

Line Hassall Thomsen

Silvio Waisbord:
***Reinventing Professionalism: Journalism and News
in a Global Perspective.***
Cambridge: Polity. 2013

MedieKultur 2015, 58, 150-153

Published by SMID | Society of Media researchers In Denmark | www.smid.dk

The online version of this text can be found open access at www.mediekultur.dk

Has new media made us all journalists now? What makes someone a journalist anyway? Is journalism a profession? And if so, what makes a journalist professional?

Today, as traditional journalism is challenged by the ever-changing and ever-increasing media market, journalists and journalism researchers are constantly questioning the professionalism of journalism. Silvio Waisbord's new book provides an excellent exploration of answers to questions such as these.

I was particularly curious to read Waisbord's book, having just finished my PhD thesis (Thomsen, 2013) about the professional values of broadcast journalists. During the writing of my PhD, I had searched in vain for a current reference book that provided a thorough review of the history, meanings and expectations of professionalism in journalism today.

Waisbord had the idea of writing this book while working as an international aid worker, outside of academia. During his work, it struck him how different but also how remarkably similar was the way journalists from around the world worked. He found journalists from different regions such as Bangladesh, Peru and Tanzania sharing concerns, hopes, frustrations and demands with journalists from the West. This experience made him want to explore "what remains different and similar amidst the increased connectivity between different parts of the world?" (p.2). Raising this question led Waisbord to investigate and rethink the notion of professionalism in journalism.

The term 'professionalism' should not be narrowly associated with the normative ideal as it developed in the West during the past century, argues Waisbord. Rather, professional-

ism should be approached as a valuable analytical concept in debates about how journalists define the conditions and rules for work within certain settings. For, as Waisbord puts it:

The apogee of professional journalism is behind us. It sounds anachronistic in a world of amateur journalism and partisan media, when the boundaries of press systems are constantly expanding. Yet as journalism navigates a changing world and confronts doubts about its future, it is important to understand how journalism maintains its unique position in society, how it reinforces its role as the expert arbiter of news as it tries to maintain autonomy vis-à-vis external forces. (p.10)

The book is structured in chapters that elegantly lead to a discussion and rethinking of journalism and professionalism today. First, chapter 1 provides a historical review of the rise of the model of 'professional journalism' in the US and UK. Chapters 2 and 3 introduce the problem of setting up journalistic autonomy in absolute terms and the current ambiguities of professional journalism.

Chapter 4 reviews critical models of professional journalism. Chapter 5 discusses the professional logic of journalism, while raising crucial questions about the multiple understandings of a profession. Here, Waisbord introduces "journalistic logic" as referring to "the specific rationality of journalism articulated in the observance of news values – the criteria commonly used to define and report news" (p.135). From this point of view, Waisbord argues, though the journalism profession may have many shared values and ideals, "'newsiness' trumps all other considerations" (p.141).

Chapters 6 and 7 discuss the globalization of the professional cultures of journalism. The discussion leads naturally to an exploration of the global spread of occupational norms and practices. Finally, chapter 8 builds on a historical review of theories and ideas surrounding professionalism in order to discuss current challenges to professional reporting raised by elements such as citizen journalism and digital platforms.

There has been much debate about the current threats to journalism. Researchers appear divided between seeing the situation as an opportunity or an apocalypse for the journalism profession. Those who worry about the *déroute* of professionalism in journalism often also worry about the *déroute* of democracy and of public service values.

Recently, it has been argued that the journalism profession is "suffering from osteoporosis" after constant "refractures" (Broersma, 2013: 41-44). News journalism today is not the same as it once was. But the changes to journalism as we know it may not necessarily mean that the journalism profession is in a state of crisis. As Schudson recently pointed out: "[T]he blends and hybrids of journalistic coverage and commentary" can be seen as "exciting and energizing, not the heralds of apocalypse" (Schudson, 2013: 198).

The current head of news products at Google is one of today's optimists: "The future of journalism can and will be better than its past," he said recently (Richard Gingras in Briggs, 2013: 2). While Google has an interesting market-driven approach to news, there

are also economic advantages to journalism driven by professional ideals. Indeed, my thesis (Thomsen, 2013) illustrates that, although journalists struggle with the current challenges of market logic, they have not lost what Waisbord calls the “ethical principles” of the professional ideals of journalism. These ideals can be seen as traditional broadcast media’s strongest selling point. In this sense, current challenges to traditional media production could be seen as opportunities to strengthen the values of the profession; and, as Broersma and Peters have suggested, “this public service element of journalism” is viewed as “its definitive mission” (Broersma and Peters, 2013: 11).

Nossek has written of the future of journalism that the most imminent “threat facing journalism is de-professionalization, which means that everyone can be a journalist and nobody actually is one” (Nossek, 2009: 358). Waisbord does not talk of professionalism among journalists as being guided by ethical principles such as objectivity, fairness and even-handedness. Rather, he defines journalistic professionalism as having a shared consensus around “the regular observance of routines and norms” (p. 146). It is this shared professional culture that is “the basis of journalism’s claims to social distinctiveness and power” (ibid).

With this book, Silvio Waisbord appears to lean more towards viewing the challenges to journalism as an opportunity than an apocalypse. However, he does not give a simple answer as to whether the difficulties of sustaining professionalism for journalism are good or bad for democracy. Answers to that question, he argues “depend on whether one believes that professional journalism, the ability to exercise jurisdictional control, is desirable for democracy or is antithetical to democratic communication and citizenship” (p.224).

It is not Waisbord’s intention to take a position on the guidelines for occupational practice. Indeed, rather than add to the debate on whether journalism today is facing an apocalypse or a wealth of opportunity, he suggests that journalism is in a state of flux, which makes it necessary to rethink, reconsider and re-evaluate its most distinct practices. This position makes a refreshing contribution to a debate that has often become polarised by those who are either optimists or pessimists about the future of journalism.

As a researcher interested in the issue of professionalism and journalism, I have found the book to be an exciting, in-depth and inspiring read. As a lecturer on journalism studies, I would no doubt add this book to the reading list. For more practical courses of journalism, this book could prove too abstract and theoretical.

On a more critical note, I believe more empirical elements could have helped to strengthen the book’s analytical points even more. It is mentioned in the introduction that the book’s starting point was Waisbord’s experiences from working with international aid during a five-year period. In chapters 6 and 7, some of his knowledge about international journalism is alluded to (i.e., pp.193-194). However, as a reader, I would have been even more convinced of the strength of Waisbord’s argument if he had been able to link ideas such as “the professional logic of journalism”, “the globalisation of professional cultures” and “post-

professional journalism” with cases and examples not only from research but also from real-life working practices among journalists.

However, the lack of empirical studies would not stop me from recommending this book to any researcher, lecturer or student interested in the very topical issue of professionalism and journalism today.

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Line Hassall Thomsen, PhD

Lecturer

Centre for University Studies in Journalism

Department of Aesthetics and Communication

Aarhus University

LHT@dac.au.dk