

**Media Anthropology Network
European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA)
E-Seminar Series**

<http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars>

E-Seminar 55

**“It’s like a family” – The unity and community of journalists: On connections
between newsroom and how journalists share a community of practice**

by

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Discussant

**Chris Paterson
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March 1-20, 2016

Veronica Barassi v.barassi@gold.ac.uk

March 2, 2016

Dear All,

I am delighted to announce the opening of our 55th E-Seminar!

The paper we will be presenting has been written by Dr Line Hassall Thomsen from Aarhus University

‘It’s like a family!’ - The Unity and Community of Journalists: On studying connections between newsrooms

To journalists at traditional broadcast media these are times of insecurity and opportunity, rapid change and ever-growing competition. In the face of growing pressure, the unity and community of journalists employed at traditional broadcast media is increasingly strengthened. This working paper explores the strong practice-community bonds existing between journalists employed at competing traditional broadcast media.

Drawing on a two-year period of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the newsrooms of BBC News, ITV News, TV Avisen and TV2 Nyhederne, the paper presents an anthropological approach to studying journalists at work. During fieldwork, the study found journalists at competing newscasters to be working in very similar ways, while expressing a strong relational bond. In order to explore this bond, it is examined what is core and what is periphery to the journalists within the newsroom. One of the key findings is that each newsroom is very much connected to competing newsrooms by way of everyday practice-communities, both real and imagined.

For those of you who are new to this mailing list, these sessions run for two weeks on the list and all subscribers are welcome to participate.

If you haven't had the chance over the last few days to read the paper yet you can find it on our website: <http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars>

Prof Chris Paterson (University of Leeds) will be acting as discussant. <http://media.leeds.ac.uk/people/chris-paterson/> He will be posting the comments directly to the list. I will first give the chance to Line to respond and then will open the discussion to all.

We are looking forward to your comments and thoughts!

Veronica

Chris Paterson C.Paterson@leeds.ac.uk

March 2, 2016

Hello medianthro list.

I hope you have had a chance to read the paper by Line Hassall Thomsen.

Thank you to John, Philip and Veronica for inviting me to start off discussion of Line's paper: "It's like a family!" - The Unity and Community of Journalists: On studying connections between newsrooms".

It was a pleasure to read this derivation of Line's major ethnographic project, which I've been familiar with for some years. This larger ethnographic examination of television news production, involving observation and interviewing over a long period with extensive follow-up, seems to me one of the most thorough and original television news ethnographies of recent times.

The paper develops a concept of distinct, competing, newsrooms being connected "by way of everyday practice-communities", whereby friendly, respectful bonds with other journalists shape ideals of "good journalism" more than do internal management structures and pressure from

immediate peers. The community of practice concept is a helpful theory upon which to develop explanation of the pronounced links of affinity which Line observed stretching across institutional boundaries and this work starts to unpick the social dimensions of news work in very interesting new ways.

I find Line's observation that "I see journalists as never only engaged in creating media but also always engaged in producing themselves as social persons in relation to others" a particularly valuable insight, reminding us that news production is far more than a 'routine' driven process with varying degrees of influence from micro and macro level forces on the implementation of those routines; it is a highly public, exposed, high-stakes social process performed for an immediate audience - fellow news workers and managers - as well as the distant mostly unknown public audience. The concept is original and useful, and this paper does a good job of exploring its manifestations and implications.

The example of the dismissal by management of a senior journalist and an outpouring of support - even from people within rival media organizations - is held up as an example of the strength of such bonds, but I wondered if such cases might also be explained from an industrial relations perspective in the context of fast paced newsroom change: the need across the industry to revolt against a high-handed sweeping away of the old guard as the news product is reshaped for the digital age. Colson and Heinderyckx (2008), for example, demonstrated how poorly such change has been managed by some organizations.

Examples are provided to demonstrate the idea of journalists who are professional competitors seeing each other as 'family', but I would have liked a clearer sense of roughly what proportion of informant perceptions of other journalists could be characterized in this way, as opposed to what proportion (roughly) expressed a more competitive or cynical view. There is the implicit suggestion that this 'family' approach is the norm amongst the informants the author engaged with, but at the risk of imposing quantity on an appropriately qualitative approach, I'd like clearer evidence. I recognize some of this from my ethnographic work (though I failed to theorize it as well), but also found amongst the news agency journalists a widely held and tangible 'dog-eat-dog' approach, which they would proudly encapsulate with tales of how one news agency managed to sabotage the work of another in order to get a story (such stories were often more colourful legend than fact). Some of the examples in the paper come from war reporting, when journalists do have to depend on each other in unusual ways and do form extraordinary bonds, but I wonder if these cases are confined to those relatively few, mostly senior, news workers who have been in such situations, but would be less pronounced amongst less experienced news workers who might eagerly adopt a competitive ethos?

Another fascinating example used as illustration in this paper and presumably drawn from the author's observation was the case of rival broadcasters finding out about scoops because someone in

the newsroom would make a call or send a text to a friend in the rival newsroom before the story was broadcast. I witnessed control over news workers in the television news agencies to prevent this from happening; there was friendly boasting about a story a rival didn't get, but typically after the story was broadcast. The paper implies that links of friendship spread such typically propriety information between rivals, potential costing an employer a competitive advantage; or is there more to it? Are some newsroom cultures simply more competitive than others? I wonder, for example, if the author saw a pronounced difference in this regard between Danish and British newsrooms? Line also observes the power of the unique jargon of news workers to exclude outsiders and reinforce a sense of community. Even within the television news industry, there are sub-grouping of jargon (between the international and the local for instance). I catalogued much of the jargon used by television news agency workers, some of which had origins four or more decades earlier and some of which was intelligible only to that small television news agency community. In London television, the extensive use of freelance staff seemed instrumental in diffusing a more generic broadcast jargon (and related work practices) into the news agencies and from the news agencies to the large broadcasters (of the sort Line observed), as well as in reinforcing the interdependence between the two.

It is interesting that the family-like bonds are seen by the author as a stronger definer of 'good practice' than is management dictat; it would be interesting to read examples of this. As Jerolmack and Khan (2014) suggest in their useful provocation entitled 'the Attitudinal Fallacy', one could imagine interviewees suggesting this, as a subtle validation of their autonomy, but find through observation - or indeed, measurement of content - that the product indeed varies little from what management/owners proscribe.

On a broader level, Line's large project of comprehensive ethnographic research with multiple broadcast news organizations seems to suggest that access to major media is still possible for researchers, even though there are indications access increasingly closing down. It is pleasing to see large news organizations still providing this kind of access in 2007; would they now? It does seem, given the number of ethnographic news production projects in the last decade and half, that Danish broadcasters have been particularly, and commendably, open to such research. In a small study with Zoellner (Paterson and Zoellner, 2010) we found media ethnographers agreeing on the usefulness of some prior professional media or journalism experience in gaining access, and it seems Line used her professional networks and experiences well to gain a deep level of access but also to build personal relationships with journalists which yielded the kinds of insights about networks of friendship which this unique paper describes. It suggests she moved beyond a level of news worker defensiveness which I found in newsrooms and which I suspect is common in the early stages of most newsroom observation. It takes skill and persistence to get beyond this, and this paper offers good evidence of the rewards for doing so. But as US newsroom ethnographer David Ryfe (2016) observed, contemporary realities for research students and academics make such

long-term field research exceedingly rare. I hope Line's excellent work inspires more researchers to try.

I hope some of these observations are useful - back to the list for discussion..

Sources referenced:

Colson and Heinderyckx (2008), in Paterson and Domingo, Making Online News (Peter Lang); Jerolmack, C. & Khan, S. (2014) "Talk Is Cheap: Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy." Sociological Methods & Research, 43(2), 178-209; Paterson, C. and Zoellner, A. (2010) "The efficacy of professional experience in the ethnographic investigation of production." Journal of Media Practice. 11(2), 97-109; Ryfe, D (2016), chapter in Paterson, C., Lee, D., Saha, A, and Zoellner, A. (Eds.) (2016) Advancing Media Production Research. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Line Hassall Thomsen linehassallthomsen@gmail.com

March 3, 2016

Dear Chris and all,

Many thanks for participating in this e-seminar and for contributing your thoughts to my draft paper, *'It's like a family!' The unity and community of journalists*. Thank you to John, Philipp and Veronica for inviting me to contribute. I have been following this list almost ever since the day it began and am very excited to have a paper discussed. I especially want to thank Chris Paterson for taking the time to read and comment my paper. I very much appreciate the depth of your understanding of my arguments. Particularly as you yourself have done extensive newsroom studies, it is intriguing to hear which elements of my findings may resonate with yours.

Some thoughts in response to your comments

* 1) Could the example of **the dismissal by management of a senior journalist and an outpouring of support - even from rival media organizations also be explained from an industrial relations perspective in the context of fast paced newsroom change?*

- Yes, I very much agree, the way that journalists of many and competing news organisations stood together in support could be explained from that perspective. During my time of research in newsrooms it was evident how the older generations had to work harder in order to follow the pace of the younger journalists who were more at ease with all new things digital.

At times, I too have seen organisations handling this change poorly. Among the journalist practice-communities I sensed an understanding and excitement of the importance of new media. However, the primary shared goal of journalists appeared to be to make good journalism, whatever the

media convergence skills. Indeed, one of the primary conclusions of my thesis was that journalists were sensing a host of new struggles, particularly from new demands of multiskilling, while at the same time keeping intact old ideals of the journalism profession. So, when a much respected Good Journalist is made redundant, journalists from all news organisations see it as proof of utter mismatch between management ideals and the ideals of their profession.

*2) Just how wide-spread is the family-concept among journalists? **Roughly what proportion of informant perceptions of other journalists could be characterized in this way, as opposed to what proportion (roughly) expressed a more competitive or cynical view?*

- This is a hard question to answer. I think you are very right in pointing out that some circumstances and some places (such as conflict areas and war-zones) make for more close and extraordinary bonds between journalists. I too heard stories of how reporters from one news outlet managed to delay the competitors' story in coming out – as getting out ten or twenty seconds earlier than the competitor with news is a clear goal (so clear, that editors will pay journalists in bottles of wine, cake, a congratulatory group-email or the like if they manage to get it first. After the bombings in London in 2005 for instance, I remember the editor telling me to write down the exact time where we first reported that it was bombings and not a powercut which had happened in the Underground. We were apparently almost two minutes before BBC in reporting this – and therefore we sent a press release out to all media papers...)

Maybe my circular illustration does not make as much sense as I hoped. But the idea was that I wanted to illustrate that journalists may feel a sense of camaraderie and fellowship primarily with those who s/he works alongside in the newsroom but still feel an overarching family-like belonging with all journalists. This feeling of family-like bonds to fellow journalists at other organisations was one that I heard staff of both senior level, young reporters and trainees refer to. I witnessed not just war reporters, but reporters at the royal wedding in Denmark, and political correspondents at the lawn outside parliament in London help each other with practical things such as lending a lead or giving background information to a story. This kind of helpfulness and camaraderie I would ascribe to the family-like bond which journalists expressed. Still, however helpful towards each other in practical matters, I saw journalists take good care in being first with a story, and also not to share guests or leak scoops with the competitor.

It is true that I experienced journalists finding out about their competitors' scoops before they were broadcast, often through a phone call or a text message from one newsroom to the other. But such sharing was always done with too little time for the competitor to have the same story or get the pictures in time. An editor might suddenly yell angrily through the newsroom on finding out that the competitor was going to broadcast a scoop and having too little time or information to do the same story. This would mean that the competitor 'owned' the story and all the rival news organisations could do would be to 'follow up' on the competitor's scoop.

I wouldn't say that I saw much more of a competitive ethos in British newsrooms compared to that of Danish media.

*3) **The power of news jargon. *

- I very much agree that the news jargon is an important aspect in keeping excluding others and reinforcing a sense of community. I admire your cataloguing of jargon and news speak, and agree the use of language would be a theme worth delving further into.

During fieldwork, the news jargon was something that I thought very much about. As I have myself worked as a news journalist it helped me on countless occasions that I knew of the jargon. It turned out to be a way of showing that I was 'one of them' that I could speak their lingo so to speak. And I remember, from the days I first began working inside a newsroom, how excluded I felt when I did not know the meaning of things such as an 'ENG', an 'Attack', 'Cut and tail', a 'Ulay', 'OB' or 'KGN' for instance...

*4) **Is management dictate not stronger than what journalists define as 'good practice'?*

I am thrilled that you asked into this. In fact, this is one of the primary focuses of my entire thesis and also the forthcoming book. I did not set out to study how journalists find themselves different and better than the management by which they work. But I ended up seeing so many discontented journalists trying to work around management dictate that the clash between management and journalists soon became one of my main themes.

Some journalists described work as 'guessing what the management wants' and then 'trying to turn management ideas into good journalism'. I was in editorial meetings where management suggested ideas to which journalists would appear to agree, and then as soon as the management representative had left the room the journalists would say things such as 'right, HOW do we turn that idea into journalism?' or 'Right, what is the REAL story today then?'

In three out of the four newsroom journalists were often told to make their stories suit a very particular and narrow audience. The younger generation and the white middle class woman was an audience that journalists were often told to imagine their news items to suit. In editorial meetings management would often explain that stories should be simplified in order to better suit the short online news updates, or in order to be entertaining for 'a viewer who might be busy baking pear-tart while watching'. Journalists often joked around with just how they would make complex stories very simple in order to suit what they described as the crazy management ideal-viewers.

In the everyday work, I saw journalists bending or changing their designated storylines to make

them better journalism than what the management representative had suggested. Also, I overheard much joking among journalists about what management would deem a ‘good story’.

Generally, news editors were differently trusted and respected if they themselves had been journalists previously. If they had not been journalists before becoming news editors then they would often be seen as ‘part of management’, and their ideas would be a lot less listened to.

So, while journalists did work to management dictat, they would often try to bend the rules to suit their shared ideals of what is good journalism. In the everyday however, journalists felt more and more pressured to work to the dictat of management, thus creating an ever-increasing sense of dissatisfaction with one’s own work as a journalist.

*5) **On access to the newsrooms...*

You ask whether it may be harder today to enter a newsroom as a researcher than it was when I began my fieldwork back in 2007. Although I ended up getting all the access I had hoped for, gaining access was not easy at all.

In fact the most significant challenge of my PhD project was an unexpected one. After years of working for established British news organisations, I had become accustomed to getting instant access to people, information and places that made the stories of the day. So, though I was aware that journalists were less than fond of being looked over the shoulder, I was very surprised and unprepared for the difficulty I faced in getting access to study the four newsrooms I had planned to include in my project. I have written an entire chapter on my struggles of gaining access to the four newsrooms.

Ultimately, I believe I ended up being able to convince news editors and journalists that I was ‘one of them’, however, I believe there was also a great deal of luck involved in me gaining the access I had. As Buchanan et al. (1988: 56) have put it: ‘[N]egotiating access for the purpose of research is a game of chance, not of skill’.

I will stop commenting for now, and really look forward to the discussion to follow. Thanks again to all for reading my paper, and for any comments you may have...

All the best to you from Denmark,

Line

References

Buchanan, David; Boddy, David.; McCalman, James. (1988) 'Getting in, Getting on, Getting out and Getting Back' in Bryman, A. (ed.): *Doing Research in Organizations*. London and New York: Routledge.

Veronica Barassi v.barassi@gold.ac.uk

March 3, 2016

Dear All,

I would like to thank Chris for his comments and Line for her prompt reply. The discussion is now open to all.

all best
Veronica

Chris Paterson C.Paterson@leeds.ac.uk

March 4, 2016

Given the topic of Line's paper and our exchange of comments about collective responses of journalists to fast paced change, this rather ethnographic essay about the depressing state of US journalism and mass dismissals of experienced journalists in recent years is worthy of attention; evidencing, perhaps, communities of practice extending into unemployment:

<http://www.thenation.com/article/these-journalists-dedicated-their-lives-to-telling-other-peoples-stories/>.

Veronica Barassi v.barassi@gold.ac.uk

March 7, 2016

Dear All,

This is just a reminder that the 55th E-Seminar is now open to all.

We are looking forward to your thoughts and discussions on Line Hassall Thomsen's paper.

If you have not had the chance yet to read the paper you can find it on our website.

<http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars>

all best
Veronica

John Postill jrpostill@gmail.com

March 7, 2016

Many thanks Line for an extremely interesting and well researched paper.

I was particularly intrigued to read about journalists in both Denmark and the UK expressing a strong professional and familial identity, and about the clashes with managerial understandings of what audiences want. These clashes and audience imaginings reminded here of some of the TV production ethnographic research we discussed on this list back in 2004 (Katarina Graffman, <http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars>) and subsequent doctoral work by Ivan Kwek in Singapore - or indeed Peterson's (2003) media anthropology book that you cite in the paper.

They also bring to mind the contemporary academic field, but I don't think we need to go there on this occasion, see Marilyn Strathern, David Graeber and others on the corporatisation of universities.

A few quick questions:

1. How does your argument about 'the strong practice-community bonds' of journalists link to the existing journalism scholarship, and specifically to the anthropology of news and journalism (Bird, Boyer, Peterson, etc.)? What's the specific contribution your paper is making? I felt this was a crucial missing element in the paper, e.g. Boyer's work on technological and political changes in the former East Germany's newsrooms, or Bird's comparative volume with case studies from different parts of the world.
2. Speaking of cross-cultural comparison, does a country's scale matter when creating professional bonds? I would imagine that these are easier to create and maintain (yet with their own problems, too) in small countries like Denmark than in larger ones like the UK or Germany, not to mention imperial states such as China or the US?
3. Those 'inspiration trips' by managers to other newsrooms, didn't they raise fears of industrial espionage?
4. In the wake of the WikiLeaks and Snowden affairs, some have called for anti-establishment, 'adversarial' journalism (with Glenn Greenwald leading the charge). The cosy arrangements you describe seem like just the sort of thing that Greenwald et al would like to obliterate. This probably falls beyond the scope of your research, but have you noticed any impact here in recent times?

I've got a few more, but I think I'll stop there!

Many thanks again for a great read

John

Jannie Møller Hartley jath@ruc.dk

March 7, 2016

Thank you Line for giving me the chance to learn more on the news workers who were also a big part of my phd on online news production in Denmark. Line and I know each other from the phd period, but I have not had a chance to read any of Line's work yet.

1) My first question is a theoretical one. I can see what you gain from Wenger and the concept communities of practice, but the problem for me seems the same as the one I struggle with when using Bourdieu's concept of field - when do you define the borders of a community of practice, e.i the different levels? What does it take to share this practice - the same degree in Journalism/education? Some specific norms? Or do you, as field theory suggest, enter the field as a newcomer and the adopt the norms and become at one with the community of practice? You mention yourself that radio and tv journalist are at the same level, but that they also differ - can we then talk of a community of practice of tv journalist and one of radio journalists and then how does this help our understanding these specific groups - I mean why add a community of practice concept? - how does it help to see what they share and how they differ? Maybe more importantly how does the concept differ from that of a profession?

2) My second question is similar to that of John Postills, but here I am also interested in how you see your work linked to those studies done in Danish newsrooms, mainly Ida Willig (2006). What is the specific contribution of this paper in that relation? I know that for people outside Danish academia this might be new and also the comparative aspect is a great contribution, but this you don't go so much into and I am wondering if the strong focus on journalism as a family prevents you from seeing how the news workers in the two countries differ and across tv stations within the two countries...In relation to this the part of the paper dealing with scoops in newswork - how is Wengers community of practice helpful in this regard and how you see Willigs work on the "solo criteria" (also a Bourdieu- theoretical framework) in relation to yours? Is there a specific reason not to mention this work, despite the fact that she has studied this in Danish tv news production (although a few years ago now)...am just curios if or if not you found her book (bag om Nyhederne) helpful?

3) My third question is linked to this - in your reply to Chris you write that " It is true that I experienced journalists finding out about their competitors' scoops before they were broadcast, often through a phone call or a text message from one newsroom to the other. But such sharing was always done with too little time for the competitor to have the same story or get the pictures in time." In this respect Jeremy Tunstall's work reminds me that not very much have changed. His concept of colloquy-competitor might be useful to you: "Colleague-competitor as a concept is more

specific than of the many varieties of 'reference group'. Newsgatherers acquire not merely some of their values from the group: the competitor-colleague group is operationally defined as a group of journalists each employed full time by one of the 23 national news organisations covering a single specific news source area. From this group the specialist receives regular, usually daily, acts of competitive (and co-operative) behaviour." (Tunstall 1971; 7). How can Wenger help us in an understanding of this complex relationship where friends are also working against each other? From your reply and your paper I can see much of this kind of relationship, but has the speed and increased possibilities of new technology changed this? Or is everything the same just faster?

And a small thing on access to newsrooms: Its all about making the editors feel that they are a part of ground breaking research, which they also are of course. But I found that once I got one of the big fish on board with the argument: "You might learn a lot about the ways you produce news..." then it was easy to get access to other news rooms." And I found exactly the same as Line, that being a journalist helps when fitting into the newsroom during fieldwork. Its like they think that we are also part of the family and that we cannot be critical. This I actually find to be a problem in some of the research done by former journalists, the specific aim not to be critical, e.i. "I am merely describing". But this is more a general comment and not on this paper by Line...

Thanks again Line, I too have many more questions, but we can grab a coffee sometime and discuss:)

All the best,
Jannie Møller Hartley

Erkan Saka sakaerka@gmail.com

March 9, 2016

I personally benefit from article and all the questions and commentaries and I may not have much to contribute theoretically at this point. Just a few ideas.

Maybe Line does it in her full monograph and there are clues in between lines, but maybe more explicitly there should be temporal and locational descriptions to specify a particular type of formation of a family like journalist community of practice.

I could imagine a similar one among journalists in Turkey only within strictly ideological or class-based categories of journalists.

A year ago, when a Gülenist reporter was thrown away from a ministry-level event while he was doing his routine work, none of his colleagues supported him. However, I can guess and I have observed some "family like" situations in specific occasions.

Moreover, more emphasis on tension while building a community of practice might trigger new dimensions. I guess growing financial pressure on media organizations force journalists to be more competitive but they might still preserve their sort of unity.

Maybe digitalization and user generated news practices might also create a new front and tension and this might lead a new sort of alliance among professional journalists..

Cordially,
Erkan

Line Hassall Thomsen linehassallthomsen@gmail.com

March 10, 2016

Dear all,

Many thanks for your comments, and thanks to those who may have read my paper without commenting too. It is really exciting to share and discuss in this forum, and I am grateful for any comments and critiques.

Apologies for replying a little slower than I'd wish for – I am currently on maternity with newborn baby, so am writing this as she sleeps...

Here comes a reply to the comments from John Postill,

Reply to John Postill,

Many thanks for your comments, I'm grateful to you for taking the time. Thanks also for reminding me of the works of Katarina Graffman and Ivan Kwek which are indeed relevant. I do definitely see a link to the notion of the corporatization of universities (Strathern and Graeber and others). In fact, I have talked to other researchers and practitioners who talk of similar kind of corporatization happening where they are at, for instance among doctors and in primary schools.

To your questions,

1. What's the specific contribution my paper is making?

Thank you so much for asking this. I regret not having inserted a few lines on this in the early parts of the paper. This shall be amended for sure. I spend half a chapter of my monograph discussing the existing scholarship (i.e. Bird, Boyer, Hemmingway, Hartley, Peterson, Ryfe, Willig and many others) and setting out how I see my study differ. In short, I would say that I see the study's primary contributions to be that it bring a very indepth insight into the everyday of journalists at a specific

time where the profession is under pressure.

In researching newsrooms and journalists, the study connects with the first wave of newsroom studies that had its heyday in the mid-seventies. However, methodologically the study proceeds from sociological research methods often favoured by this particular wave of newsroom studies, as the methodology has been developed within the framework of cultural anthropology.

Aiming to create a situated knowledge based on participant observation among journalists at these specific four newsrooms, I hope to have provided new insights into the everyday work of news workers today. Connecting this situated knowledge with theories of the profession has enabled me to analyse the observations of everyday work from a new perspective.

As this study has had an explicit interest in describing news work from the perspective of news workers, it has been crucial that research questions were inspired by empirical findings. The danger of such research is of course that the empirical findings can single-handedly decide the focus of the research. With this in mind, I aimed to be constantly walking the thin edge between findings **in** the field and theory **of** the field. Thus, I did not begin my study with an interest in professions, but in the light of empirical findings the professions perspective was found relevant for the analysis.

2. Speaking of cross-cultural comparison, does a country's scale matter when creating professional bonds?

During fieldwork, both back in 2007 and today as I carry on visiting the four newsrooms, I am often asked this kind of question from the journalists – they are often keen to hear what kind of difference I have found between the British and the Danish newsrooms. I am sure there are some patriotic bonds that are different in each country. Mainly, however, my informants were oriented towards the professional group across countries, overall it seemed to be an international identity, rather than one defined by the country they worked in.

When I set out the study I was very interested in the national differences, as well as differences I expected between Public Service Broadcasters and the commercially funded ones. One of my ideas to spot such differences (at least verbally) was to ask the exact same four questions to news staff in all the four newsrooms. So I put questions such as ‘What is a Good News Story’ and ‘Why do you work in journalism?’ and ‘How do you define Public Service?’ to over one hundred different news workers in the four different newsrooms, and expected different answers. But both in Denmark and in the UK news staff gave me very similar answers, sometimes exactly the same across different countries. Of course this just shows how similarly staff talk and not necessarily how similar they work in the everyday, but to me it made me reconsider the field as more connected across countries than I had first anticipated. Interestingly, all staff would tell me that they thought themselves very

different and unique to the others – and then proceed to answer almost exactly the same as all other staff.

3. Those 'inspiration trips' by managers to other newsrooms, didn't they raise fears of industrial espionage?

No, I did not meet anyone who appeared to think of the 'inspiration trips' in that way. Rather, staff (both management and news workers) appeared proud of the fact that another broadcaster had come to visit. The primary connections did seem to be between similarly funded broadcasters, so BBC and DR and TV2 and ITV appeared to visit each other more frequently. Also, the management would socialize and meet up at different news conferences, news award shows or events such as the News Quiz'es (of which I attended a few).

I have myself sat in the ITV newsroom working while tours of news management from abroad (the US or Europe) came to visit, and I remember the sense of pride among us as the 'News Theatre' (as we called the new bluescreen room) was talked about as one of the most innovative of its kind. Now I think of it, I remember some ITN's technical staff went to visit newsrooms at other broadcasters internationally in order to teach the new blue-screen technology. This would be interesting to look further into, perhaps I could talk to the staff who went travelling and enquire as to how they feel about the notion of industrial espionage...

4. In the wake of the WikiLeaks and Snowden affairs, any impact here in recent times?

I do think WikiLeaks and the Snowden affairs have had a great impact on the everyday work of journalists today and particularly the role they see themselves as playing. Last week's win at the Oscars, the film Spotlight which shows Boston Globe reporters do just this kind of anti-establishment journalism have also spurred an excitement among news workers. Journalists have told me that they see their role as that of a 'scout', a reason for doing journalism which is not far from Glenwald's adversarial-journalism ideals. However, the kind of journalism which Greenwald is advocating I have not found to be an impediment to family-like bonds and connections between the newsrooms. I do have a few recent examples of cases where reporters across different newsrooms work together in revealing wrongdoings by authorities. This would be interesting to follow in the future.

All Best,

Line

Line Hassall Thomsen linehassallthomsen@gmail.com

March 10, 2016

Reply to Jannie Møller Hartley:

Many thanks for your comments. And you are right, we should meet up and talk. I found your project very interesting, and a really good read. What you found in the online newsrooms at the very same broadcasters rang true in so many ways with what I found.

To your questions, which I have themed slightly;

1) Wenger and the concept of borders between different communities of practice

What does it take to share the practice? You ask into whether norms, educational background are important to the communities. As I understand Wenger, it is not the individual habitus, the norms or the education which creates community of practice, but rather the social and everyday shared practice of work. Wenger (1998a) and Lave and Wenger (2001) holds that the community of a group of people doing the same practice is constantly strengthened by the everyday repetition of that practice. In time, such strong bonds between practitioners can be much stronger than the bond an individual worker may feel obliged to have toward his supervisor, his editor or the broadcaster for whom he is working.

One news worker may fit many different kinds of communities of practice within the same newsroom and within the journalism profession - just like I might belong to many different practice communities via my hobbies, my workplace or my neighbourhood. I find Wenger's focus on the social very useful, and think this very everyday practice orientation fits well with the shared communities I saw between cameramen, between graphic news staff and between journalists. Each of these work together everyday and so share a practice community which is strengthened by the everyday rituals, traditions, history, and very physical and emotional struggles they have shared in the edit suite or in a camera van for instance.

Barbara Phillips (1976:92) argued that the nature of news work creates 'craft-related habits of mind'. I find both Phillips' notion of craft-related habits and the theories of communities of practice put forward by Wenger (1998a) and Lave and Wenger (2001) fruitful for understanding the strong bonds that I have found between staff within and across the four newsrooms studied. My study suggests that journalists share ideals of the profession, which are reinforced by the everyday sharing of practice.

I think your question of borders is really interesting. And it would be interesting to delve more into the relations between the many different communities of practice in a newsroom. Inspired by Jenkins, I see the identity arriving and being strengthened exactly when two or other practice communities meet. When a cameraman meets a reporter and finds out that s/he does not think visually the way he does, for instance, he might feel more of an identity with his practice

community of camera-men. This also links with Erkan's point that the overall journalism community of practice is strengthened these days with the increased competition from digital media.

I remember your study showing how journalists position themselves in opposition to 'old' forms of journalism while at the same time accepting the 'old' as 'better' journalism (Hartley, 2013). During my fieldwork I too have found tensions between what journalists describe as 'old' values and new demands. You have written of finding online journalists to be 'stalled by a field doxa, which tells them that "proper" journalism is deep, investigative, informative (as a public service), time consuming and polished' (Hartley, 2013:11). The broadcast journalists I have studied find themselves stalled by similar perceptions of what constitutes good journalism. However, while the online journalists may perceive an existential struggle towards being recognised by other journalists, my study shows that public service broadcast journalists perceive it as less of a struggle to be recognised among peers. Furthermore, I suggest that broadcast journalists in particular can use the current media changes as an opportunity to create journalism, which fulfils these professional ideals.

2) How is this study linked to those done in the Danish newsrooms?

I think I answered this in the reply to John Postill now. I definitely have found Ida Willig's book relevant and do also use it in the study, just not in this section. Indeed her and I have worked together on a paper or two in the past. Thanks for reminding me of her work on the "solo criteria" (also a Bourdieu- theoretical framework), which would be worth discussing in terms of the journalism ideal of scooping the competitor.

3) On Colleague-competitorship.

Thanks for the Tunstall reference, the colleague-competitor concept is indeed very relevant. And thanks for asking into this. I see Wenger as useful for explaining how different groups can be connected together in one practice community (i.e. reporters who share a news source) while at the same time belonging to another overarching one (i.e. BBC which has the shared ideal of being first and keeping scoops within the broadcaster). I think I will try draw another diagram which makes it more clear that one can belong in many different practice communities at the same time, which each have different shared ideals. I believe not much has changed in the way of colleague-competitorship since Tunstall described it. However, the new media have made more possibilities for strengthening this kind of relationship.

Thanks again for your comments, and all the best from Aarhus,

Line

Thanks Line for an interesting read.

I just have a couple of questions.

You gave an example of pub-going journalists taking notes on something that came up in a conversation. I was wondering if the non-journalists present commented or reacted to this in any particular manner? Could it make non-journalists wary of what they say, hence creating a certain boundary around the journalists and encouraging or reinforcing an 'in-group' feeling?

Rather like police I suppose.

Also, you mention that the Danish and British journalists had very similar opinions/practices. Do you think greater linguistic differences (given that most Danish journalists are probably excellent English speakers) might make a difference?

I'm also reminded of a study that drew a distinction between regional clusters of media systems. I think that the UK and Denmark were not included in the same grouping. I'm not sure of all the details, but I think it was Hallin & Mancini (2004) and I read about it in Stanyer (2013). Anyway, I was wondering if you know of that study, and whether you had any comment on it in the light of your findings.

Julian

Dear Erkan,

Many thanks for your comments, I am so glad you find the paper relevant. I am really keen to follow the situation of journalism in Turkey, and was excited to find your site with updates.

It is interesting that while a Gülenist reporter was thrown away from a ministry-level, none of his colleagues supported him. I wonder whether this might be due to fear of govt rather than lack of solidarity?

I did just visit your excellent site 'Erkans Field Diary' today and read of something taking place among Turkish journalists at the moment, which could suit the 'family'- allegory. Apparently Journalists based in Turkey have just launched an initiative in solidarity with their colleagues

struggling to report in southeastern Turkish provinces struck by clashes between security forces and outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/tag/PKK>> (PKK) militants. I think they call the initiative News Watch Turkey.

On whether or not there are still strong bonds in place between newsrooms, I think you are very right that 'digitalization and user generated news practices might also create a new front and tension and this might lead a new sort of alliance among professional journalists..'. It appears to me that the new demands of journalists of today have strengthened rather than weakened solidarity between the competing journalists.

Sending all the best to you from Denmark,

Line

Brett Frederick Dwyer Brett.Dwyer@cdu.edu.au

March 11, 2016

Hi Line

Thank you for the paper and perspective. I often think of journalists as hunter gatherers of rumours who go on to package and deliver the rumours into news for income. Actually, 'communities of practice' has a special significance for me. As you are probably aware the perspective was partly borne of work done with midwives. Our children were all homebirths and on the last occasion - the assisting midwives were late and actually missed the birth - because they were attending a midwives-CoP-building golfing function. So we had to do the delivery ourselves.

Anyway, I like that you are looking into these relationships at this level.

Just a couple of questions:

Re the claim: 'public service broadcast journalists perceive it as less of a struggle to be recognised among peers.' Who are public service broadcast journalists? Are they Government employees? I know in Australia we have two Government/Public broadcasters - the ABC and SBS - (similar to the BBC I think) which, are heavily controlled/censored in terms of output. I ask the question because I was wondering how you think that the increased competition between journalists in the private sector relates these communities of practice?

Also as you are probably aware the BBC was heavily implicated in child sex abuse in the U.K. yet we know next to nothing as to why a place with so many journalists were unable to break the story earlier. I was wondering, can this 'silence' of the journalists (sort of akin to the silence of priests and brothers in the Catholic Church) be associated with CoP?

Similarly, I was wondering the same with respect to Charlie Hebdo and Jyllens-Posten? and indeed the role of Charismatic/mentally ill individuals within such CoP? My view is that interconnectivity intensifies this dynamic, but I am interested to know what you think especially in light of development of the perspective.

Also I was wondering if you have looked into CoP emerging/breaking down?

Many thanks for an enjoyable read

Brett

Line Hassall Thomsen linehassallthomsen@gmail.com

March 14, 2016

Dear Brett,

Gosh, that IS a special significance! A CoP-building golfing function! I'm mightily impressed you managed without – but can totally understand if you and family are off CoPs...

I like the idea of journalists as hunter-gatherers of rumours. In fact I have a few notes from fieldwork of when editors and journalists talked of their interviews as an 'attack' of a source. I took notes from the editor's side of a live interview and noted him speaking to the journalist through an earpiece, saying things like; 'get her!', 'chase her on this!' 'don't let her run away' and 'attack her- don't let the other journalists in first!'. This made me think of certain interview scenarios indeed being like a hunt – one of the many observations in the field that I ended up not writing about...

* On being recognized among peers

The point about public service journalists perceiving it as less of a struggle to be recognized among peers was intended as a comparison with Janne Møller Hartley's study of online public service journalists who, according to her, found it a struggle to be recognized among peers. The TV-journalists I studied had no such issues. Indeed, working for BBC or DR appeared to be among one of the most respectable among peers, largely due to peers considering these broadcasters good at being 'objective' and non-partisan.

The issue of Public Service Broadcast journalists being Government employees is a tough one. At least in the newsrooms I have been to, I have seen journalists who have fought against Government involvement in stories. In both the UK and Denmark I have witnessed Government officials attempting to change or even drop a story, but I have only seen the journalists fight back against this

– and afterwards be proud at how they made sure Government did NOT change a story. But as I have been in newsrooms with the journalists, I cannot talk of what management does.

* Could the silence of sex-scandals at BBC be due to CoPs?

Well this is a controversial question...I must say I have been thinking the same. HOW did no journalists say anything if the scandals were on such a large scale?

I tend to agree with you that it is one of the dangers of CoPs that a group-silence can occur among members of CoPs in order to protect the group. That said, it is one of the ideals of journalists to break and investigate such stories, those who were in the know but did not break it must have perceived a real clash between ideals of the profession and a wish to preserve the good of the CoP. In the case of Jimmy Savile, I am told that one of the big problems was the kind of super-star status that he, and other presenters of the time, had, which meant that producers and staff were unable to criticize him. As I have heard of the Savile case, it is particularly the journalists who have been trying to investigate and break the story and management who refused airing of critical stories.

I will rethink this, but as far as I remember I have only once encountered such a silencing of bad actions within the community. In one of the newsrooms I studied, the journalists did chemical swaps at toilets of politicians and found many traces of cocaine there. Back in the newsroom a similar swap was done in the journalist toilets with just as many traces of cocaine use being indicated. But the fact that newsroom journalists did cocaine was not deemed a story.

I'm not quite sure what you mean about Charlie Hebdo and Jyllands Posten? But I do think the same holds, that the role of Charismatic/mentally ill individuals within such CoP depends on the status that they have in terms of management. Maybe I am too optimistic on behalf of journalists here, but I do believe that the ideal of scooping, investigating and putting spotlight on wrongdoings is so strong among the CoP of journalists that there will not be many Jimmy Savile-type stories that are kept untold by journalists. Previously, management and editors had much more control over what journalists could reveal. Nowadays, when a story cannot be aired due to management or members of the community which journalists see as 'wrong', well then journalists might share it via social media instead.

Your questions to CoP emerging/breaking down has made me think. In fact, I do have some observations on that which could be interesting to delve into– thanks for pointing me in that direction.

Many thanks for your questions and observations,

and all the best to you and family from Aarhus,

Line

Veronica Barassi v.barassi@gold.ac.uk

March 16, 2016

Dear All,

I just wanted to let you know that we decided to extend the seminar until the end of the week. This should give the possibility to participate to those of you who still have questions for Line.

Thank you so much for the fantastic contributions, questions and discussions so far.

all best
Veronica

Udupa, Sahana Udupa@mmg.mpg.de

March 18, 2016

Thanks for a very interesting paper, Line.

It is heartening to see more ethnographic research in journalism studies, and more anthropological insights into this important 'meaning making practice' of modernity.

In this paper, you have very well laid out professional practices that bring the 'community' together and how journalists invoke the metaphor of 'family' to articulate this community. You use Wolf's analysis well to understand the 'interstitial' and informal places. In this line, I wonder if there are also cultural logics (and not just professional practice) that frame this community. In my ethnography of journalists in India, I refer to the logics of caste and language ideology. This is important when we conceptualize journalism as a field that intersects with the broader field of power defined by heterogeneous cultural logics and social practices. As anthropologists, I believe we are well equipped to address these questions - those that are not usually the focus of media sociology or political economy.

I have three other questions/comments:

1. Conceptually, the idea of 'community of practice' is extremely compelling. Do you find Bourdieu's concept of 'field' important in analyzing these transorganizational modes of sociality? I build on this theory to understand the field of news-making as 'pulled by the contradictory forces of mimesis and difference'. One other concept I have used in my study is 'interpretative communities' developed by Barbie Zelizer. These concepts would certainly advance your analysis of journalistic

practices.

2. An important trend to notice is the growing reliance on agencies external to the news field as a source to reiterate the need for 'good' public service journalism. These may be civil society agencies and non-governmental bodies instituting awards for journalists, for instance. Such practices also advance sociality among journalists from different newsrooms.

3. Do you give us some details about the crossover of journalists between news companies, and the general labor market that helps us to further contextualize this community of practice?

Line Hassall Thomsen linehassallthomsen@gmail.com

March 20, 2016

Dear Sahana,

Many thanks for your comments which I have pondered so long, I realise I better write you back before the end of the seminar. I very much like your focus on the cultural logics of journalist at work in India, and am excited about your ethnography. I too have found the cultural important both for creating and conditioning the larger system of organisation. I aim to recognise both the agency of each news worker within a cultural system *and *the part this news worker may play in the wider structures of power (a distinction inspired by Peterson, 2003: 164). Indeed, the metaphor of family-like connections between journalists I see as deeply connected to cultural logics, which it would be interesting to expand on. As time is short, just a few replies for now,

1. The concept of 'interpretative communities' by Zelizer. I too have found this concept useful and very well-suited to the connected communities I found. I do not focus on Bourdieu's notion of field in analysis. However, in analysing the newsroom, I am much inspired by Bourdieu's description of symbolic power (1996). Thus, I have a chapter devoted to how the social and cultural room shows in the layout and setting of the physical room.

2. I agree with you that there are many new agencies which encourage and award 'good' public service journalism. In the UK I have been at a few of these award ceremonies for instance and experienced how these influence journalists, editors and news press officers in their everyday work. While both journalists and management are keen on these awards, it is not my understanding that there is more of a reliance of these agencies today than say twenty years ago. Is that the case in your study?

I too have found these events an important venue for editors/management and journalists from competing newsrooms to socialise.

3. On the crossover of journalists between news companies: I do not list or give the numbers of how

many staff move from one broadcaster to another during my time of study. But as I began noticing staff having moved/moving from one to the other I started asking staff who had moved what they saw as the differences between each broadcaster. Though these many interviews were focused on describing differences in practice, they primarily showed how journalists define their work as similar and not bound by workplace or competition.

Again, many thanks for taking the time to write. As with the many other comments from list members, I found your questions inspiring and will no doubt return to them when building on this paper.

All the best wishes,
Line

Veronica Barassi v.barassi@gold.ac.uk

March 20, 2016

Dear All,

I wish to thank Line for her paper, Chris for is excellent comments and all of you who have participated to the seminar.

The discussion has been really engaging, and I am sorry for not having had the chance to contribute.

The seminar is now closed. As soon as the transcripts are ready you will be able to see them on our website.

all best

Veronica