Bourdieu in Greenland Elaborating the Field Dependencies of Post-colonial Journalism

The scarcely populated island of Greenland offers a unique opportunity both to study the complex dependencies and tensions of contemporary “global” or “transnational” journalism and to test and develop the explanation power of one key theoretical framework, field theory. With only one (national and public) broadcaster and two weekly newspapers, the journalistic field in Greenland is small, exposed and vulnerable. It is embedded in the broader political, economic and professional field dynamics of Denmark, the former colonial power. For instance, the legislation and the organizational structure of the media are inherited and a flow of Danish visiting journalists and editors keep up the norms and the value system of the field. At the same time, Greenlandic journalism operates in a nation of its own with distinct characteristics: small size, politics of the bilingualism, tight local networks with a small elite and close ties between reporters and possible sources shape the field practically, professionally and socially (in a specific, local way). These tensions between the “global-colonial” and “local” capitals and capacities are negotiated and managed in the everyday practices of newsrooms. There is almost no previous research on Greenlandic media in general and journalism practice in particular. Mapping this small but contested field allows us to highlight some of the key analytical strengths of Bourdieu’s field theory and its ability to capture the dynamic actor relationships in such a complex, structured space. At the same time, however, the “post-colonial” realities of Greenlandic journalism can help us to pose some questions about the limits – or the need for further development – of Bourdieu’s initial sketch about the journalistic field. This chapter tests the analytical concepts of capital and habitus by putting them to empirical work through an ethnographic study of practices and structures of news making in Greenland.

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