Mexico in the wake of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. For our informants, the border represents both their everyday experience and the object of their work—as stated in the selection criteria, some of the journalists covered border issues such as: migration, government management focused on binational interest (border, water, environmental, and tourism management, and above all, local and national security), and cross-border businesses (such as the commercial exchange of goods and services, customs, collaboration of chambers of commerce, commuter jobs),<sup>4</sup> in addition to education.

The study adopted an exploratory approach. Although the sample is not statistically representative and therefore cannot be used to generalize, it provides contributions to an issue that can be explored in depth based on the concept of professional identities and trajectories, and our findings can be compared with circumstances in other professions, contexts, and production fields with comparable levels of commitment and vocation.

Consistent with the methodological proposal based on the biographical analysis of work-related trajectories, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted. The fieldwork was carried out in different spaces in the cities of Tijuana and San Diego during the second half of 2015.

Understanding the journalistic profession from the voices and experiences of those who practice it represents an empirical contribution because the working conditions they face, their conflicts, and the persistent needs of journalistic activities at the regional and binational levels are revealed, but these reports also highlight the vocational resources and practical strategies they use to pursue and even boost their careers across the border.

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<sup>3</sup>In some cases, the interviewees had also worked in Los Angeles and San Francisco, or outside Baja California.

<sup>4</sup>The term ‘commuters’ has been used to refer to employed Mexican residents or undocumented workers who cross the border frequently: every day, every week, or longer yet regularly (Anguiano, 2005).

The article is divided into two sections: the first section presents the characteristic elements of the professional field of cross-border journalism and analyzes the trajectories of the group of journalists interviewed; the second part focuses on the analysis of what work means for them and their forms of identification. Finally, the conclusions summarize the main findings and the questions that were defined along the research path.

## THE TRANSBOUNDARY PROFESSIONAL FIELD AND WORK TRAJECTORIES

The starting point of this study is Bourdieu's (1990) concept of field, which is embedded in the constructivist structuralism framework. The author conceives the field as structured spaces of positions whose properties depend on their place in such structures and which can be analyzed regardless of the characteristics of its occupants (Bourdieu, 1990).

The notion of social space and the effects of mobility and border interdependence give rise to the conceptual proposal of analyzing the cross-border professional field as a factor of influence on the conditions, relationships, and tasks of journalistic practice. Thus, the border is a space of interaction and symbolic negotiation that challenges not only those who try to cross it in search of a better life and work opportunities, but also those who have to experience life in such space on a daily basis when engaging in work, business, tourism, family, and leisure activities on the other side.

People and goods move constantly across this border, and therefore, myriad interactions and exchanges take place all the time to enable such mobility and the experience of crossing the different ports of entry (or border checkpoints) that Heyman (2001) and Kearney (2008) have addressed in regard to their roles in the classification, filtering, and control of mobility.

We conceive the cross-border space as a territory-network characterized by its instability, virtuality, and fluidity (Solís, 2018). This territory, configured by the pendular crossing through the border, is continually reproduced by the thousands of people who commute to work every day.

Therefore, the specificity of a professional field such as the one formed by journalists based in San Diego and Tijuana lies in its capacity to allow for the exchange and negotiation of one's sense of belonging, since a characteristic of the cross-border territory is the complexity derived of identity adjustments resulting from the experience of living in this zone of negotiation and negotiation of the identity policies of both nation-states.

In addition to its role in political-economic relationships and in the control of people and goods moving between the two countries through access points and walls, the border allows for the creation of cultural and symbolic boundaries perceived and signified by citizens on both sides of the border.

A second central axis of our theoretical framework draws from the theory of identities and the sociology of work. Among this group of studies, Dubar (2005) refers that social constructions are shared by those who have similar subjective trajectories, especially among people within a particular professional field. This concept refers to the meanings given to work-related experiences in both the biographical and the relational dimension.

This view of social constructions, together with the perspective of complex identities as a function of factors such as gender, nationality, and age, allows for a variety of schemes to understand how print media journalists in Tijuana and San Diego configure their forms of identification and particular identity strategies.

The cross-border professional field in Tijuana and San Diego is one of the most complex factors in the configuration of journalists' work identities. This is due to the fact that professions are fields in which the state participates by defining norms, regulations, and action spaces for those who practice a given profession.

The presence of different media companies in the region (traditional media such as newspapers, television, and radio, as well as new multimedia initiatives) results in thematic content shared by both cities and specialized information targeted to the Hispanic market in San Diego and the rest of California, or to attract international investment to Tijuana and Baja California.

However, there are considerable differences in terms of labor conditions and employment patterns. These variations depend not only on the different income scales on both sides of the border but also on the forms of employment—as a result, the labor market is heterogeneous and composed of freelance and in-house journalists.

Thus, an independent journalist's type of employment is different from that of an in-house, employed journalist (even though both are paid for their work) because the latter usually receives a fixed salary and benefits such as social security, a retirement fund, Christmas bonuses, and paid vacations, among others, whereas the freelancer usually signs a contract that, at the same time, releases the company from the responsibility of granting such benefits and paying employee taxes and allows the reporter to work for different companies, since payment is usually upon delivery instead of time-based.

According to the interviewed journalists, the highest payment for people working as employed journalists in traditional media outlets in San Diego and Los Angeles is of up to \$4,300 per month, in other words, roughly 430 minimum hourly wages in the United States, whereas the salaries of journalists who work for media in Tijuana range from 14 thousand to 30 thousand pesos per month, which represents 410 minimum daily wages in Mexico.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, independent journalists who work with Tijuana media outlets

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<sup>5</sup>In Mexico, the minimum wage is based on days, whereas in the United States, it is calculated by hour.

operating in San Diego, San Diego local media, and agencies in other cities in the United States earned the highest income, derived from different jobs: up to \$2,000 per month.

These amounts cannot be conclusively compared to determine their relative net advantages because professional journalists have different positions, types of employment and contracts, years of service, and because the standards of living on both sides of the border are quite different, as shown by the differences in minimum wages. However, the asymmetry of income is sufficiently highlighted.

### *Professional Careers of Journalists in Tijuana and San Diego*

The concept of work-related trajectories is based on its technical dimension, which is, on the sequence of work positions occupied by a person throughout his or her life (Pries, 1999 in Frassa, 2007), and on its conceptual dimension as a decision making space; that is:

[...] the result of the relative harshness of the segmentation structures of the labor market and the process of interpretation and evaluation by which individuals make sense of their situation and take advantage of their opportunities to realize more or less desirable future strategies (Davolos, 2001, in Frassa, 2007, p. 7).

Therefore, strategies are the result of the assessment of possibilities and expectations and decisions made to face external situations (Frassa, 2007).

Employment trajectories comprise chronological markers of the intersection of socially structured events and socially constructed personal choices. As pointed out by Hualde (2014), the analysis of work-related trajectories allows for the association of individual biographies with other social spheres, such as the family and education, as well as contextual elements associated with the city, the region, the country, and the global environment. It also makes it possible to include both the dynamic and the relational dimensions into the analysis (Hualde, 2014, pp. 183-184).

Although work-related trajectories are a methodological instrument, we would like to emphasize the fact that they are an expression of the interdependence between social structures and individual action. This analysis considered work-related integration and changes in work-related biographies as the elements that define a person's work trajectory. Subsequently, using a holistic interpretation focused on job stability, we constructed a typology.

### *Integration into the Journalistic Field.*

Despite their academic background or writing vocation, not all interviewees entered the labor force via journalism—some of them spent years in very different jobs, for instance, as real estate agents, lawyers, or waiters, before becoming journalists. However, when they

entered the first jobs in the media using internships, they found precarious working conditions and trial periods in which they were not paid any salary.

Three generations of journalists were determined based on age and educational background. The first category included journalists who entered the field from the late 1970s to the early 1990s and were forged by vocation and practice, although they also had college education. An intermediate generation was composed of professionals under 40 years of age who studied in public and private universities and obtained their first jobs in the late 1990s or early 2000s. These professionals faced years of risk and complications to cover their stories, and today, they need to undertake new activities in addition to journalism.

A third generation was composed of the youngest reporters in the group, those who joined the field before 2010<sup>6</sup> and learned and practiced journalism during college and were willing to stay and commit themselves to different projects in the industry, although this meant difficult hours and conditions and their salaries were insufficient for them to become completely independent or have the level of income that they expected.

The first generation consisted of four journalists (cases 1, 2, 3, and 4) who were working for media organizations in Tijuana and San Diego at the time of the interview. Case 1, Dianne, an Egypt-born American citizen, made her formal entry into the field at *The Miami Herald*, where she was an intern in the summer of 1981 after obtaining a master's degree in journalism at the University of Columbia, in New York. Before becoming a journalist, she had worked as a paralegal at the United States Capitol in Washington D.C. Since 1994, she has been working for *The San Diego Union-Tribune* newspaper, where she covers border news.

Case 2, Luis, was born in Tijuana, and he entered the profession when still underage and lacking college education; his first job was at the *ABC* newspaper in his hometown. At first, Luis decided to work for the newspaper without any pay because he was very interested in writing. For most of his career, he worked as a photojournalist and as a correspondent for national media. He obtained a journalism degree from the Autonomous University of Chihuahua in 2006, almost 30 years after he began to work in the industry. Until the interview, he had worked independently for the *Agencia Fronteriza de Noticias* and had recently quit his job as an editor at *La Jornada Baja California*.

Case 3, Esperanza, was born in Guadalajara and studied literature at the University of Michoacán. She signed her first contract at the *Baja California* Newspaper in 1991, where she was responsible for receiving communications from news agencies. She would then become a transcriber, then a newsroom secretary, until she finally became a reporter. Having come to the city to improve her economic status, she has worked as a correspondent

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<sup>6</sup>This group included only women, which was unintended; the classification into generations was established *a posteriori*.

for nation-wide media. A mother of two, she is separated and was employed as a general editor at *La Jornada Baja California* at the time of the interview.

Case 4, John, began working in the industry at the *Bay City News Service* in San Francisco in 1993. He had recently completed a master's in journalism at Columbia University in New York. Before he decided to become a journalist in different media in San Francisco, he had owned a real estate agency. John explained that he was always interested in this profession. At the time of the interview, he was working under contract for the *Los Angeles Times*, where he covered border news.

The intermediate generation consisted of three journalists (cases 5, 6, and 7) who also collaborate with local and international media. One of them, Helena, originally from Tijuana, studied a degree in communication science at the Universidad de las Américas Puebla (UDLAP). One of her main motivations to enter the profession was her father, but also university professors. When she finished school, she returned to her hometown and was hired by *Síntesis*, a TV channel, in 2000. At the time of the interview, she was still employed with the company as a producer and reporter.

Case 6 is Lilith, who studied communication science at the Universidad Iberoamericana (UIA), in Tijuana, because she liked to write. Even though she did not visualize herself as a journalist or working in the media, she started out selling advertising for the bilingual weekly newspaper *La Prensa*, from San Diego, in 2000. Afterward, at the suggestion of friends who were aware of her writing skills, she decided to become a reporter that same year. After working for local, binational, and national newspapers and radio broadcasters, she worked as a freelancer for documentary producers and agencies such as National Geographic, and at the same time, she started a health and well-being business, unrelated with journalism.

Antonio, a younger journalist, started out as a cameraman in 1994, during the weekends, for television channels in Ensenada, Baja California, since his father worked for the same company. He hesitated between psychology and engineering to study in college, but when he obtained his first formal job, in *Síntesis*, in 2002, Antonio returned to the media and decided to obtain a bachelor's degree in communication science at the Autonomous University of Baja California (UABC), in Tijuana. Nowadays, although he claims to be able to work in any other profession, he continues to work for television networks in the United States as a freelancer.

The young generation consists of three women (cases 8, 9, and 10) who were under 30 at the time of the interview. Case 8, Sarah, studied journalism at the University of Southern California (USC) in Los Angeles. She entered the profession in 2010, and after completing her internship with *The Wall Street Journal*, she formally joined the media company and its news agency, Dow Jones Newswire, as a correspondent in Mexico City. Her main motivation for studying journalism and entering the professional field was that she wanted to find a practical way to become a writer. She obtained a master's degree in creative



writing and arts from Goucher College (Baltimore, Maryland). After graduating, she worked for the public radio and television channel KPBS, in San Diego, as a border reporter, a medium in which she is still employed. At the time of the interview, she was writing a book entitled *Crux*, based on her father’s experience as a migrant in the United States.

Case 9, Miranda, was born in Tijuana and studied communication science at San Diego State University (UCSD) with a student visa. She chose this career because she liked magazines since she was a child. When she finished college, in 2010, she was hired as a reporter by *Frontera*, a newspaper in Tijuana. At the time of the interview, she had been working as a reporter in San Diego for six years.

Case 10, Abril, was born in San Diego, California, although she lived much of her childhood and youth in Ensenada, Baja California. She completed a bachelor’s degree in communication science at the UABC in Tijuana, and in 2009, and after her internship in the *San Diego* newspaper, the medium hired her as a reporter, but under a scheme in which there was no economic retribution. A position was opened at the newspaper one month later, and worked there for two years, covering news targeted to the Hispanic community in the United States. At the time of the interview, she carried out freelance work for the EFE news agency and *The San Diego Union-Tribune* newspaper. The following chart presents the sociodemographic and work profile of each of the cases; the chart is divided into generations.

Table 1. Sociodemographic and Occupational Profile by Generation

Case	Medium	Schooling	Age	Gender	Nationality	Type of visa	Employment agreement
<b>First generation</b>							
1	<i>San Diego Union-Tribune</i>	Master’s	62	F	American	SENTRI pass	Employed
2	<i>AFN</i>	Bachelor’s	56	M	Mexican	B2 Visa	Independent
3	<i>La Jornada BC</i>	Bachelor’s	52	F	Mexican	Press and Media Visa	Employed
4	<i>LA Times</i>	Master’s	53	M	American	SENTRI pass	Employed
<b>Intermediate generation</b>							
5	<i>Síntesis</i>	Bachelor’s	39	F	Mexican	Press and Media Visa	Employed

6	<i>Correspon- dent for National Geographic</i>	Master's	36	F	Mexican	Press and Media Visa SENTRI pass	Independent
7	<i>Agent</i>	Bachelor's	33	M	Mexican	Press and Media Visa	Independent
<b>Young generation</b>							
8	<i>KPBS</i>	Master's	28	F	American	SENTRI pass	Employed
9	<i>Frontera San Diego</i>	Bachelor's	27	F	Mexican	Press and Media Visa SENTRI pass	Employed
10	<i>EFE and Enlace</i>	Bachelor's	30	F	American	SENTRI pass	Independent

Source: Adapted from interviews conducted by the authors in 2015.

The chart shows that two of the interviewees had a press and media visa to cross the border as well as a SENTRI pass (permission to cross through a special checkpoint in an expedite way), while others only have a press and media visa. The person from case 2 lacked a press and media visa at the time of the interview, and he never applied for it throughout his entire trajectory because he never deemed it necessary. For instance, when he covered trials or police matters such as the San Ysidro massacre in July 1984, the journalist said that he had only needed his Mexican passport, but not a visa.

#### *Changes in Work-Related Trajectories.*

When analyzing the decisions and changes encountered by the interviewees, we determined an average of five significant career transitions, specifically, job changes. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that not all of the additions to a trajectory were new jobs involving quitting other jobs, but independent jobs carried out for other media organizations, including radio, television, or charity projects to support non-governmental organizations, which reflects the high degree of instability in the industry, but also of employability, that is, opportunities to continue working in the field. Moreover, the number of career changes was more than 10 in three cases, which underscores the individual effort needed to build a career in journalism and the conditions of this activity in the cross-border context.

Table 2 summarizes these main changes in the professional trajectories of the interviewed journalists. The number of jobs ranges from 5 to 13, and the most stable cases are case 1 (U.S.) and case 9 (Mexico). The table also shows that these journalists work both

as freelancers and employed by media organizations and that many of them, regardless of their generation, have more than one job.

Table 2. Types of Work Throughout the Journalistic Trajectory

Case	Country	No. of jobs	Outside journalism	In the media, under contract	In the media, freelancer	Has more than one job	Total years of trajectory
1	United States	5	0	3	0	No	37
6	Mexico	13	4	1	8	Yes	15
7	Mexico	8	2	1	8	Yes	22
8	United States	5	0	2	5	Yes	6
4	United States	4	1	3	1	No	23
9	Mexico	2	0	2	0	No	6
2	Mexico	9	0	5	14	Yes	38
5	Mexico	4	1	2	5	Yes	14
3	Mexico	11	3	5	3	Yes	25
10	United States	5	0	3	2	Yes	7

Source: Adapted from interviews conducted by the authors in 2015.

Work-related trajectories are not only a set of external factors that determine the experience of professionals but also, to a large extent, the result of decision-making and the creation and application of survival strategies to remain within the field. The strategies identified from the interviews can be classified into three main types:

- 1) Alternating academic education with other trades;
- 2) The use of family or personal resources, such as establishing businesses unrelated to journalism, such as selling photographic material and stories; and
- 3) Multi-activity,<sup>7</sup> understood as the accumulation of different jobs carried out independently and simultaneously in short periods of time.

### *Types of Trajectories*

<sup>7</sup>As described by Guadarrama (2014) in the case of musicians.

After analyzing the most important moments and stages in the professional lives of the journalists in the sample, as well as the types of jobs that they carry out (and, consequently, the strategies and resources with which they ensure their permanence in the profession), we identified a model of career paths among journalists who work for media in both Tijuana and San Diego.

This model consists of three main types of trajectories based on the most prominent elements of the analyzed cases, that is, job stability or instability, predominance of a main job, and the existence of secondary jobs due to low salaries or disadvantageous working conditions, in addition to the strategies used to stay in the profession. These trajectories were defined as:

1) *Stable trajectories based on a main job and a professional project*: In this category, most of the jobs obtained by the journalists involved an indefinite-term contract, although their entry into the field was usually via short-term non-paid internships. Subsequent employment relationships were formal until the journalist reached a point of stability in their current employment. In this type of trajectory, freelance work is uncommon: these journalists tend to focus on one job, which they keep for years. People in this category state that they have designed an ideal professional project and believe that they have achieved it by doing journalism in the way that they intended.

2) *Trajectories involving a main job and a variety of simultaneous jobs*: The second type includes journalists who entered the field through regular jobs, had a main job at the time of the interview, and their employment circumstances were relatively stable. Most of the journalists in this category sought options to practice journalism as freelance correspondents and managed to create a client portfolio of their own; however, the main motivation for this search was not obtaining additional income or dissatisfaction with their main job, but a desire to develop their professional careers.

3) *Relatively stable trajectories involving cumulative independent work*: This type includes professionals who have worked independently for most of their careers, rarely establishing formal agreements with an employer involving fixed schedules. These journalists have two or three simultaneous jobs, or they covered information on the same theme for different media at the national and international levels. They prefer to collaborate independently, as correspondents or performing different journalistic projects, and their activities are marked by periods of sufficient and adequate work and low-activity periods when projects end due to reasons other than the journalist's performance, such as the closure of media companies or local offices. As a consequence, these trajectories are not characterized by stability. These journalists choose to accumulate simultaneous jobs due to their need to adjust their income to cover their necessities, but also due to their awareness of their situation outside the regulation of stable employment.

The three generations and types of trajectories are not directly related because journalists in all of them were employed or freelancers; however, the first generation and

the trajectory based on a main job and a professional project were remarkable compatible, as well as the intermediate generation and the trajectory based on a main job in addition to other jobs simultaneously.

There were relatively few changes throughout the trajectory, although the first job was usually not longer than two years due to new job offers, company closure, or because the journalist moved.

In sum, despite the changing conditions during the course of their work trajectories, the interviewed journalists continued to be part of the journalistic field in the region and embarked on new professional projects. A small number of them had begun to take an increasingly firm step toward occupations very different from journalism.

Not all cases were accurately and definitively assigned to each of the proposed categories or trajectories; this categorization was rather intended as an interpretation of heterogeneous and complex labor biographies. It should also be borne in mind that this is an intentional sample, focused on statements and perceptions expressed by the journalists themselves, and is not statistically representative.

#### SIGNIFYING AND LIVING FOR THE NEWS: WORK IDENTITIES OF CROSS-BORDER JOURNALISTS

This second section presents an analysis of the meanings attributed to the journalistic profession by the interviewed journalists based on their experiences, relationships, and challenges working in the media in Tijuana and San Diego as they constructed their professional identities.

Identity does not arise spontaneously, it is the product of actions undertaken by individuals who develop a personality as a response to the multiplicity of social conditions and phenomena to which they are subjected (Vázquez, 1999, p. 70); therefore, professional identities are the result of work experience, and their forms of identification derive from a double transaction, both biographical and relational (Dubar, 1992, in Margel, 2010).

An analysis based on the approach to socialization at work put forward by Dubar (2001, 2005) and the characteristics of the social space comprised of agents, institutions, and practices as described by Bourdieu (1990) shows how the cross-border professional field influences the construction of professional identities in two dimensions: biographical and relational.

The biographical dimension, according to Dubar (2001), is a definition or construction of oneself that refers to what the worker is or wants to be, which could be observed in the most personal accounts of the interviewed journalists. This identity has its origins in the first people who exerted some influence on the interviewee, but also in their academic and economic backgrounds, family-related decisions, and their vocation or pursued ideals, that is, all of the experiences that led them toward journalism.

Personal and family triggers motivated the men and women we interviewed to continue working as journalists. It, therefore, becomes clear that the construction of one's identity (*identité pour soi*) is not only a matter of choosing a profession or obtaining titles, but also of an identity strategy, which involves one's self-image, an appreciation of one's capabilities, and the attainment of one's desires (Dubar, 2005, p. 118).

The relational dimension explains how the recognition or non-recognition of what is allegedly at play in a specific space is transacted based on interactions with significant actors in a particular field (Margel, 2010, p. 82). Thus, this field, in particular, allows journalists of different nationalities to be hired as correspondents or to be assigned projects, which is why they maintain relationships with editors and colleagues and interact with sources and members of institutions on both sides of the border.

This idea summarizes one of the most important findings of the present study: as a result of their experience of the interdependence between Tijuana and San Diego in the context of their work, the interviewed journalists have developed a complex identity that makes them fully aware of the differences between countries and colleagues from either side of the border, and although they cover similar news, their approaches to the facts vary depending on the orientation of the media organization they are working for, which in turn responds to the interests of the society and nation to which it belongs.

The interviewees developed different identities and practical resources during their process of identification with the profession, which they use to face problems derived from very specific circumstances of the professional field formed by Tijuana and San Diego. Two moments stand out in this study: the rise of violence caused by the war on drugs and the different events associated with migration and the border. Interpersonal relationships at work, based on power and gender relationships, as well as working conditions, especially benefits and income, were central to the experience of the interviewed journalists.

Speaking both languages, the possession of documents to enable prompt crossing (visa, SENTRI pass), in addition to creativity, practical knowledge, courage in dangerous situations, and adaptive capacity are some of the identity strategies that increase the possibilities for these journalists to remain in the industry.

### *Forms of Identity of the San Diego-Tijuana Journalist*

According to Dubar (2001), identity is constructed and reconstructed throughout life; thus, in the professional context, we can speak of forms of identification rather than a fixed and stable identity in and through work. Based on this consideration, we used Dunbar's model of four typical forms of identity, constructed by the intersection of the biographical and relational dimensions. As a subjective relationship with work, the form of identity highlights identification spaces and significant temporalities in the construction of the worker's definition of him or herself, involving the double transaction of the biographical and relational spheres. Therefore, although journalists in Tijuana and San Diego share

similar work situations, there are likely to be important distinctions between their discourses about work, their attitudes toward work, and the way in which they discuss their professional past and anticipate their future (Dubar, 2001, p. 11).

In this analysis based on the four possible work-related identity processes, it should be pointed out that two of them derive from recognition or lack of recognition on the relational axis (company identity and profession- or category- based identity), while the other two are based on continuity or rupture on the biographical axis (network or flexible identity and identity away from work).

For analytic purposes, it is useful to differentiate between continuity narratives and rupture narratives, since the former express a way of bestowing meaning on work based on a vocation and a sense of self that allows for a more effective sense of professional belonging, whereas rupture narratives represent a flimsy self-definition resulting from the distance between the inherited and the intended identification, a distance that can be increased by the lack of recognition in the workplace and, consequently, lead to a rupture with and denial of the vocation (Solís, 2009).

#### *Continuity Narratives.*

This category includes the construction of company and professional identities, which are associated with permanence in the industry but also characterized by recognition or lack of recognition at work, respectively (Dubar, 2001).

A *company identity* entails the construction of a sense of belonging to the organization in which the worker conceives him or herself as a necessary element in the production process, so they become personally involved in work activities. On the other hand, professional identity refers to a continuity between one's identity and the other's—nevertheless, professional identity is faced with a lack of recognition by the organization. The lack of acknowledgment results in professional blockage or stagnation; although the interviewees value the knowledge acquired during their careers, they are not given the recognition that would give them the opportunity to legitimize themselves (Solís, 2009).

A representative case of company identity is that of Helena, who mentioned that, although she does independent work for other companies, she is committed to her main job, where she feels privileged:

Yes, but in *Síntesis* I'm treated really well, I can't complain. I mean, I think I am privileged where I work because they allow me to collaborate with other media; in another company, they wouldn't let me be [in several media at the same time] and here, yes. And they let me cover what I think is important, so what's the need? (Helena, personal communication, June 14, 2015).

The case of Dianne shows how identification with the firm is interwoven with identification with the profession: she feels respect for her work at *The San Diego Union-*

*Tribune*, to which she had devoted 22 of her 37 years of career at the time of the interview. She associates recognition with the time she has worked for the newspaper:

Wow, you know? It's funny. I don't know. I mean, am I recognized? Yeah, I think I'm respected at the paper. I think like, I'm the person who does the border, you know? I've been there for a long time (Dianne, personal communication, August 30, 2015).

However, when she was asked about her future in the profession, she answered that she planned to leave that line of work to teach because the pace of work does not allow her to develop her goals as an "old school" journalist: "It's not that I don't love, I love journalism, I still do, but I don't love the new dabbling" (Dianne, personal communication, August 30, 2015).

### *Rupture Narratives.*

This category of identity forms is the opposite of the previous category: it is built on the basis of inherited and expected identities, and it includes the construction of network and off-work identities. According to Dubar (2001), the former is characterized by voluntary breakthroughs and external recognition, whereas the latter is defined by the ruptures where workers face a threat of exclusion due to the lack of recognition.

The network or flexible identity is valued and recognized within flexible work environments, such as those found in maquiladoras.<sup>8</sup> It requires personal autonomy and adaptability to the different transformations at work. People with this type of identity collaborate via (work-related) social networks and tend to be innovative and mobile (Solís, 2009, p. 73).

This group includes Esperanza, who has worked as both as a freelancer and as a media correspondent at the regional and national level for most of her career. After 25 years, Esperanza has had many jobs, which demonstrates her ability to adapt to flexible environments; she assumed the responsibility for her two children and considers herself to be a well-known journalist: "I feel especially for myself and for some part of the community" (Esperanza, personal communication, 2015).

Regardless of the precarious conditions of her work, she considers herself committed to journalism: "Look, benefits I don't have, they are very incipient. But I understand that it's a company, how can I say this? It is not exactly a family business, more like an adventure among colleagues, so I support them" (Esperanza, personal communication, 2015).

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<sup>8</sup>This form of identification is frequent among women as a result of their rejection of inherited (traditional) feminine identities and their desire to transform such identities to enter the (historically) masculine world of labor.



Finally, off-work identity (Dubar, 2001) refers to the construction of identity based on a rupture that also lacks the acknowledgment of the other in the workplace, which leads to a process of exclusion and an identity that is threatened and withdrawn into other spheres of life. Consequently, the worker establishes a merely instrumental relationship with work and seeks other areas of personal development.

An example of this type of identity is Lilith, who decided to be an independent journalist since the beginning of her career. However, she faced several problems when she began to work in Mexican media, derived from sexist threats and accusations, and she had the experience of high-risk coverage, all of which changed her way to work and identity as a journalist.

After completing a project with *Milenio Baja California* in 2014, where she was also questioned in regard to how she had obtained the job and her role as a leader and producer at the radio station, the journalist experienced an intense rupture with the journalistic profession: “We did a very good job. So, it’s terribly sad that everybody was canned even though they had done such a good job. That was in May, when I lost my job. For the first time in my life, they terminated me” (Lilith, personal communication, August 14, 2015).

Thus, the journalist faced a new process of reflection and distancing from the profession:

When that was over, I realized that I would never go to the newspaper again. If before I was fed up with violence, after those two years of having to think constantly about the radio station, where 30 people reported to me, six hours of radio news, plus national television feeds, the printed version, the site with 60 notes per day, I was squeezed, squeezed (Lilith, personal communication, May 14, 2015).

Another example is Antonio, who expressed:

If you go to the issue of journalists’ work situation, it is terrible. In general terms, it is terrible. Just now that the issue of the situation of journalists in Mexico reemerged with the assassination of this photographer in Mexico City, we said: “Wow, we write notes about all the injustice people face and we help out, but now that we think about our work situation and our security, whom do we tell?” (Antonio, personal communication, September 2, 2015).

The analysis and description of the identity construction process in a profession such as journalism revealed similarities between the four forms of identity and three types of professional trajectories that directly relate to the characteristics of the border reporter, such as nationality, age, gender, and type of employment.

For example, journalists expressing continuity narratives tend to be characterized by stable trajectories, permanent jobs, and in some cases, professional projects, including a main job in addition to other professional engagements. This category includes the three

generational groups and is composed mainly of American women working in media outlets in San Diego or Los Angeles.

Network and off-work identities are built within the rupture narratives, characterized by the estrangement between “one’s identity” and the “identity assigned by others.” It is important to point out that the off-work identity includes journalists who have followed relatively stable trajectories and carried out cumulative and independent work, and it is present in two generational groups (the two older generations); both men and women present this identity equally, and these journalists have worked most of their careers as freelancers for Mexican media.

This hypothesis is supported by statistical studies: journalism requires a more intense personal effort from journalists working in the border, especially due to the lack of recognition in the profession.

Finally, personal values and the faithful practice of their vocation was very important for the interviewed journalists. Therefore, despite the lack of recognition, risk, and confrontation they experience in their field, their trajectory in the profession and the type of identity that they develop depend mostly on themselves.

Translator: Miguel Ángel Ríos Flores

## CONCLUSIONS

The border between Tijuana and San Diego represents both the context and the shaping factor of a professional field characterized by mobility and exchange, although conditions of social, economic, and political asymmetry are still present. This is where the work of these journalists takes place; therefore, besides portraying the reality in the border, they experience it as citizens on both sides.

Border journalists are part of a special space of interaction where they struggle for the legitimacy and recognition of their work. This particular cross-border professional field is comprised of institutions that journalists use as sources and the different media companies in their different formats—print, television, radio, and digital—both at the local and international levels via information agencies. Different forms of employment emerge in this configuration. The employed journalist and the freelancer coexist, one of them tied to the (ever decreasing) security of a fixed job and social benefits and the other enticed by the freedom to work for different media.

Consequently, a variety of forms of employment and work arrangements have appeared in the industry, all of which are special cases of the value assigned to journalism as a profession; income levels are different on either side of the border, and freelance journalists have sources of income independent of this profession.

The academic background of journalists before entering the journalistic field is remarkable. After initial internships with little or no payment, there are few changes throughout the career of journalists with permanent jobs, which could reflect job stability in the profession. However, such stability is relative, or even absent in the case of journalists who take multiple jobs in addition to their main job, and so transitions from one job to the next sometimes led to estrangement from the profession. These ruptures were perceived as characteristic or frequent in the field.

Additional strategies used by journalists to remain in the industry are: a) to supplement their income and securing economic stability with academic background and practical knowledge from other trades; b) to use family's or one's savings and resources; and c) engaging in multiple activities, in other words, simultaneous work for different media companies independently.

A joint analysis of the most important stages in the life course of the interviewed journalists, the types of employment available and, consequently, the resources required to ensure their stability and permanence in the journalistic profession, revealed three main types of trajectories:

1) *Stable trajectories based on a main job and a professional project*, which characterize permanently employed journalists with media companies in San Diego.

2) *Trajectories based on a fixed job and various simultaneous jobs*. Journalists who entered the field as employees belong in this category.

3) *Trajectories characterized by relative stability and cumulative independent work* are those in which journalists have collaborated for most of their careers in the media as freelancers.

These trajectories highlight the fact that the multiplicity of activities is, in its most instrumental sense, a way to cope with the precarious context and the lack of professional recognition, which for the interviewed journalists is increasingly evident from indicators such as low salaries, reduced benefits, and even lack of support from the civil society.

Dubar's (2001) model of identity forms was applied to the accounts of these journalists; this analysis revealed their identity construction processes, which were organized into continuity narratives (company identities and category identities), as well as rupture narratives (network identities and off-work identities), characterized by the importance of recognition, job transitions, and experiences that impacted their lives from the personal to the professional domains almost in parallel.

One of the main features of the border between Tijuana and San Diego is the cultural, symbolic, and commercial interdependence between these cities, which extends to the journalistic profession. In this regard, journalists develop a complex identity that makes them fully aware of the differences between the two countries and among their peers. This identity involves the use of mobility resources and foreign language skills, and above all,

seeking the possibility of collaborating independently with international media. Moreover, their approaches to facts and thematic coverage are partly determined by the media companies where they work, as well as their society and nation of origin.

Therefore, one of the most important findings of the present study is the remarkable adaptive capacity, resourcefulness, and resilience of media journalists in Tijuana and San Diego in an unstable and constantly changing field. In recent years, the issue of violence in Mexico has been witnessed up close by journalists, and the phenomenon has certainly affected their trajectories and the way in which they build their sense of belonging and give meaning to work. Undoubtedly, vocation is central in this profession, and only in this way has it been possible for these journalists to cope with precariousness and risks faced during their trajectories—this represents an example of work acquiring a transcendent meaning related to social commitment.

This was even more evident in cases in which the person had been an independent journalist for many years; although simultaneous employment with different media companies is a strategy against precariousness and unemployment, independent journalists also require recognition and support both from the industry and from society in order to avoid ruptures with their initial vocation and the profession they have carried out for most of their lives.

Some of the questions raised by this study point to the most specific differences among journalists, which refer to gender and nationality. Another question for further analysis concerns the relationship between these forms of identification and the selection of news and ways to relay such news among journalists. Finally, we hypothesize that personal effort toward recognition is stronger on the Mexican side.

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