

Master Thesis

How do foreign reporters view and experience their role: The case of Ukrainian news in The Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

International news media has a crucial role in constructing an image of a foreign country, shaping views of leaders and citizens, that affect international relations and foreign policies in a long run. Front pages of international news agencies and media outlets were filled with news on Ukraine in the period from 2013 till 2015, the country's most restless time since independence. Few years after, when the conflict is frozen, Western coverage of Ukraine has been criticised for its unrepresentative and disinterested manner, that stigmatises the image of Ukraine as the 'EU-burden' country. While the most media research on professional role is focused on content and perception, this paper aims to explore the perspective of producers. On the case study of Ukrainian news in The Netherlands, this paper explores how Dutch journalists view and experience their role as foreign reporters on the country. Informed by the conception of structure and agency in journalistic work, this research investigates different levels of influences on journalistic work, including impact of media routines, journalistic norms, organization, Dutch media system, as well as national settings in Ukraine; and takes into account their individual motivations, interests and creative capacity to overcome challenges they face. Eleven in-depth interviews were conducted with the main foreign correspondents and reporters, who have written about Ukraine frequently during last two and a half years, to investigate their everyday work conditions, personal experiences and intentions. The findings show that generalising their reporting as neutral and disinterested would be unjust. Journalists try to deliver news which is nuanced and represent the country from its different angles, while proliferating the voices of ordinary people. Most journalists see their role as disruptors of stereotypical attitudes about post-Soviet states prevalent in their home country. Relationship with an editor, newspaper's interest in foreign news and national settings in Ukraine were found the most affluent factors in the selection of topics and frequency of coverage. They still try to adhere to the value of objectivity when giving balance to opposing sides of the conflict, but they do it by using own critical judgement of truth and not because it is a golden rule. They also believe in value of separating opinion and facts, but do not reject interpretive reporting. Some even take a more active political stance, by reporting with features of peace journalism trying to build closer relationships between East and West.

KEYWORDS: *Ukraine, Western news, Professional role, Objectivity, Peace journalism*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (2004) talks of the foreign correspondent as one of the key players of globalization, whose reporting creates “that flow of information from and about other parts of the world which, for many of us, is a part of the rhythm of our daily routine’ (p. 2). The news people, reporting on the world central events, such as 9/11 terrorist attacks, or Mandela’s release from prison, might feel like recording the future history. They cannot be certain of the outcomes these events or their coverage might bring in a long run, yet they have to be aware of the possible effects these can have on perceptions of readers, shifting realities, and even on their own careers and lives. The mass media outlets of developed countries, with the century-old legacies, established reservoir of resources and robust reputations are the number-one sources of information for many, be it ordinary citizens, scholars or political authorities. Indeed, Internet proliferated wide variety of international sites, citizen and alternative journalism, and lowered the “debate over the politics of global news flow”. Nevertheless, major news agencies of Western countries, implying Western European and North American, continue to sustain dominance in the global news flow (p. 41).

This paper aims its attention at foreign news and theorizes it as one of the dominant ways to make sense of a distant territory, its inhabitants, norms and traditions, political and economic environment. News reporters carry a leading responsibility in shaping the audience’s views, whether it is on the local, national or international level. Of course, immediate personal experiences of a foreign country, by traveling to or living there, can be even more effective in shaping attitudes towards the land. However, most people depend on the representation of the country, regulated and provided by the international news flow (Hannerz, 2004; Kevin, 2003). It is not novice in media research that news on developing countries are often reported in an infrequent and unrepresentative manner, partly thanks to the norm of prioritizing “unusual and extreme events” (Perry, 1987, p. 432). In the macro perspective, political scientists evidence the “growing intrusion of media into the political domain” and its increasing power of influence on political institutions (Mazzoleni and Shulz, 1999, p. 247). On the international political arena, this means that media portrayal of a certain country appears as evident factor of influence on its international relations, its exposure to international investments, possibilities of international trade, number of potential tourists visiting.

Front pages of international news agencies and media outlets were filled with news on Ukraine in the period from 2013 till 2015, the country’s most restless time since independence. It all started in November in 2013, when peaceful demonstrations on Maidan Nezalezhnosti, main square of the capital city Kiev, were organized by 2,000 civilians willing for the country’s integration with European Union. Government’s decision to suspend from the original plan to sign the Association Agreement, and instead, to build closer ties with Russian Federation evoked public outrage and escalated into continuous violence between protesters and the police until the end of February 2014. Overturn and replacement of the government were followed by the annexation of Crimea by Russian

troops and a controversial referendum leading to proclamation of the peninsula as the Republic of the Russian Federation. In March that year the pro-Russian protests in Eastern Ukrainian region Donbass escalated into armed conflict between the separatist groups and pro-government forces.

The conflict in Donbass remains unresolved today, midway 2018, the frontline is not moving, and several attempts of ceasefire have been unsuccessful so far, despite the efforts of international peace organizations. International media attention to Ukrainian news has eventually faded away and shifted to disasters in other countries, including conflicts in the Middle East, refugee crisis and terrorist attacks. The events of last four years have divided the country severely, caused economic recession and society remains to be dissatisfied with the government. However, the steps to join the EU had been made and ambitions for Euro-integration are still strongly pronounced by the large part of Ukrainian society. Non-governmental organization 'Promote Ukraine' conducted media research of Western mainstream media outlets examining their coverage of Ukraine. Concerned about the representation of the country in dominant news media and the consequences it may have on the process of Euro-integration, Barandiy (2017) and fellow researchers of the Brussels-based NGO conducted content analysis of the news coverage throughout the last four years and interviewed EU residents to examine the general attitudes towards Ukraine of the bypassers on the streets of large European cities .

In summary, they concluded several narratives prevalent in Western media pages about Ukraine: as a country constantly trying to liberate itself from the sphere of Russian influence; there are massive human rights violations in Crimea after its annexation; the country is situated on the crossroads between East and West; corruption is a country's main hindrance to implementation of the reforms; there is a high level of criminality in Ukraine that also takes place in Europe. News on the war in Eastern Ukraine are reported quite regularly, but usually apparent in episodic fragments of the startling front-line incidents. Regarding the views on the conflict, the most widespread narrative tells that it has been provoked by pro-Russian separatists supported by the Russian state. Majority of Western press acknowledge that there is large amount of propaganda and disinformation within the Russian mainstream media landscape. Being generally critical of Ukrainian government, Western journalists often report on corruption scandals. In regards to Ukrainian society, it is recognized that generation of young and creative people in Ukraine is the driving force on the country's way to democracy. When it comes to issues related to the association with European Union, news are usually written in a neutral tone, without advocating for or objecting the integration. By the latter, researchers claim, they confirm the standpoint of EU politicians - that the issue is not even in questioned in the present moment (Barandiy, et al, 2017).

Concerning the views of bypassers, results of the interviews were mostly congruent with those of content analysis. Among positive responses about the image of Ukraine were mentionings about the country's fertile soils and agricultural potential; occasionally, also, high level of education and democratic reforms. The majority were aware of the conflict, labeling it as a war, or civil war.

The bypassers confirmed the general pattern of news that Ukraine is usually viewed in the context of Russia. Though, what was pleasant, they argued, is that it was not seen as part of Russia anymore - the view that had to be proven by image-makers ten years ago. The researchers conclude that progressive reforms and positive changes remain as secondary topics, that results mostly in a prevalence of attitudes towards Ukraine as another 'EU-burden' country (Barandiy et al, 2017).

International concerns regarding exclusion of numerous stories on the pages of Western press were also expressed. In October 2017 in Kiev 150 international journalists, activists, scholars and media professionals gathered during the three-day media conference to discuss the longtime problem of omission and certain ignorance of peripheral countries in foreign news reporting. The event was organized by the German-based NGO of transnational network N-Ost, specialized in improving practices of foreign reporting. Under the name 'Inside Our Blind Spots', the conference aimed to initiate multiple discussions about underreported areas and perspectives, labeling those as 'blind spots'. The location chosen for international gathering, Ukraine, was associated with one of such spots excluded from the attention of Western media for too long. The participants acknowledged that, generally speaking about the mass media, there is a considerable underreporting on the occupied area of Eastern Ukraine, Donbass, stereotypical narratives about the country, the lack of everyday life narratives and voices of ordinary citizens. Concerns about even greater exclusion from the news were discussed about other post-Soviet countries like Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia (N-Ost, n.d.). One of the devastating consequences of exclusion and omission of certain perspectives in Western media, as the conference's curator and a journalist Evgeniya Belorusets claimed, is the rise of populism views in recent years (Shinkarenko, 2017).

Initiating such debates based on critical analysis of the Western news content, like the two NGOs presented above did, is highly valuable in stimulating the accountability of the leading media. At the same time, it seems necessary to pay attention to those making the decisions in the ground and understand their constraints and opportunities when covering a topic like this. International reporters on Eastern and Central Europe participating in the conference shared also their experiences in covering the so-called 'blind spots' and discussed the possible actions to be made for proliferation of uncovered areas and angles. BBC journalist, Demytrie Rayhan, shared with experiencing hardship of reporting on ethnic conflicts. She shared that difficulties in covering a frozen conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan were related to physical access to war-torn areas, challenge of making sense of the confronted actors and, no less important, the feelings of fear for her own safety. Rayhan shared about the struggles she occasionally faced with finding mutual ground with the *BBC* editors regarding the news stories, that were not of their interest, yet considered to be of large importance in her own view. In her experience underreporting on frozen conflicts rooted in editorial influence, because convincing the editor to report on the territories, which are dangerous, yet where no killings are recorded, is very difficult. Among other things discussed, reporting on Ukraine involved dealing with disinformation (Shinkarenko, 2017).

Case study: Ukrainian news in The Netherlands

This research, built on the above-mentioned concerns, is an effort to make an empirical and original contribution to this discussion. It zooms into one specific and valuable example of arguable “blind spot” coverage in a developed country – the coverage of Ukraine in news media in The Netherlands. Moreover, it does so, by attending to the perspectives and experiences of journalists themselves.

There are a number of reasons to examine a special case, related to particular events that intertwined the two countries in the recent years. Dutch media, of course, in line with other European coverage, reported regularly on the developments of Ukrainian crisis. But the story on airplane crash of Malaysia Airlines Flight (MH17) flying from Amsterdam to Kuala-Lumpur with 298 passengers, two-thirds of whom were Dutch citizens, is, no wonder, the most reported in recent years. The plane was shot down above the territory of Eastern Ukraine in July 2014, in the time of pro-Russian occupation of the region. After almost four years of extensive investigation research following the event, the Joint Investigation Team concluded that the plane was shot by Buk missile system, originating from the missile group of Russian Ground Forces based in Kursk (Openbaar Ministerie, 2018).

A prominent event in the relation of two countries was also the Referendum on Ukraine Association Agreement with EU held on the 6th of April 2016 in The Netherlands. The consultative referendum was represented in the political campaigns and the media from a number of controversial viewpoints. It resulted in prevalent percentage of 61% voters voting against, and the prevalent motive for ‘no-vote’ investigated was the unwillingness to build up relations with the high level of corruption in the country (Heck, 2016). The Referendum, initiated by the political party supporting eurosceptic views GeenPeil, was numerous criticized by liberal parties and media outlets, including those in The Netherlands, for encouraging the rise of populist views and for turning it into the referendum on Europe (Vries, 2017). Ukrainian press criticized the misrepresentation of the Referendum’s goal in Dutch political campaigns and for the stereotypical, often untruthful and humiliating portrayal of the country by politicians, and, consequently, by certain media (Janmaat & Kuzio, 2016). However, a year later, in May 2017, passing the Dutch government, the agreement came into force, and underlined its trade-related goals (*Reuters*, 2017).

As presented above, the case of Ukraine in the Dutch news media inspires a number of thought-provoking questions, considering the tense relationships between the countries. Considering that, generally, academic research on foreign correspondents gives most attention to their role, while undervaluing the “more mundane and characteristic features of the occupation” (Morrison & Tumber, 1985, p. 445), I aim for more anthropological approach. In accordance with Hannerz (2004), I argue that, in order to understand foreign news journalism and its outcomes, it is productive to explore reporting routines and conditions the journalists face. I look into journalists’ daily decisions and experiences in newsmaking in organizational context, while also enquire about their individual views on job responsibility, intentions and the room for creativity. When research on foreign correspondence

is remarkably limited and the most studies on foreign journalistic practices are focused on American reporters (Hannerz, 2004), this study aims to contribute to the European stance on the topic. Thus, I attempt to answer the following research question:

How do Dutch foreign reporters view and experience their role in covering Ukrainian news?

In order to answer this main research question, I will address the following four sub-questions:

1. *Who are the Dutch journalists covering news on Ukraine?*
2. *What do they see as their main responsibility in foreign reporting in general and reporting about Ukraine in particular?*
3. *How do structural factors influence the selection, research and production of the news story?*
4. *How do they exercise agency in relation to the given structural conditions?*

Taking seriously the cultural and national context in which news is produced, the study specifically focuses on those who cover Ukraine for Dutch media. Using articles they wrote as a starting point, news producers were interviewed to understand their practices and individual experiences of reporting on the region, from the perspective of the structure and agency dynamic.

The study attempts to contribute to the existing knowledge about Western journalistic practices in international reporting, and - on the example of Ukraine - especially directed at the countries in transition. The research does not aim to become generalizable to all Western coverage of Ukraine, nor to all Western foreign correspondents in the country. What I try to do is to, from sociological point of view, expand the knowledge on foreign reporting, and illustrate that there are a number of various constraints present in processes of foreign news production and that, at the same time, journalists find ways to act like agent. One should not overlook this when being critical of the news content.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

2.1. Structure and agency

Any human activity, work practice or profession can be discussed in terms of structure and agency. Being members of communities, organizations, nations and societies, we live with social norms and rules, utilise available resources. As it is inherent in human nature, we are capable of resisting certain social structures and invent new approaches to do things, that later become standardized. As explained by Sewell (1992), every individual is born with “the capacity of agency to desire, form intentions and act creatively” (p. 20)

Structure can be understood in terms of ‘schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and tend to be reproduced by social action’ (Sewell, 1992, p.19). Giddens (1989) disagreed with the belief, found popular in social science, that structures are only the systems of constraint and restrictions imposed by powerful for exercising social control. The scholar especially highlights that one should not neglect the fact that structure provides actors the very opportunity to exercise agency. In a similar way, Sewell (1992) argues structure and agency should not be viewed as antagonistic, as they presuppose each other. He defines agency as the degree of control an individual has in changing, or modifying social relations. Hence, structure facilitates human practices, while human practices, in turn, constitute and initiate new structures.

2.2. Structure and agency in journalistic work

From a sociological perspective, journalistic work is enabled by a certain media organization, its culture and its resources, as well as influenced by larger economic, political, technological influences and developments. These influences may be considered as structure, impacting the news production process. Sewell (1992) also defines structural schemas as pervasive in ‘institutional spheres, practices and discourses’ (p.22). Translated to journalism, these schemas take form of journalistic norms and routines, that simultaneously guide and, to some extent, constrain the processes of news selection, production and evaluation. Agency of journalists arises here as the ability to exert control over their own work, and to put individual intentions, desires and creativity into practice, while having to adhere to organizational standards, journalistic norms and procedures of news production.

As actors working within media structures are clearly not “cleverly programmed automatons” (Sewell, 1992, p. 2), and news is socially constructed - they tend to often find themselves in the middle of criticism. As mentioned in the introduction, Western media coverage of Ukraine has been criticized for poor frequency of news on the war-torn country, prevalence of negative topics and constant contextualisation to Russia. In addition, topics related to new reforms, achievements and human stories were argued to be largely underrepresented. In conclusion the researchers of the NGO

argue that such coverage stigmatizes the negative image about the country and reinforces stereotypes of its Soviet past, which in Ukraine is “forgotten in the old books” already (Barandiy, 2017). Nevertheless, after reviewing the value of approaching the question from anthropological perspective, I aim to show that these findings, while valuable, are not to be taken for granted. Without underestimating that reporting in the context of unexpected military conflict and an information war is a complex and non-neutral mediation process (Tumber, 2006), there is no doubt that the processes of foreign news work, and especially, conflict reporting, are worth of examination and discussion. As a consequence, this thesis explores the point of view and practices of Western media producers of stories about Ukraine.

Amid multiple structural factors that can play a role in Western journalists’ coverage of Ukraine are the hierarchical structure of international news (Wu, 2000); type, size and readership of the news organization; event factor and other news values; as well as accessibility, danger and risks involved in the conflict areas (Tumber, 2006). However, every foreign reporter sees his or her role differently, has different personal and professional possibilities, interests and motivations, and therefore, will experience structural factors and exercise agency distinctively, while reporting on a foreign country. This study, therefore, will investigate in which structural conditions Dutch journalists cover news about Ukraine for Dutch media, as well as how they exercise agency within these contexts, taking into account their own understanding of their professional role.

Sewell (1992) rejects to provide a general typology of structural factors, explaining that any analysis of structure should arise from the concrete cases of social phenomenon (p.24). Of course, given the natural fluidity of structure, its varying forms and levels, it is impossible to outline the exhaustive list of structural factors in the news production process. However, within the journalism research literature there is a number of studies dedicated to different influences on the news, including social, political, economic factors.

During this research I attempted to investigate what challenges and opportunities the professionals faced in the processes of news-gathering, evaluation and production, by using the sociological approach of structure and agency, mainly referring to study of Sewell (1996). Given the ‘frustratingly unspecified’ definition of structure (Sewell, 1992), I was looking for ways to systematize it in the context of news production. I found the hierarchical model of influences on media by Shoemaker and Reese (1996) to be providing a very comprehensive list of factors provided on different layers; yet at the same time, focused enough on the news production, and thoughtful of the interplay of external and intrinsic forces, resembling structure and agency. Shoemaker and Reese’s (1996) hierarchy of influences on the news became a classic in journalism scholarship, as the authors managed to systemise a comprehensive range of impacts on journalistic work on different levels, from individual to ideological level. It is important to consider that their study does not feature a straightforward reference to the structure-agency discussion. Different influences on the news production they discuss include both structural and agency-related factors. The

ranked model consists of the following five layers: individual, routines, organizational, extramedia and, lastly, ideological. The model takes a hierarchical form of effects, where each influential factor of newsmaking results from the effect of the aforementioned one. The authors imply that the different factors, rather than being clear-cut and separated, should be perceived in a chain of effects form of influences.

Rather than giving a summary of the book, Shoemaker and Reese's argument is applied here as a helpful guide to organise the discussion on diverse factors impacting the news production. Other literature more focused on the issues of this study were added. By adapting the theoretical model to this particular research, in this paper I give more attention to the interplay of structure and agency, and also incorporate the literature on international news production, crisis reporting, and give more updated literature overview on reporting in twenty-first century. In the last section of theoretical framework I discuss the concepts of agency and journalistic responsibility in more detail. In what follows I discuss the different layers of influences in a subsequent order. So, I first provide a brief overview of the individual influences, and then, start the theoretical discussions about structural layers, namely media routines, organizational factors, influences outside the organization, so extramedia factors, and, at last, the influence of ideology. I discuss journalistic responsibility and agency only at the end of this chapter. I found presenting the structure and agency interplay in this way as reasonable, because I wanted, first, to shed light on the conditions that actually enable and constrain the news production in general, and only after - to bring attention to the agency and journalistic responsibility.

2.3. Individual factors

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) in the first layer in hierarchy of influences model propose the intrinsic characteristics of the media worker. Personal background, including age, gender and education form 'the stone' of a media producer as a communicator. These intrinsic characteristics, together with personal experiences influence the person's values, attitudes and beliefs, that, in turn, affect on the way how a journalist sees and experiences his or her professional role and work ethics. Consequently, these individual factors play a role in how a media worker, be it a foreign correspondent, a reporter from the desk, or an editor of news organization, makes decisions everyday on the selection of topics, perspectives and sources. Kester (2010), for example, in her research on Dutch foreign Russia correspondents, established that time spent in the country, level of proficiency in the local language, type of education were variables, which had a large impact on their feeling of familiarity with the foreign environment, and, in sequence, on the themes and sources included in their news stories.

Westerstahl and Johansson (1994) also observe the individual perspective of news selection routines. They argue that besides being guided by the tastes and interests that audiences hold, a

journalist also has own motive or desire to influence or inform about a certain topic. So, similar to Shoemaker and Reese (1996), they imply that journalists orientate by using the news values - stable criteria formed according to psychological traits and basic societal structure, as well as by not-static individual motives. Fundamentally, the authors claim that the audience-oriented and the individual motives are constantly clashing as well as reinforcing one another. This level is also strongly related to how a media worker relates to a broader society, and the function of own work in it, for instance, as a “neutral transmitter of events or active participant in developing the story” (1996, p. 61). Bringing focus on a journalist’s view on own role in society in the last section of this chapter, in what follows I discuss the other three layers of influences, and I start with the media routines, by interpreting those as an important set of structural factors on journalistic work.

2.4. Media routines as structure

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) define routines as “patterned, routinized, repeated practices and forms that media workers use to do their jobs” (p.100). Routines enable journalists to do their work efficiently, by offering clear and systematic guidelines to gather information and write news; which in the result provide audiences with the recurrent and predictable patterns of the news content. They help media workers to cope with the daily tasks, choose which event to cover, which sources to address, and which tactics to use. Therefore, mastery of routinized process of news production was also identified by Tuchman (1977, in Shoemaker and Reese, 1996) as the feature of professionalism of a media worker. At the same time, routines are also constraining, because journalists carry out their work within organizational and occupational settings that limit their decisions. Drawing parallel to a factory work, Bantz et. al (1981, as cited in Shoemaker and Reese, 1996) argue that news organizations have to establish the task and the role division to get the content published within time and space limitations, to, at the end of the day, satisfy consumers’ needs and compete with other media. Routines are rarely flexible, giving the news workers little space of individual control over own work, hence, they do not always match with their professional goals (p.103).

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) argue that, generally, media outlet utilizes the routine having three aims: to identify which stories are available, which ones would attract the audience and which ones would satisfy the organizations’ needs. According to the authors’ classification, the media routines include the following: audience-oriented routines, including the news values, the defensive routines and story presentation routines; sources-oriented routines; organization-oriented routines. In the following subsection I present each of these, while incorporating also other literature relevant to the research question.

2.4.1. Audience-oriented routines

2.4.1.1. Standard news values

Vast amounts of things, developments and events are happening each second throughout the world, but only a miniscule percent of those end up on the news pages. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) argue that newsmakers, unable to constantly conduct audience research to identify the audience's wants and needs, have established a set of news values, that would serve as a criteria for newsworthiness. Similarly, referring to news values, O'Neill & Harcup (2008) argue from sociological perspective, that news producers use a set of tools that directs their decisions about which events to include and which to exclude from the daily coverage. While guiding and constraining the journalistic decisions, news values were established and agreed-on by media workers themselves, which illustrates how structure and agency presuppose each other.

Even though the way news values are defined may vary in different journalism textbooks, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) conclude they all come down to selection of those stories that audience will find interesting and important to know. The major news values they list are those defined by Stephens (1980), namely importance, interest, controversy, the unusual, timeliness, and proximity. Following the O'Neill & Harcup's (2008) claim that "definitions of news are not fixed" (p.171), the routine structure suggests, that news become what the routine structure defines them as such. Halberstam (in Cohen, 1992) said, that, first, rather than about trends and patterns, news is nominalistic, thus, determined in terms of a single event. This nominalistic orientation also explains why there is usually more reporting on unpleasant events than on the fortunate ones. Bad news occurs much more frequently as an event, unlike the agreeable things, that usually develop, rather than just happen. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) explain that journalists find the 'event' routine as helpful as it provides unambiguous and easy way of news selection.

2.4.1.2. International news values

Research on news values of international reporting is not significantly different in that respect. In their research on foreign news, Westerstahl and Johansson (1994) narrowed the list of fundamental news values down to three main news values: importance, proximity, and drama (p.73). They call them "proxy variables, more or less effectively summarizing a complex journalistic judgement about news values" (p.74). Similar to the aforementioned features of newsworthiness, the authors also agreed that a journalist's judgement is mainly based on his or her prediction of what will interest the public. They argue that importance factor can be measured in terms of the population size, gross national product and expenses on military of the potentially reported countries. Proximity value is more fluid, and can relate to geographical, commercial and cultural proximity. Geographical proximity, they argue, is closely related to the communication technology, and that good communication, in fact, virtually

reduces the distance. The third factor - drama - refers to the events rather than countries, and as Westerstahl and Johansson (1994) present it, related to the negative news about the country.

Wu (2000), after all, claims that attributing the international news selection only with the news values is incomplete, and calls for recognition of 'systemic factors' as contributors to the foreign news 'menu' (p.111). These are: national characteristics of the country, such as its territory and population, economic development, the language, the level of press freedom; interaction between the host and a guest country, namely, geographical distance, trade and historical relatedness, such as colonial ties; and the logistical factor, such as presence of the international news agency. Given that news values can be interpreted in many ways, they are somewhat overlapping with systemic factors, like territorial size and economic development are related to importance, and countries' relatedness - to proximity, whereas access relates to logistical factor. Some added also the factor of the host-country media as incremental one. Morrison and Tumber (1985) claimed that a foreign reporter could be 'as good as the local media will allow' (p.466).

2.4.1.3. Story presentation routines

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) include in the audience-related routines not only the news selection processes, but also the ways of writing and presenting the content. A gatekeeper's daily task is not only to choose which news will interest the audience, but also the way how to present it in the most finest way. The story must be readable and the headline able to catch attention. The 'inverted pyramid' structure of the story is a way to prioritize the information in sequence of decreasing importance. The strategy is taught in journalism academies and used to serve both organizational as well as the readers' needs (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

Epstein (1974, as cited in Schoemaker and Reese, 1996) called the narrative structure with a beginning, middle and an end an effective way to present the story. Traditionally, complying the culture of oral histories, a news story has to incorporate an attribute of drama in it to be appealing to a reader. Lederman (1993), points out the use of storyline in newswork - a frame used to simplify the narrative to an overarching theme, where certain dramatic aspects are highlighted and the background information is limited. A story line provides readers a certain reference point "from which to set out into the unknown" (p.12). This way, Hannerz (2004) argues, similar to anthropology, an overarching theme is meant to provide readers, especially elite, an easier manageability of the story and underline the quintessential question for the host country's interest. The use of overarching theme, on the downside, is a strategy that usually results in a concentration of some topics and selective discerning of the others. It can de-contextualize a complex issue and compel stigmatization (p. 103). Another way how media can de-contextualize a news event is to frame it in 'longue duree' setting, that is not explicitly focused on any present event, but is full of featured stories with often incoherent links to the past, which resemble an ethnographic work rather than news reporting (p. 219). To illustrate, Ndlela (2005), examining Norwegian coverage of Zimbabwean crisis, finds it was mainly focused on

representing stereotypical 'disaster' images of Africa, while downplaying the news about reforms and elections. Hence, a complex issue of the national crisis was mainly presented as a "'typical' African story of tragedy and despair" (p. 89).

Finally, Hannerz (2004) concludes that in the process of foreign reporting journalists ought to make instant but efficient decisions about the story lines, at the same time, speculating the amount of certain knowledge that readers can already have on the covered territory. As themes of the news stories derive from the mass media of several central countries, a journalist in his new piece is prone to embed those themes assuming they are already familiar to wide audiences. In fact, a reporter, while planning for a new assignment abroad, is educating him or herself on what has already been reported about the territory. Therefore, to certain extent, these reserved story lines function as 'institutional memories', that are safe to refer to and prove useful in preventing a reader from disorientation (p. 217).

2.4.2. Defensive routines: Objectivity

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) differentiate the defensive routines as those used to avoid offending the audience, or to be accused by the the audience for their work. Objectivity is referred to the category of defensive routines because, as Gaye Tuchman (1972) suggested, from the organizational perspective, it serves as a ritual to protect producers from accusations about their work, or avoid libel suits.

Because of the number of pressures under which journalists report, they feel the need to know these procedures to be able to legitimize themselves as objective professionals. Techniques that journalists use to maintain objectivity include: the use of verifiable facts and inclusion of oppositional views on 'truth', direct quotes and additional evidence, as well as distinguishing opinion from facts by the use of 'news analysis' label. What is crucial to keep in mind, although, is that "facts" are socially taken for granted things, also often labeled as common sense. Tuchman (1972) warns, in turn, that "notions the newsman takes for granted are actually a picture of his view of social and political reality", or the view of other newspeople (p.674). Critics admit the danger of these "facts", is that they, if make sense, often become legitimized by a broader society, as associated with the 'sacred professional knowledge' (p. 675).

Similarly, Glasser (in Cohen, 1992), as well as Schudson & Anderson (2008) also relate the notion of journalistic knowledge to a rather obscure justification for objectivity and certain power of possessing the information. Cohen (1992) argues that 'reporting is objective to the extent that facts once selected are communicated as accurately as possible'. However, he says that some of the "facts" are unknown to a journalist or not yet disclosed at the time of reporting. Because of that, the author pinpoints that objective reporting, in fact, refers to honest and mindful reporting of the facts "to the extent they are known" (p. 27).

Treatment of objectivity as deterministic was often rejected in journalism research. Walter Lippmann (in Cohen, 1992), one of the most prominent figures in journalism of the twentieth century,

reminds that as long as news is “the joint product of the knower and the known,” some presence of bias in the reporting is inescapable (p.156). Objectivity, he argued, is the standard which legitimizes the common good bias and presentation of unequal evidence of the two opposing sides. Therefore, nearly a century ago he advocated for the standard of empiricism - philosophy that knowledge originates from only or primarily sensory experiences. Iggers (1998), also denying the notion of journalistic objectivity, says that it remains one of the greatest obstacles for a journalist to play a more responsible and constructive role in public life’ (1998, p. 91)

Tumber (2006) argues that traditionally objectivity in journalism implies the pursuit of truth. In abstract terms ‘telling the truth’ is usually referred to disinterested reporting; however in practice it is more about aiming to ‘get thing right’ by relying on sources that can be quoted and prove that can be verified by authority (p. 448). As he explains in the context of war reporting, detachment, a professional imperative, strongly associated with objectivity, is insufficient when it comes to reporting ethical conflicts. Especially, often criticized for legitimizing underrepresentation of disempowered, detached or objective reporting was called disinterested. On the other hand, emotional journalism, or as Ward calls it, ‘journalism of attachment’ (1993, as cited in Tumber, 2006) was not left uncriticized either, as it was often blamed for being hypocritical or ‘moralizing’ (p. 447). As a consequence, Tumber (2006) explains that a conflict reporter experiences antagonism which lies between the two edges of his or her social identity - service to the public and professionalism.

The objectivity standard, after all, remains a very contested one. Considering that news production is a constant tussle of structure and agency, objectivity appears as one of the structural schemas, which protects a journalist from criticism and guides the writing process, on one hand; yet, restrains his or her responsible accounts, on the other.

At the end of the day, media outlets can not only be guided by the preferences of the audience, as it has certain financial resources available, and may find some sources difficult to get access to, to deliver an interesting and well-written story, which leads us to a separate set of media routines. Golding and Elliott (1979), in that matter, argue that a comprehensive and realistic list of news values would also include the values of accessibility of sources and fit into organizational policies. This leads us to discuss the two following types of routines in the next two sections: source- and organization- oriented routines.

2.4.3. Source-oriented routines

Source-oriented routines are hardly visible, identified by Shoemaker and Reese (1996) as: “adaptation by media to constraints imposed by the sources” (p. 122). The selection of sources is often a routinized process. For example, adversarial strategy of the use of sources, adapted from the lawsuit issues coverage, became a suitable news format; although, it also has been blamed to distort the view. Related to the norm of objectivity discussed above, the authors argued is convenient for a journalist to

quote from oppositional sides, but the lawsuit approach to sources does not consider multiple perspectives that are unable to get a voice due to the litigation processes.

The authors adapt Sigal's (1973, as cited in Shoemaker and Reese, 1996) classification of sources, where routine channels include officials, press conferences and pre-scheduled events were found the most widely used in their research on American broadsheets; whereas enterprise channels, including interviews and spontaneous eye-witnessed events, own analysis and independent research were used twice less. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) explain that government officials often use the press to legitimise their social positions and control the information. Therefore, for journalists the behaviour of political and corporate authorities is more open and easy to study, than doing the 'labour-intensive' research (p.125). Besides, news coverage of government has always been of a great public interest; and by providing authoritative information, it is also argued to make the news piece more valid. In that way, journalists and their sources often have mutually-beneficial relations. However, Didion (1988) writes about political reporters, that in exchange for access, 'are willing to transmit the images their sources wish transmitted', which might be against the reporters' own intentions (p. 21). Apart from routine and enterprise sources, Sigal (1973, as cited in Shoemaker and Reese, 1996) identified also informal group of sources, which included leaks and background briefings, as well as reports from other news media outlets, and interviews with other journalists; and experts.

Studying the practices of Dutch reporters in Russia since Soviet times, Kester (2010) concludes that accessibility and reliability of sources emerge as major restrictions when working in authoritarian regions, which makes the requirement to adhere to Western traditional news values very difficult at times. Under the different presidencies in Soviet Union, and even upon its discarding, the correspondents could not rely on informal channels due to the different forms of censorship and their oligarchical ownership. Routine channels were often inaccessible, and ordinary people were reserved in sharing their opinion. The interviewees admitted they had to "make an extensive use of expert sources" (p. 66). Referring to the arguments of Gans (1980) and Manoff & Schudson (1986) that news is considerably routine-based and mainly led by sources, Kester (2010) concludes that correspondents face major challenges while working in such circumstances.

2.4.4. Organization-related routines

Besides audience- and source- oriented routines, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) also identify routines related to organizational decisions, which primarily aim to "help media organization operate smoothly" (p.113). Media cannot operate without a routinized system, having to deal with a vast of unpredictable newsworthy events, limited finances and space in the newspaper. Therefore, media outlets establish gatekeeping routines and a deadline system, as well as define roles and expectations to control the news production process. Besides, organizations tend to typify news, for example to 'hard' and 'soft' ones based on the way they are going to deal with them (Tuchman, 1977, in

Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). 'Pre-scheduled' events, such as trials, and 'unscheduled' ones like natural disasters he relates to hard news, which ought to be covered quickly. Soft news, in turn, feature stories that do not require immediate publishing, and can fill the 'holes' in case hard news are lenient (p.115).

2.5. Organization as structure

The section deals with the organizational level of influences, the third layer of Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model. It involves structural schemas and resources existent within a media organization that, to a large part, shape those very routines explained above. Simply put, an organization provides a media professional with a paid job and a platform to publish stories. At the same time, every organization has its formal settings - such as role and task division, corporate policy and target markets - that limit journalist's agency to approach his or her work in specific standards. Ownership of the media, its organizational policy with its unique set of goals and priorities have a large impact on the news content, and differ per organization. Operating within a marketplace, every commercial mass media establishes a positioning strategy to differentiate itself from competitors; therefore, marketing department also has an inherent influence on how media producers work. Additionally, differentiation of roles and jobs allocated to these roles, vertical and horizontal lines of power inside the organization will influence the way the decisions are made (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). For example, adherence to the principle of objectivity as a 'strategic ritual' might also be imposed directly by the editor (Tuchman, 1972).

Nevertheless, despite fixed roles and goals of the media company, internal clashes between workers from different hierarchical levels can occur. Scholars often have viewed the economic goals of the news company as the constraints that keep newspeople from exercising other goals of the media, such as serving the public and achieving professional recognition (e.g. Sigal, 1973). Allern (2002) also emphasized on the influence of commercial value of news and the financial resources of the organization. He argued that budget limitations in the newspaper can have a much larger impact on the news selection than trying to achieve professional recognition (p. 145). Similarly, Gans (1979) argued that an editor and a reporter might clash because the first one is usually more audience-oriented, whereas the former one - more source-oriented. At the same time, however, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) remind that individual influences of media managers should not be understated, especially in the cases of crisis reporting. The authors mention the expression of professional instincts and going over-budget in cases of breaking news events, such as unexpected wars (p. 140).

Each commercial mass medium operates within a marketplace, and the nature of the marketplace can sometimes affect content. For example, the size of the market and its opportunities for profits affect content, as does the general health of the economy. On the other hand, numerous studies of the effects of competition on newspaper content show that competition does not ensure increased diversity within a market (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

2.6. Extramedia influences as structure

Extramedia implies the factors that are affecting news production from outside of the media organization, including political media system, general health of economy, technological developments. The discussion of external factors starts with the brief introduction into Dutch media system. I have applied Hallin and Mancini's (2004) international typology, as it provides a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between state and the media. I then present the national context of Ukraine, following the useful suggestion of Kester (2010). The author explains that when studying journalistic practices of foreign correspondents, it is essential to emphasize on the cultural, political and social environment of the country in which they collect news for audience back home. Considering the military conflict and political, social and economic unrests that Ukraine has undergone over the past four years, the subsection reviews the research done on characteristics and work conditions of conflict reporting, and the available, yet limited in amount, research done on reporting in Ukraine. Lastly, I discuss the economic and technological developments of the present century, which have affected the news routines and organizational policies in general, and of foreign correspondence, in particular.

2.6.1. Media system in The Netherlands

According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), The Netherlands, as other North and Central European countries, belong to the Democratic Corporatist model. Media in these countries are characterized by high professionalization of journalism, whereas maintaining strong political parallelism; having press freedom and, at the same time, quite considerable state intervention in the public broadcasting system. Also, since the times of Protestant Reformation, the media was being utilized by opposing religious, ethnic and political groups to diffuse the diversity of ideologies. Specifically, the media system in The Netherlands is also called as 'pillarized', where each political party used to hold its own broadcasting organization representing a certain subculture. The system also named 'segmented pluralism' was organized by the end of nineteenth century by Catholic, Social and Protestant subcultures to preserve their independence from the dominant liberal and conservative cultures. Newspaper readership, therefore, normally has been divided in pillarized societies (p. 152). In 1970s the pillarization system collapsed, and, according to Eijk (in Gunther & Mughan, 2008), and as a consequence, two strategies were adopted by the national media. National newspapers, on the one hand, broke away from previous associations with political parties and labor unions. On the other hand, after losing their previous 'pillarized identity', most national press had gradually re-positioned themselves along the left and right spectrum and the differentiated lifestyle lines. Distinctiveness of each subculture decreased significantly, as the antagonisms also faded away, turning the pillarized system outdated (p. 312)

Drawing a parallel between the media systems in Northern Europe and United States, authors identify high level of professionalization in both; however, the sense of objectivity differs (Hallin & Mascini, 2004). Schudson and Anderson (2008) conclude from their work that in democratic corporatist media system the autonomy of a journalist is viewed as ‘compatible with active and intentional intervention in the political world’ (p.93). In North European countries, they argue, professionalization does not exclude media to be tied to political parties. The Netherlands and other countries in the model hold strong liberal institutions and developed civil society, where the state intervention has always been limited by commercial interests. However, on the contrast to market-oriented system in US, it is much less capitalist-oriented (Hallin & Mascini, 2004). According to Curran et al (2009), media system in North-European states is the public service system, that besides national news, offers its citizens a solid amount of content on the foreign news and public affairs. At the same time, citizens of the Nordic countries want to be informed in civil affairs, if they are to participate in elections, hold the government accountable, and stay empowered.

2.6.2. Reporting in Ukraine

To use a strong argument made by Dan Berkowitz (2009) in relation to foreign reporting: “The country where reporters interact with their sources does make a difference, partly because of press system differences, but also because of the role that media play in a specific culture” (p. 111). It is important, thus, to understand the context of news production in Ukraine in this research. However, considering the problem statement and the goal of this research, it seems relevant to reflect on the transformations in the national media landscape prompted by the chain of unrestful events of 2013 and 2014.

According to the research by Orlova (2016), who examined the changes in Ukrainian media landscape triggered by EuroMaidan, severe protests in late 2013 left both positive and negative consequences. In regards to news production in the beginning of civil unrest escalation, similar to the state and society, media institutions were unprepared for the intensity of events and life-threatening work circumstances. The national media were largely criticized by media observers for inability to verify the facts, report in a balanced way and for silencing of certain topics (Dorosh 2014; Dovzhenko, 2014, as cited in Orlova, 2016), which caused a major decrease in trust to the media in Ukrainian society. At the same time, the crisis events became the momentum for a number of democratization initiatives and reformation in society, which positively affected the media environment, evident, for example, in the increase of freedom of speech and adoption of new media laws. Crucial developments also included the increased recognition for independent online news platforms and the establishment of several new online platforms, which rapidly became the primary sources of information for millions of citizens (Szostek, 2014). One of the most prominent phenomena, from journalistic point of view, was the high level of activism exercised by Ukrainian

journalists from the beginning of EuroMaidan protests, in terms of physical participation in the protests, online activism, investigative reporting projects and initiatives (Szostek 2014).

In the post-Maidan environment, however, Orlova (2016) argues, the same problems with concentration of media ownership, inflamed by corruption and nepotism, that existed in Ukraine since Soviet times, remain deeply penetrated in the mainstream media. Independent media face major challenges to compete with the powerful business-oriented mainstream media outlets. Aggravation of the economic crisis tightens their possibilities even more.

2.6.3. Relations of Ukraine and The Netherlands

Important issue to consider is that media of a certain country is claimed to present the news on another state through the prism of national interests (e.g. Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). The extensive research done by Westerstahl and Johansson (1994) make a valuable point about the role of national ideology in the selection and presentation of news. The authors especially highlight that country's foreign policy usually correlates with the media coverage of the international affairs. In relation to Ukrainian news in Dutch media, the events that received the most attention were those which had direct relationship with the Dutch society. The disastrous plane crash of the MH17 Boeing had played a major role in creating tension in international relations between the two countries, as Netherlands appeared in the centre of the crossfire of undefined conflict, and paid the price of almost three hundred Dutch citizens. The theme became a major one among others on Ukraine for the next few years after the event, featuring the research of the international Joint Investigation Team, among which the Netherlands had played one of the most active roles (RTL Nieuws, 2015).

Referendum on Ukraine Association Agreement with EU that was held in The Netherlands was also the event, prominent in the international relations, and, therefore, was predominant on the Dutch news pages. The initiative of holding such a referendum was related frequently to the populist political movement, as the idea was implemented by the Euro-sceptic party GeenPeil. Launching the campaign that called the Dutch citizens to vote against the association, the arguments included that the treaty involved not only trade relationships between the countries, but would contain also military and political implications (De Winter, 2016). The minority part of proponents of the treaty, on the other hand, including the Prime Minister Mark Rutte, argued for free trade agreements (Rettman, 2016). After the Referendum, journalists and academics analyzed the issue calling it politicized in terms of the Netherlands relationships with European Union, rather than with Ukraine.

2.6.4. Foreign reporting in XXI century

The role of a foreign correspondent is being intensely debated in contemporary research. Firstly, the researchers observed the major decline in foreign correspondents per organizations. Multiple studies suggest that significant budget costs in print newspaper industry are strongly associated with the

downscale of the international news (e.g. Alterman, 2008; Kester, 2010), as the domestic audiences are generally more interested in the local and national affairs (Altmeyden, 2010). Financial and economic pressures faced by today's news media had even prompted some scholars to label the genre of foreign correspondence as on its way to becoming "extinct" (Hamilton, 2009, p. 463; also see Sambrook, 2010) or "in a kind of crisis" (Kester, 2010, p. 41). Moreover, the possibility provided by Internet to access a foreign media by one click had played a huge role in decay of print news, and driven advertisers' appeal to web media.

These interconnected developments - namely the changing economics in the news industry, globalization and innovative technologies - according to the Reuters Institute, led author Sambrook to question the role of foreign correspondents in the book *Are Foreign Correspondents Redundant?* (2010). He summarizes that dramatic change in a foreign reporter's environment during the last twenty years is based on three factors: economic crisis, technological innovations and globalization. On the one hand, he argues, the amount of news sources a reporter can use is greater than ever before: professional news websites and companies, governments, NGOs, blogs and social media. On the other, these also emerge as a competitive field for the audience attention. Besides, Sambrook (2010) also argues that despite the variety of available resources, the difficulty to verify information online is one of the risks associated with reporting in digital era. Adding the argument by Tumber (2006) about war reporting, he argues that for conflict reporters there is a greater risk of being criticised for their work immediately.

However, opportunities for foreign correspondence associated with the impact of new media technologies were also celebrated in communication and media research. Christina Archetti (2012), for instance, in her study argues that the critical accounts about foreign correspondents as 'endangered species' exist actually due to the considerable scarcity of academic research. She defends their role of "sense makers" among the booming competition of other resources of news should not be understated (p. 847). The respondents in her interviews stated that the current developments had actually prompted new ways of work, related to diversifying their work, presenting alternative angles, providing more detailed context, adding multimedia, and even, "some opinion" (p.851). Especially, the latter, expression of opinion was identified as an added value of a foreign correspondent today. They also analysed the eyewitnessing value as still relevant to their main role of "making sense" of meanings of the events in terms understandable for the national audience. Another task mentioned in the study is to give an 'early warning' to a home country, for example, by illustrating a good or bad problem-solving case on the host country. Fundamentally, the author concludes saying that even in the economic crisis the picture of the foreign correspondents is much more 'dynamic and resilient' than journalism scholarship argues. Despite the increased complexity of their work brought by financial cuts of media outlets, she mentioned a journalist still would try to deliver quality in each story because "they have their name on it" (p. 854)

2.7. Ideology as structure

In their last layer of the hierarchy of effects, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) identify ideology as the most macro-level structure, that symbolically intervenes all the levels below. Citing Hall (1989) they relate ideology to the “symbolic influence of media on audiences, the “definition” that prevails, and the legitimation and exercise of symbolic power” (p. 309).

News values and norms are constantly discussed in the context of power relations. For example, Schudson and Anderson (2008) suggested that journalistic values help to “provide internal solidarity and cohesion to a particular group” (p. 94). McChesney (2000) claimed that journalistic norms are created to serve ‘an ideological structure’, which would downplay some topics and naturalise the others (p.49). The most obvious sign to identify the effect of ideology on international coverage, they argue, is in the representation of good and bad actors. Deviance might be the first sign of ideological influence on the news selection and the content of the story. Shoemaker’s research (1984) found that political groups considered by the news editors as deviant were portrayed rather negative in coverage. Moreover, news selection criteria are argued to contain the element of deviance themselves, by prioritising sensational, controversial, and unpredictable. Previously mentioned prevalence of powerful media sources implies that appearance of less powerful members of society in the media comes often with deviant behavior, like protests and crimes.

Cohen (1992) states that the power to bring a topic to the public agenda or to keep it off already constitutes any institution as influential. Cohen elaborates on the agenda-setting theory that media cannot tell people what to think, however it has the power to decide what they do or do not think or talk about. Through the process of rigorous selection the newsroom leaves numerous perspectives and facts unreported. At the same time, the author cautions to not overstate the status of media’s power in public affairs as absolute. He admits that media can bring attention to a story, or, at times, ‘catalyze’ its outcomes, but it has a limited power in making a real change in political process. What he underscores, though, is the media’s capability ‘to stereotype and to ridicule’, which can affect the course of political consequences (p.139).

2.8. Agency

The structural factors affecting journalistic work listed above give a comprehensive theoretical overview of the forces and conditions, which enable and disable a reporter’s actions. However, before presenting alternative ways and strategies to “reinforce or reconfigure” (Giddens, in Ahearn, 2001, p.117) these very structures, it is worth noting that agency is always present in one way or another in these structures. Unravelling the individual level of influences in their model, Shoemaker and Reese’s (1996) explain that the media producers’ background and experiences may not directly affect the content, but certainly influence his or her attitudes and views potentially guiding journalistic choices. Referring back to Sewell’s (1992) discussion on structure and agency, his comparison between

capacity for agency and capacity for learning the language is worth to mention here: “it is formed by a specific range of cultural schemas and resources available in a person’s particular social milieu” (p.20). Therefore, every media worker, with his or her unique background and bundle of knowledge and experiences, will approach the daily news production tasks distinctively, even under the same organizational policies and professional standards.

In more global perspective, Westerstahl and Johansson (1994) discuss the resilience of media institution itself enacted by human agency, proving that structures do not remain static. Authors argue there was a major shift in journalistic processes in 1960s. As one of the consequences of social movements happening during that time, traditional journalism transformed into more critical and active journalism. Few decades later the authors found it indisputable that policy-makers were by far not the only ‘stage-managers’, but media were also taking an active role in exercising influence (p. 75). Similarly, Sewell (1992) argued that states and political structures are subjects to periodic transformations.

Peterson (2004) urges that while remembering the powerful social structures of media production, we should not neglect the creative capacity intrinsic in journalists’ decisions. Author defends that the fact that production of media is a process involving “dialogic and co-narrative elements” invites for special attention to “interpretive and representational practices” of actors involved (p. 189). Kester’s (2010) research is also a great illustration of the journalists’ use of agency. While discussing the ways that Dutch correspondents used to cope with the challenges of accessibility and trustworthiness of sources in Russia, she emphasizes that interpretative style of reporting was a solution strategy for practicing journalism in authoritarian country. The journalists she interviewed indicated they had to use alternative strategies in order to “read between the lines” the local news reports, be critical to the information provided by elite sources, and at times they had to rely on own observations only (p. 65-66). Capacity to reflect on subjective experiences is related to the practice of ‘eye witnessing’ in journalism, and may be interpreted as capacity for agency to resist the objectivity standard. As Zelizer (2007) unravels the term, she argues that “eye-witnessing is thought to offer a kind of proof that is different from that provided by other types of reportorial chronicles. Drawing from the authority gained by being on the site of an event being reported, eye-witnessing refers to ability to account subjectively for the events, actions, or practices seen with one’s own eyes” (p. 411). The author refers to the virtue of the on-site presence especially valuable and used by the news producers, while reporting on complex and hard-to-confirm events; and is believed to strengthen the news’ credibility and authenticity.

Given the hardship of working in conflict zones, the agency of a conflict reporter has an essential place in this research. According to Tumber (2006), crisis reporting, as a part of hard news journalism, is a field in which traditional journalistic norms and values are constantly challenged. Among challenges a war reporter faces are the danger of being in the warzone, the risks of persecution, hardship to understand the boundaries between opponents. Especially in today’s rapidly

changing communication environment the journalistic practice of witnessing is more a matter of journalists making an effort to 'shake' people than reporting in a detached and 'objective' manner.

As Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti (2013) explain, committed story-telling of the eye-witnessed event is a challenging effort while adhering to traditional commitments such as impartiality and objectivity. For example, Lee, Maslog and Kim (2006) argued that journalistic news values, by bringing much focus on negative events, in fact, limit space for what they call peace journalism, reporting that investigates causes and alternatives of the conflict.

The study of Galtung and Ruge (1965) became one of the most influential in the research on the so-called 'alternative media' (as cited in Atton, 2002; Harcup, 2005). Among other things, the authors recognized the need and called journalists to feature more background and context in the stories, write about more long-term issues than singular events. They also encouraged to investigate the complex issues and provide more space for non-elite people and countries.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Research method

This research, focused on journalistic practices and perspectives of the Dutch news media professionals involved in the coverage of Ukraine, adopted a qualitative methodology. Aiming attention at the news production, I was interested the most in journalists' personal experiences with producing the content on Ukraine, and the different aspects that affect their views and opinions on own professional role. Thus, in accordance with methodological literature, purpose of the study itself is of qualitative nature, as it opts for in-depth and idiographic knowledge, rather than broad and nomothetic generalizations (Babbie, 2013). Previous research on different micro and macro factors of news production and literature on foreign news and conflict reporting were used to contextualize my research and educated me on the fieldwork prior the data collection stage. Sensitizing concepts of structure and agency were studied in the literature on sociology and anthropology, and proved very useful in studying the implications of the profession of a foreign reporter. Because analysis of research findings adapted both concept- and data-driven approaches, consulting the previous research done in the field was inevitable to inform the research sufficiently and to increase validity of the research results.

Attempting to explore and explain the journalistic constraints and opportunities, as well as their roles in reporting about Ukraine in the Netherlands, semi-structured in-depth interviews were chosen as a method. I aimed to explore the journalistic work of Dutch reporters on covering Ukraine not only in terms of the editorial and organizational conditions. Questions about organizational policy, hierarchy, the division of tasks and the given deadlines could have been asked via survey. By contrast, the research question requires more constructivist philosophical orientation, which considers journalists as agents. Hence, I attempted to take an anthropological stance to explore who the journalists are, what are their intentions, views and experiences of the professional role. Therefore, I aimed for the generation of knowledge which is more descriptive and detailed, for which more personalised, in-depth and flexible research method, such as semi-structured interviews emerged as the most suitable. The benefit of this method is flexibility in the degree of depth and order of the topics that preserves natural flow of conversation, while still allows the interviewer to moderate the process following the interview guide (Russel, 1994). I looked for the 'thickness' of the results, that according to anthropologist Sherry B. Ortner (2006) means getting an understanding of the field through descriptive, detailed and rich information (p. 43).

3.2. Operationalisation

In order to identify the interplay of structure and agency in the work of the reporters, I started from questions on a specific news story and led to the general questions. In order to understand their news values routine, I asked about how they selected the topic, the initial idea and why they considered it newsworthy. To identify the organizational influence and the extent of autonomy they felt in their work, I asked their thoughts on how such story fitted in specific publication, how it was in line with the task division, and about the editor's control of the topic selection and deadlines. In regards to the defensive routines, I asked journalists about their perception of objectivity. I asked about the concept in broad terms to encourage the diversity of answers and invite really personal interpretations. I asked whether and how they tried to attain to the norm of objectivity in a specific story or other experiences. As follow-up questions I asked what would an unbalanced story mean for them, and how they detach their personal opinion from their professional practices, especially in such conflict areas like Ukraine. Furthermore, I asked which sources the journalists used to produce a news piece, why was a specific source used and what were the experiences of approaching the sources. The question of sources also involved the issue of balance between the opposing sides. Again, starting from a particular story I asked for other examples from their experiences.

Questions about their agency included asking about the intentions they had while writing a news story and approaching certain sources, and how they anticipated the audience to perceive the story. Exploring their agency also inevitably involved enquiring about their personal interests in reporting on the region, their expertise and non-journalistic experiences of the country. We discussed how these could influence their work both consciously and unconsciously. Discussions about their implementation of their agency came up usually as follow up questions to the main questions about the structural factors. When asked about the effect of news routines, organization, sources and the host-country environment on their journalistic work, I followed up asking how they cope with constraints and what are the ways to bypass certain restrictions in order to adhere to their roles.

Leaving a more personal question till the end, I asked their opinions about what was included in their responsibility as a foreign reporter in general, and then, tried to follow up with the question steering to the discussion on news in Ukraine. The interview guide is provided in Appendix 1.

3.3 Sampling and Units of analysis

In this research I opted for purposive sampling. The interviewees were chosen based on the content they wrote. In order to find the journalists, I browsed through numerous articles about Ukraine written in Dutch mass media in past few years, by using Lexis Nexis Academic database. The search string that I used was 'Ukraine OR Oekraine' and I selected 'All Dutch news' option of resources, so incorporating print and web news found in daily newspapers, magazines and journals. I aimed for

stories of the average newspaper story length of 600 words, which featured the search string word in the headline or, at least, in one of the first three paragraphs, meaning that Ukraine was the main focus of the news piece. Aiming specifically to study journalistic work and content on Ukraine in its times of a ‘frozen’ conflict, I did not base my selection of authors of those articles which were published before 2016. All the stories which became the base of my selection of interviewees were published since 2016. The stories were usually located in foreign or international sections of the media outlet. Considering having quite poor knowledge of Dutch language, I mostly used Google Translate to understand the content of the stories.

In order to collect quality information and ‘information-rich cases’ (Patton, 1990, cited in Sandelowski, 1995) that fit the research objective the best, the purposive, or non-probability sampling was used. Before selecting the stories, I decided to give the main focus to mainstream media in The Netherlands, meaning those which have the highest circulation rates of readers. The assumption for such criteria is that the most popular media convey the largest influence on the formation of audience’s views on the foreign country. However, as it was observed during further overview of their content on Ukraine, the two newspapers with the the highest circulation rates, namely tabloids *Telegraaf* and *Algemeen Dagblad* were not included in the sample, as they mostly published very short background articles on Ukraine and the majority of other foreign regions. Their stories in the foreign news section were mostly acquired from the news agencies, such as ANP or Reuters. Similar format of international news stories was featured in the free daily newspaper *Metro*, however, some longer news pieces on Ukraine with identified authors were located in this daily. The majority of the stories were located on pages of the national broadsheet papers. These included the three largest ones: leftist *de Volkskrant*, liberal *NRC Handelsblad*, and Protestant *Trouw*. I also chose newspapers with the special interest, such as *Finaanciale Dagblad* with the big interest in economics, and religious *Reformatisch Dagblad* (Bakker, 2018).

Another important source of news in The Netherlands is NOS, the main news division of the public service broadcaster. I found multiple coverage of the MH17 plane crash on NOS digital news platform, therefore it was also a valuable medium to take into account. According to Cohen (1992), besides the big broadsheet media outlets, influential on a national level, small commentary publications and op-eds can also generate points on the public agenda. So, opting for diversity of media names in the sample, I also decided to include online newspaper *De Correspondent* and weekly magazine *Groene Amsterdammer*, as I observed the two media had quite a lot of reporting on Ukraine. *De Correspondent* positions itself as an unconventional ad-free newspaper, bringing more in-depth and historically contextual reporting on a topical basis (Witschge, 2013). Bakker (2018) recognized the role of new magazines as very important in forming public opinion, even though their turnover in the country had seriously declined in the last decade. Among *Elsevier*, *Vrije Nederland*, *De Tijd* and *Groene Amsterdammer*, the most stories on Ukraine, and also, those with the average length of 600 words were found in latter one, thus it was also chosen for this study. The range of

stories included news on political decisions, investigative stories, background stories on the current war situation, feature stories about war consequences on citizens. All the references to the stories are provided in Appendix 4.

So I opted for comparative analysis between the reporters writing news pieces on Ukraine for different media in The Netherlands. When I stumbled upon the same author's name few times in Lexis-Nexis search results, I then used the basic Google search to find out other stories he or she had written. Many of the authors had Linked-In profiles, through which I often could find out their professional biography and current occupations. Some journalistic profiles listed their positions as freelancers, that implied they could have been writing for multiple publications. I browsed the Internet with the authors' names and read through their news stories. If I found that the journalist was writing quite actively on the issues in Ukraine, I started to look for more information and published material under his or her name. I did not predetermine a minimum number of articles per author, because the general number of space the different media outlets dedicated to foreign news, and, in particular, Ukraine varied. For example, I did not define a minimum of four or five articles authored by a journalist to suit my sample, because the amount of stories on Ukraine published in *NRC* was much higher than that in *Financiaale Dagblad*, *Groene Amsterdammer*, or *Metro*. My approach was, rather, directed at diversity of cases of the news pieces, and then, relied on availability of the potential respondents. So, at the end I collected a pile of stories about Ukraine that were published by the different news media. They were diverse in the news type (soft, hard), themes, sources featured and writing styles. Consequently, I selected thirteen people whom I wanted to conduct interviews with, by briefly investigating their professional biographies and reviewing previous work online, and sent out the invitations. Prior to the interviews, by browsing the journalists' web portfolios, blogs and Linked-In profiles, I could conclude that the level of experience on reporting on Ukraine varied among the sample.

Initially I opted to conduct ten to twelve interviews relying on a timeframe of the project. Within the period of one and a half month I ended up conducting eleven in-depth semi-structured interviews with the people who reported on Ukraine on a regular basis in Dutch media pages. Asking for references from the interviewees themselves, at the end, the names that had been mentioned were, mostly, the ones which I had contacted already. The list of authors on Ukrainian news among Dutch media could, of course, have been longer; but I am certain to say, that the interviewees I selected are the core group of reporters in The Netherlands who have covered Ukraine the most frequently in the last two and a half years.

Among the interviewees nine were men and two – women. They all had quite diverse level of experience in the practice of journalism and in reporting on Ukraine. As it was revealed during the interviews, some of the respondents had changed their occupations in the field of journalism throughout their career, which differed from the one they had at the time of the interviews, for example some experienced the roles of both a reporter and an editor. So, during the interviews some

media professionals told about their practices and experiences in foreign reporting from different perspectives of several occupations. As an answer to sub-question one of this research, further details on profiles of the interviewees are provided in 'Results' chapter.

3.4 Interviews

Email information provided on the website of the media outlet as well as LinkedIn Inmail option were used to invite journalists to the interview. I created a template for the email invitation which included a short description of my topic, reference to the articles authored by the person, and my motivation to interview him or her based on this news story. The potential interviewees were suggested several date and time options for conducting the interview. Pleasantly, the response rate to the invitations was really high, as out of thirteen people that I invited, twelve responded with a positive answer, yet one response was received too late.

The process of interviewing to some extent took an ethnographic approach, where I as the interviewer engaged in co-producing the knowledge about the professional role of a foreign reporter. According to Kvale's (2007a) forms of interviews, the process of interviewing journalists resembled the 'Narrative interview' type the most, as stories about their individual experiences and views were the main focus of the interviews (p. 7). I often encouraged them to share about the details of their work, but most of the time stories came up spontaneously. Treating narratives as "one of the natural cognitive and linguistic forms through which individuals attempt to organize and express meaning" (Mishler, 1986, as cited in Kvale, 2007a, p. 7), it can be concluded that spontaneous use of narrative examples in their answers to research questions proved to be a comfortable and efficient way for journalists to communicate about their daily work conditions and own perceptions of a profession, its ethics and norms. For me as an interviewer, a narrative interview was a useful interview method to assist "through questions, nods and silences" the sharing of different examples on topics about Ukraine (p. 9). I would also argue, that the conceptual form interview was inevitably used here. In order to answer the main research question, I used interviews to explore meanings and conceptual layers of the 'responsibility' phenomenon (p. 6), during which, in turn, the narratives served very helpful to unravel and operationalize the term.

Interview strategies by Hermanowicz (2002) were helpful in preparation. The interviews had a rather conversational approach, during which I asked a lot of follow-up questions, asking for clarification, expansion and other examples. For instance, the interviewee's responses were often used to guide the sub-questions, and sometimes their answers prompted the new sub-questions which were not planned before, so the knowledge was being produced along the way. Conversational style meant that the interviewees could also ask some questions back in a dialogue form. This did not happen often, however, there were several cases when the interviewee was stating his conclusions as a result

of a short dialogue with the interviewer. But, also, “silent probes” were used to let the respondent time to think and reflect on own work (p. 485). For example, ethical questions about objectivity and responsibility, as quite sensitive questions, usually required some quiet time. Rephrasing and restating the questions had also proved to be useful to ensure understanding of the difficult and controversial concepts, and so, to validate the interpretation of the interviewees’ answers. Also following the advice from Hermanowicz (2002), the interview questions were relatively of a short and formulated in quite general terms. As using analysis of one of the journalist’s news story was a starting point in the interview, it enabled specificity of the answers. Asking to compare experiences of writing this selected story with the other work allowed to explore their more general views and other experiences as well.

I used the specific news stories in order to ground the discussion and trigger conversations about broader journalistic concepts and practices, which proved very helpful. Even though the order of questions was changing with the flow of each interview, I had a general interview guide which always helped to return to the core themes and avoid any omission. My interview guide followed the same structure for all the interviewees, but was adapted to a specific story he or she authored.

I started the interviews with open-ended questions about how the reporters started reporting on Ukraine, their general professional and educational backgrounds. These served as ice-breaking questions, but also helped to understand their individual factors of influence, so to answer the first sub-question. I then asked questions about the routines, organizational conditions and contextual settings of their daily work. These questions were aimed to reveal how the structures and conditions enabled them to do their work, as well as which constraints or challenges they faced. Probe questions were asked to identify what ways and strategies they used to cope with conditions, and what intentions and motivations guided them, so by that, enquiring answers about the second and the third sub-questions. A more personal question about their view on responsibility as a foreign reporter I moved to the end of the interview.

All the interviewees were provided with the Informed Consent Form prior to the start of the interview session, where the contact details of the researcher, the goal of the study and future application of its results are stated (Appendix 2). The form also lists the participant’s rights, risks and benefits associated with the involvement. An option of staying anonymous is provided, as well as the choice of being recorded is stated as optional. In the end, all the respondents agreed to identify their names and with being recorded.

Overall, the eleven journalists were open and talkative, which enabled a flow and conversational style of interviews. Most of the time they were giving answers to the questions that were further in the interview guide. The shortest interview lasted 36 minutes, and the longest one was 1 hour and 22 minutes. Four out of eleven interviews were conducted via Skype with the three correspondents living in Moscow and one freelance journalist currently based in Berlin. Other seven interviews were conducted face to face in different locations that were convenient for the journalists:

public cafes (3) or cafes at the news organizations (2), newsroom office (1) and the journalist's home (1). After one of the interviews, a journalist added his view which he wanted to share via email.

3.5 Data analysis

After building up a theoretical framework of the study and familiarizing myself with the methodology literature, I planned ahead to use thematic content analysis and the main method. Consequently, the hierarchy of influences model by Shoemaker and Reese (1996), which served as a guideline for constructing the topic list for semi-structured interviews, similar themes were also used for data analysis. The process of coding began in very inclusive way. Firstly, following the analytical recommendations by Kvale (2007b) I read through each interview to “get a sense of the whole” (p. 8). Then, trying to grasp the meanings of the texts' passages, I coded them with the use of shorter statements using the language they used, but also adding the concepts from the theory in brackets, for the sake of my own understanding of the meanings. Next, I tried to examine the meaning units by relating them back to the theoretical framework and the research questions. Lastly, I re-read the passages and texts in iterative, or “hermeneutical circle” manner, trying to relate the meanings of different passages and themes of the interviews to broader meanings of the interviewee's viewpoint on professional role (p. 10). Even though, I did not focus on quantifying the results, counting the emergence of specific themes and comparing and correlating these to other ones was useful for comparative analysis (Kvale, 2007b).

Thus, the main themes and most of the sub-categories in the interview transcripts were generated in a concept-driven way, adapting the main theoretical concepts of the Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model, but also literature on foreign news, conflict reporting and professional ethics to this specific case study. Additional subcategories, as well as the sub-subcategories emerged during the interviews, therefore, were added to coding frame in a data-driven way, following the method of subsumption (Mayring, 2010). To ensure credibility, the tools suggested by Silverman (2012) were applied: analytic induction strategy of a constant comparison and contrasting between the previous research and outputs of the interviews was applied during three levels of coding: open, axial and thematic. Furthermore, the process also included a search for deviant cases.

As theoretical framework informed this research on structural factors that are of potential influence on the media producer's work, these factors were used to generate the main themes of the coding frame. Among concept-driven concepts, only the first category of individual factors, including their intentions, motivations and conceptions of the role, was conceptualized as part of the actor's agency. Additional dimensions of agency, operationalized as creative solutions, strategies and alternative ways to deal with structures, were discovered throughout the analysis and added as sub-subcategories in a data-driven way. The list of the three main concept-driven categories and related

subcategories is listed below, whereas the data-driven sub-subcategories are presented in the next chapter.

Coding frame:

1. Intrinsic factors on perception of responsibility

- Professional background (incl. education)
- Views and interests
- Ethics

2. Influence of structural factors

- Media routines
 - News values
 - Defensive routines
 - Source-oriented routines
 - Organization-oriented routines (Incl. editorial influence)
 - Story presentation and audience appeal
- Organizational factors
 - Media type
 - Political orientation and readership
 - Organizational policy
- Extra-media factors
 - State and media relationship in The Netherlands
 - Ukrainian context
- Ideological factors
 - National ideology

3. Exercise of agency

- Strategies to bypass the strictness of the news values
- Interpretative reporting
- Alternative ways to report on conflict
- Strategies to cope with inaccessible sources
- Strategies to cope with unreliable sources

3.6 Self-reflection

In some way interviewing journalists about their work can be interpreted as interviewing elites, taking into account they are experts in the fieldwork. Mikecz (2012) finds that interviewing elites is often associated with problems of obtaining access and during the process the feeling of unequal power relations. On the other hand, author admits, being knowledgeable on a topic of interview, as well as competent in the technical language and familiarized with the biography of the interviewee might be very helpful in increasing the extent of symmetry in the process (2012).

However, in my experience, out of thirteen people I sent invitations to, I had only one non-response, which means I was able to reach out to twelve. Considering my position as a young female expat student, probably, might have created certain asymmetry of power with highly-expertised interviewees. As an interviewer, however, I did not encounter any particular problems of power relations. I also did not experience challenges with building a rapport with interviewees. Before starting with the interview questions, I thanked for agreeing to participate in the research, introduced myself and gave a brief description of my project and its goals. Constructing an interview guide which started with easy open-ended questions about the reporters background and personal history on reporting on Ukraine was also helpful. In such way, the first minutes devoted to brief personal introduction served as an ice-breaking technique. In regards to my knowledgeability, I usually admitted to the interviewees that I am not a journalist myself, and not a student at the school of journalism, therefore, I might be unfamiliar with the certain professional terminology. But I briefly explained that my Master program intertwines the media and the sociology, which provides the fundamental knowledge of the field. Before every interview, with the help of online resources like, for example, professional networking site Linked-In, I familiarized myself with the professional biographies of the interviewees, if such were available. I also considered important to admit to the journalists that my familiarity with their previous work was rather limited to the several stories on Ukraine they authored.

Lastly, it is worth to reflect on my own position as a researcher. My Ukrainian nationality might suggest a certain bias during the process. From a positivist perspective, that researcher's background, motivation and desires are told to be strictly divided from the research subject. But considering that it is a qualitative research with a constructivist approach, adhering to positivist ideal here seems unachievable. Following the logic of Gadamer (1999, as cited in Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007), personal background and views of a researcher are actually productive in reaching greater interpretation and understanding. According to the advice of Cerwonka & Malkki (2007), I strived to be constantly conscious of the cultural bias during the different stages of the research. I avoided the use of leading questions and kept emotional distance during the interviews. I was also transparent with the interviewees regarding my nationality and my special motivation to study the issue. The results section is based only on what the interviewees had said.

Chapter 4. Results & Analysis

This chapter is based on the content of the interviews. The results of the in-depth semi-structured interviews are structured in the sequence the coding frame, so in the sequence of the research questions. I first present the respondents' personal and professional backgrounds. Then, I present the findings on how they view their responsibility as journalists in general, and reporting on Ukraine or Eastern European region, in particular. The following theme incorporates journalists' experiences with and thoughts on structural factors and the narratives about their exercise of agency, meaning different creative solutions and strategies they used to bypass, respond or omit the structural influences on their work. Considering the hierarchical sequence of the factors of influence, I did not address them one-by-one, to present the results, because sometimes, they were too interrelated to separate. Instead of adding a separate section on the context of Ukraine or Eastern-European context, I integrated it in each of the dimensions, similar to the approach used by Kester (2010). The influences of Dutch media-state relationship, as well as of ideology emerged in the interviews as closely related to the organizational level of influence and the concept of objectivity; therefore, are presented below in slightly different structure than in the initial coding frame.

4.1. Professional backgrounds of the reporters

Before addressing the ways how journalists experience their professional responsibility, I firstly provide a brief summary on the professional backgrounds and histories with reporting on Ukraine, that they shared with during the interviews, but some of this information was already identified through the preliminary research as explained in Chapter 3. Since most of the correspondents were based in Moscow, many of the examples they gave concerned Russian news, however, experiences of writing about Ukraine were constantly named too.

Almost all the interviewees reported on news in Ukraine as inclusive in the 'package' of a Russia or Eastern-Europe correspondent. Five journalists had been reporting on region even before Ukraine's independence, so the Soviet times: Bert Lanting (editor and a foreign correspondent at *De Volkskrant*), Laura Starink (*NRC*), Joost Bosman (*Finalinciale Dagblad*), Geert Groot Koerkamp (*Trouw*) and Gert-Jan Dennekamp (*NOS*). Most of the interviewees were regularly reporting on Ukraine in the period from 2013 to 2015, as the Revolution and war environment demanded a lot of news. Freelance correspondents Michiel Driebergen (*Trouw*, *Radio 1*), Floris Akkerman (*RD*, *De Correspondent*), Eva Cukier (*Trouw*, *NRC*) and Tom Vennink (*De Volkskrant*) have been regularly visiting Ukraine from The Netherlands, Poland or from Moscow since that time. Laura Starink had resigned from the newspaper *NRC* and became a freelance journalist. Starink and Driebergen had also published books about Russia and Ukraine. Gert-Jan Dennekamp reported on Ukraine and MH17 investigation for *NOS* since 2013. Tobias Wals had lived in Kiev for two years after his graduation

from Slavic studies in Amsterdam and wrote several soft news pieces for *Groene Amsterdammer* and *NRC*. Wouter van Loon did not specialise in foreign news only and did several reports on Ukraine for mass newspaper *Metro* as a freelance journalist having a big interest in international politics. He now changed his focus into data journalism and was hired by *NRC*.

The interviewed journalists often mentioned their personal expertise and knowledge in Eastern-European region to play significant role in their reporting. Foreign reporters knew Russian language, one also knew Ukrainian (Tobias Wals). They were familiarized well with the region's history, culture, political, economic and social background, as they had academic background in Slavist or Eastern-European Studies. Journalists relied strongly on their own judgements of what they considered important for the Dutch reader to know. They relied on their own authority as experts in the area, knowledge of its history, culture and close interaction with locals. An exceptional case was Wouter Van Loon, who reported from the desk and did not specialize in foreign news journalism, so had not had educational background or a first-hand experience with the region.

4.2. Perceptions of Responsibility

- *Disruptors of clichés*

The scope of how the foreign reporters interpreted their role varied in quite different ways. Most of the time they all mentioned few interpretations in their answers. First of all, while discussing their responsibility, they usually took guidance from their audience. Eight out of eleven journalists mentioned they aimed to disrupt clichés and stigmatized perceptions of Ukraine and the region. They recognized that an average Dutch reader has rather limited knowledge of Ukraine. The image of the country is mostly unfavourable, as it is often entrenched with stereotypes about Soviet state, propaganda, authoritarian regime and corruption. Attitudes towards the country, reporters mentioned, were generally formed from Western European perspective. So, the news that the audiences mostly see on Ukraine - related to governmental decisions and announcements of negative events like military conflicts and information war - appear as very contrasting and distant to Dutch audience. During most of the interviews the journalists acknowledged that news about both Russia and Ukraine depict mostly geopolitical events, and admitted the lack of daily life presented in the news media. Hence, in order to bring them closer to the audiences, the reporters considered it valuable to provide more space for ordinary people in their reporting, and by that, to “complicate a stereotyped view” (Tobias Wals) and cover “grey shades” (Laura Starink). In the words of *de Volkskrant*'s Russia correspondent Tom Vennink, apart from the President and oligarchs being the main decision makers of the country, there are dozens millions of voices disagreeing with the government, which are so often left underrepresented. Therefore, in his reporting he preferred showing “nuances” than presenting a “black-and-white story”. Joost Bosman had a similar interpretation of his responsibility

during his job as Russia correspondent regularly reporting for *Financiaale Dagblad*. Reporting from Moscow, he expressed he tried to “give an image to the country”, by showing its different sides and having to play sometimes the ‘advocate of the devil’. Koerkamp described the role of foreign correspondents using the metaphor: “eyes and the ears of the newspaper, and of the people, who read the newspaper”. As he explained, him and his colleagues are responsible for trying to help their readers understand the events in Ukraine and Russia from the different angles.

- *Eye-witnesses*

Besides, they emphasized on their function as eye-witnesses of the events and related that to their responsibility to “show what is really happening”. Especially for correspondents who experienced leading investigative reporting in Ukrainem - those were Gert-Jan Dennekamp and Laura Starink - the importance of “being there” and trying to critically investigate the issue or the chain of events were emphasized. To that account, what was similar between all the interviewees was that they aimed to explain what the events in the foreign country actually mean, by providing stories with the sufficient context in order to “help readers understand” the region (Geert Groot Koerkamp). Moreover, Floris Akkerman claimed that foreign reporting for him also implied giving a story a descriptive context, in order to let the reader experience “through his eyes” the “unknown world three hours away by plane”. He aimed to report not just by providing facts stated by his sources, but when having enough space, to report on the country’s looks, smells and emotions of the local people.

- *Active journalism*

The most active stake on own role as a foreign reporter was expressed by Laura Starink. While answering about what motivated her to initiate the web platform on Russian affairs *Raam op Rusland*, she expressed her intrinsic political intentions:

And I think it is important {to report}, the world is becoming more difficult and unclear to lots of people...And lots of people just don't want to read anything on politics anymore. And that's dangerous...There is such avalanche of information, that it's becoming more and more difficult to get a clear picture that many people don't want to take the time. And I think it's important to defend European values, to defend democracy, transparency, good governance, freedom of speech, freedom of the press. And I think we are in our small insignificant way, contributing to that.

Moreover, she even added that, when with other two editors they ask for funds from sponsors, they said the following very powerful statement: “We are three people sitting in the kitchen table, trying to prevent the Third world war to happen”.

Also, Floris Akkerman shared an interesting opinion about his efforts as a foreign correspondent to address some important social concerns, and, in a way, to educate the audience: “Sometimes as a journalist you want to show something which is in his/her eyes important. Like my story in Akkerman

about grass roots politics, the refugee problem in Mariupol of going to Volgograd to show the importance of the Soviet army in WWII. In the West we forget about this and only thank US, GB, Canada and France” (email communication). The attempt of Michiel Driebergen to ‘give a warning’ through his reporting can be also interpreted as part of active journalism. He shared about his attempt to pitch the story to his editor about a danger of severe pollution problem in a town with the chemical factory located very close to the occupied territory. His story got rejected, and he wondered whether it was included in his role to report on what might happen, which is “not typical for a journalist”, and to give an early warning.

- *Informants of important topics*

Rather more detached role was expressed by Wouter van Loon. Reporter, not specialized in the foreign news, described his role as: “I try to inform people as good as I can. So then, it’s with the readers to decide what they are doing with it.” But, at the same time, it was his own judgement about what topics are newsworthy, or ‘the must-know’ topics to his audiences. He mentioned he restrains from looking at online analytics of perception of his articles, and making decisions independent from commercial value. Most of the journalists mentioned similar view of their role in selecting worthwhile stories, based on intrinsic desire to inform.

4.3. Routines

4.3.1. News Values and agency

Most of the reporters mentioned the drama event value inherently affecting their routine, selection of topics in particular. Compared to the amount of work they had during the period of 2013 to 2015, ‘the hottest part of the war’ (Tom Vennink, *De Volkskrant*) - including the Revolution, Crimea annexation, MH17 plane crash and first invasions in Donbass area - now the environment in the country is not newsworthy enough. When asked to name examples of not getting to “sell” a story to an editor, for most of the reporters the absence of event value appeared as the main reason. Tobias Wals shared his experience with weekly magazine *Groene Amsterdammer*, when the editor rejected the story about oppression of Crimean Tatars because the issue was not something particularly new and the conflict was ‘steadily bad’. He told: “I did propose one large article to *Groene*. About Crimean Tatars, which are constantly being pressured by Russia in Crimea. But they said it's not a newsworthy topic, because there's no development in it. Like, it's bad, but it's steadily bad and there's nothing changing, so that's why they didn't want an article on that.”

Tom Vennink discussed how the audiences are tired of reading about ‘another wounded soldier’ in the morning paper. While not having experience with rejection of his stories by the editor, Tom Vennink recalls the story that was published in *De Volkskrant*, yet did not get enough interest of

the editors and the readers. As he explains, trying to cover the war not from the frontline but with a narrower angle, he interviewed Ukrainian soldiers in the military hospital in Dnepr (city in central-eastern Ukraine), asking them what they were fighting for and where they thought this ‘frozen war’ was going to. Unlike his personal interest and involvement, he mentioned he saw little public reaction to the story (judges probably from analytics online), as it ended up in the back of the newspaper. That is the reason he thought that stories not directly related to the war would receive more attention. His example illustrates the prevalence of negative news in the general news media production, as these are more currently selected in accordance with the news value of drama (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

Journalists also tried to bring up the topic of war in Eastern Ukraine by embedding it in a soft kind of story. This way Tom Vennink wrote about the premiere of the movie ‘Crimea’ featuring romantic story of a couple during the annexation, or a story about nightlife in the occupied city of Donetsk. Koerkamp’s story about volunteer actions in a small town, and Akkerman’s article about the refugee problem were also alternative ways to bring up the topic of war, even without the hard news event. All these stories do not talk about the events during the war directly, however they are about the effects of the war on ordinary people in its various aspects.

The association Treaty of Ukraine got a considerable attention of the media, due to its direct link to the national audience, Dutch citizens, following another important news value - proximity. The topic of Referendum was raised in the majority of interviews was mentioned during the majority of interviews. The event itself was described by interviewees as heavily politicized and used by populist parties and journalists as an opportunity to spread negative narratives about Ukraine, that is similar to what Ukrainian critics argued. As it was described previously, prior the Referendum the dominant groups made use of traditional journalistic routine of the ‘event’, or ‘drama’, to portray Ukraine as deviant group in the press the ideological layer of structure comes to play. That corresponds with the previous literature on the role that the national ideology can have on the news selection and presentation, which reflects the country’s international policies (Westerstahl and Johansson, 1994). In this case - the populist anti-EU attitudes. However, Michiel Driebergen expressed his dual attitude towards the effect of the Referendum and its public attention. In his view, despite of its often ‘aggressive’ coverage, the Referendum had caused bringing the topic of Ukraine back on the news agenda after a long silence. In this case he also saw an opportunity of emergence of the news space for himself to produce stories with his own positive intentions about Ukraine, and to dispel the black and white image of the country, that, to his view, really worked, compared to the image it had prior to the event. This vision of a positive opportunity in the stigma enforced by political groups can be read as an expression of the journalist’s agency.

4.3.2. Source-oriented routines and agency

Enterprise sources

One of the effective ways to make the content of their stories appealing was by incorporating a human factor into it. As Joost Bosman expressed keeping it 'as human as possible' makes it 'readable' and 'comprehensive' for an uninterested reader. Adhering to 'Vox populi' principle was also considered congruent with his own opinion. He explains his attitude to sources in the conflict reporting as it follows: "Vox populi' is still way more important in situations like that, because the war affects people. That is most important. It affects their... It derails their lives in many ways and that what makes it the most visible to show what is a war, actually".

Similarly, Gert Groot Koerkamp, Trouw's correspondent based in Moscow, justified his selection for the story about volunteering organization formed in a small town in the separatist area. Rather than reporting on a general situation of the small town in Eastern Ukraine, he explained he was trying to begin his story with an interesting narrow angle, and then relate it to a general problem. He found the phenomenon of ordinary people joining together to solve civil problems at the times when the authorities are not capable or not willing to do that to become a positive approach to present a background of the war to a reader. Laura Starink also mentioned her preference in choosing small angles in investigative reporting. Trying to find out information in a small place, where people know one another, and where it is easy to get access.

Lastly, journalists referred to their own first-hand knowledge of the event, that belongs, according to Shoemaker and Reese (1996) to the enterprise group of sources. Floris Akkerman also shared that it is important to bring sensory details. He claimed that incorporation of such details is what makes an underlying difference between reporting on the ground and from the desk:

I think it's the main cause for the foreign correspondent, because otherwise, I can sit here in Amsterdam and write: "There again the revolution is going on in Kiev and Euromaidan, people are getting killed, there are shootings." No, as a foreign reporter, - and you are on the ground - you have to write what's happening on the ground: what kind of smell, what kind of colours the tables have, what people are, the emotions of the people, it's your plus.

In conclusion, journalists expressed they were happy to publish stories related to daily life and ordinary people in Ukraine, when the newspaper type or a relationship with the editor gave such a chance. Such stories included topics as about nightlife in Donetsk (Tom Vennink), garbage problem in Lviv (Tobias Wals), volunteer (Gert Groot Koerkamp) and grassroots initiatives (Floris Akkerman) in small towns. It enabled them to enact the role of a foreign reporter related to cover grey shades and complicate the image they have, judged from a Western point of view. Often it also enabled to bring up the topic of the war in alternative, and often, more positive ways.

Routine sources

Floris Akkerman also shared that he was willing to show the ‘truth’ in his articles, and, quoting his words: “the politicians always lie”, so his personal preference was usually talking to ordinary citizens, or “people on the street”. However, he admitted, in some cases, interviewing formal sources was inevitable. But on the other hand, their opinion was identified with giving an article some more firmness. As Geert Groot Koerkamp explains the importance of keeping a story very informative, choosing an informant who would tell this comprehensive picture on the situation in Ukraine is a crucial tactic. So, an interview with a knowledgeable, influential and outspoken person such as Sergiy Taroeta, former Donbas governor. Besides his authoritative position, the journalist also appreciated the source for having a critical, yet well-informed opinion of the government. Finding the right interviewee with expertise and analytical thinking was a great tool to tell a story, he claimed.

Informal sources

Out of Ukrainian sources the media names mentioned were *KyivPost*, *InfoResist*, *Hromadske*, *Radio Svoboda*; although, almost always the journalists acknowledged some uncertainty about their independence from political and economic influences. Bosman explains that he uses *InfoResist* website even while knowing it is politically biased. Due to the very limited sources of information in the area, he has to rely on what is available, he explained. In such case, he says, it is crucial to state that the website is pro-Ukrainian when quoting the source, so that the audience understands.

Given that almost all the journalists had a knowledge of Russian language, and less - of Ukrainian, they also referred to Russian news sources, for example, *Meduza* and *Korrespondent*. They also referred to big international media outlets like *BBC*, *The Guardian* and *New York Times*, as well as the news agencies, including *ANP* and *Reuters*. Social media also proved to be useful in the area with very limited amount of sources. Journalists named Russian networking sites such as *Vkontakte*, *Lenta.ru* (Bert Lanting), Twitter and Facebook (Eva Cukier, Laura Starink, Joost Bosman) were frequently used to get the news information but also to get a greater sense about locals’ perspective. Using social media was mentioned as especially useful for Eva Cukier, who currently reported on Ukraine from her editor’s desk in Amsterdam. She said that following the social media accounts of the occupants’ area, such as *Donbas Press Agency*, and follow what people were twittering helped to understand their own state of mind. She also mentioned making contacts with people from both sides using social media. New media sources were also especially helpful for Wouter van Loon. Using “bellingcat” method to verify the information of other news organizations, so searching for filmed evidence of the event on social media and localizing it via Google Maps was, in some way, a substitute to eye-witness experience for him.

Experts

Gert Groot Koerkamp, correspondent mainly working for *Trouw*, mentioned that in his reporting, more than by presenting facts in a simple and interesting way, he tries to craft an informative story, giving it interpretation, to really help the reader understand the broader picture. So, apart from presenting the particular problem or event in the country within the frame of ‘what is happening, when, and sometimes why’, it is also important, and, especially the more eager readers are also interested to know, what the possible consequences or solutions are; therefore, opinion of an expert can be also important.

Inaccessibility

The interviews suggest that difficulties with the physical access to the occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine keep the journalists away from covering the war, while they feel there is an urge to do so. Starting from 2016 foreign journalists, in order to enter and report in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic, are required to apply for accreditation and get approval of the DPR Ministry. As the interviewees explained, this is a very slow process and is hardly ever successful. Joost Bosman shared he tried to apply online and received an immediate refusal in two words only: “Accreditation – no”. Bosman and Lanting explained there is an alternative way to get into the area – through Russia and in secret from authorities. However, both journalists stated they rather would not do that, Lanting said it is too dangerous and that it contradicts “the way he likes to work”. Bosman persisted that despite a similar hardship of requirements to get to the Crimea, he would still want to get to the area officially, explaining that it would be ethically correct and in coherence with his personal belief that the peninsula still belongs to Ukraine: “I think, it’s, first of all, ethically correct. It is not good to cross, to not go through Ukraine, because I do find Crimea is still Ukrainian... But if you have this opinion, I mean, then you should, also, I mean be fair and go through Ukraine.” It was interesting to hear how the correspondent straight after talking about the constraints of access, put forward the alternative idea of a story, and turned a constraint into opportunity. His story about Marioepel, the port city bordering with Donetsk Oblast was, as he explains, an alternative solution to access problem, which enabled him to still produce the story about the conflict, just on the other side of the frontline. Even though, he regretted he was not able to compare the situation to that in the separatist area, him and his editor at *Financiaale Dagblad* were happy about the choice of Marioepel for a news story, as the city was interesting due to its strategic location, a lot of industry and military. Bosman admitted also the time and effort cost of travel to Crimea are worthwhile, as he saw an opportunity of a new story:

It can deliver another good story, because you have to cross the border... There are lines of people waiting, you can talk to them, you can talk to truck drivers, you can, you know. So, that’s interesting for people in Holland. To see what is the situation on the border now, what is going on there, so it gives me another, more pragmatic approach, that I can have another stories for this.

4.3.3. Story presentation and Audience Appeal

Giving to the story a rich context was identified as especially valuable, and the amount of the background explanation needed, depended on the story. For the reason MH17 airplane crash had a huge traumatic effect on the Dutch audience, there was no need for having a separate explanatory section, Gert-Jan Dennekamp explains. Together with the another reporter on the event for NOS, they produced a series of investigative stories on the disaster, where the main background information was put only in the first one, as about such a traumatic event a certain common knowledge already exists. What he believed was unique about their approach to MH17 coverage, compared to other national media, was specifically the ‘war point of view’. So, the journalists really tried to investigate what happened at the day of the plane crash and build linkages to the other events happening at that time of the military conflict.

4.3.4. Views and experiences with Objectivity

Reflecting on practice of objectivity in own reporting was not an easy thing for respondents, at first. But a common pattern of answers was also that reporters were initially answering that they adhered to the principle, however, later in a conversation denied being objective. Confusion roots in ambiguity of the term itself. When asked their personal views on and experiences of objectivity, the journalistic norm was interpreted by journalists in three different ways. It was discussed as a principle of keeping balance between opposing sides, in relation to sources and perspectives; using only verifiable facts and as the act of detachment from personal views and opinions while reporting.

Differentiating facts from opinion

Journalists admitted the complexity and ambiguity of objectivity. Laura Starink acknowledges that possession of knowledge that a reporter has on the country, its culture, politics, language skills serves as a justification for journalist’s objectivity. She explicitly states to be not objective, as the selection she makes as a journalist is biased by this very knowledge which “formed” her as a journalist. In that sense, her attitude is congruent with the argument by Tuchman (1972), that journalistic “facts” are filled with the producer’s personal views on reality. Describing her disturbance prior the Referendum, she expressed that her personal disagreement with the politicization of the issue was too huge for her to remain professional objectivity:

It was a very negative narrative (...) And the populists used that very heavily. So for me this was very difficult because as a journalist, you are supposed to be objective. But in this case I wasn't. Because I thought you know it is crazy to have a referendum on a subject that nobody knows anything about.

As Laura continued the discussion, she described that the solution to express her opinion was to publish a pamphlet with the advice to vote “in favor of the Agreement”, which was “not a normal thing to do for a journalist”, she said. She added that because at that time she had already left the

position in the newspaper, she considered herself more as a publicist or a writer, yet she still offered “more or less the same” reportages to De Correspondent and published a series of articles there, without the part with the advice. She raises a question of the journalist’s reflexivity - and that she tries herself and appreciates in the reporting of others - openness about her individual way of seeing things, and about doubts she might have in the complex narratives of the conflict investigations. Koerkamp’s view on the interpretative reporting is also similar to what Laura Starink was saying, that simply presenting four narratives and telling reader to choose one would be unfair, because he or she does not have a sufficient background to make such judgement.

Talking about objectivity Tobias Wals says full impartiality of the reporter is impossible, because one’s views of the world and social environment are affecting journalist’s decisions. Apart from this intrinsic, often unconscious bias that distorts the traditional norm of objectivity, he argues that the standard is also unreachable because a reporter simply cannot be aware of everything that happens around him; therefore vast of topics are left unreported, and perspectives - left out. On his personal example of authoring the feature story for Volkskrant about sex tourism in Kiev, he claimed he was ‘not proud’ of, he indicated that being unaware of the mechanisms behind such a complicated problem, he published a story which was ‘too anecdotal’ for a serious subject. He explained that when he wrote it, it was the time when he had just arrived to Ukraine and still was not familiarized with the environment.

Also, opinion column, travel section, and fictional supplement of the medium were identified as alternative spaces for subjective and more interpretative writing.

Balancing opposing views

Interpreting the question on defensive routines as quite difficult, or “threatening” (Hermanowicz, 2002) question, I planned to approach it gradually, between the middle and ending part of the interview. However, the discussion on objectivity was, in most cases, raised earlier in the interview, usually in the context of balancing the sources used in the story.

Gert-Jan Dennekamp illustrates the NOS reports on MH17 air crash as examples of the story where the oppositional views are giving relatively equal attention, as during such investigations a reporter has time to do field research on one side, and then, on another. That is different during the coverage of military conflict in Eastern Ukraine, he shares. Balancing of both sides of the frontline was hard and actually impossible when the real war started, because, he argues that you as a journalist are either on one side or the other. Valuing first-hand evidence the most, he says it is complex to be objective during the war, when you report on one side of the frontline and cannot eyewitness and check the facts about the reality on the other. He differentiates here that once a journalist is in such situation, the solution could be to refer to casualties of the other side, report about their numbers and opinions; however, whether such reporting would be objective - stays a very complex and debatable question. He strongly contends the act of Ukrainian activist website ‘Mirotvorets’ of making the

accreditation list of journalists who work on the oppositional side of the border: “I think they have brought people in danger, they have framed Ukrainians, who work on the other side, as being pro-separatists, while there is a need to be on the other side. I mean, if you are not there, you don't know what's happening.”

4.4. Organizational factors and Agency

At large, it can be stated that organizational factors played a big role in both constraining and enabling the production of news on Ukraine, while their individual agency inevitably came into play as well. Foreign reporters acknowledged that almost always they were the initiators of the themes to cover about Ukraine, which was quite natural, as they explained, because they were on the site and having an expertise in the region. More specifically, audience's interest and awareness in international affairs was mentioned as the most prominent factor. Therefore, the reporters often mentioned the two largest national broadsheets, *De Volksrant* and *NRC*, to provide the most space for in-depth, elaborated stories on Ukraine. Newspapers' budgets and the type of readers – middle class educated and interested in international affairs – allowed for higher frequency of and depth in reporting about Ukraine. Deadlines for sending stories mostly were also depending on the journalists themselves, except for hard or urgent events that were asked by editors to be sent the same day. At the same time, the reader's point of view inevitably had to be taken into account.

Wouter van Loon, who reported on Ukraine from the desk, admitted that his selection and presentation of the stories were, first of all, based on own assessment of its appropriateness to the specific newspaper's target group. He selected the story about violation of a ceasefire in the frontline city Avdiivka would be relevant for *Metro*, because the issue was covered repetitively by the major international news outlets, including *New York Times* and *BBC*. Knowing that *Metro* readers are mostly interested in national and local news, among international affairs he usually selected the topics that he considered “must-know” issues only; and maintained quite a simple writing style. Writing for *NRC*, on the other hand, required a very different mindset - writing for educated, interested in foreign affairs public, so giving less space for explanatory background and, instead, providing more detail to the issue.

Drama, or event was clearly not the only criteria to publish a story about Ukraine. The type of media outlet and its focus on international news were identified as factors that, to some extent, constrained journalists' choices; yet also enabled publishing stories with alternative views on the war and soft news. When asked about the initial idea of the story about the state of Mariopol, a city bordering with occupied region Donbass, Joost Bosman, a freelance Moscow correspondent shares his appreciation for the policy at *Financiaale Dagblad*:

The first one {news story} was just because the newspaper wanted me to go to Donbass again, because I haven't been there for a while, and they were interested in what is the situation now. Which is quite pleasant. The more and more what you tend to see is that mass media only sends their correspondents only when there's really hot news. Only then. But I have the luck that Financiaale Dagblad is also interested in stories just to look what's going on, you know. What is the status quo in Donbass...

Similar remarks were mentioned by the reporters of *Trouw* and *Reformatisch Dagblad*, the newspapers with a special religious orientation, originated from the pillarized system. Editors of these two outlets allowed and sometimes even encouraged journalists to write soft stories on Ukraine. Floris Akkerman, regular freelance reporter for Protestant daily *Reformatisch Dagblad* explained that newspaper's openness to such stories is corresponding with how it treats its audiences. As Akkerman explains, *Reformatisch Dagblad* readership are religious, quite close minded people, therefore the vision of the editorial board is to broaden their readers' views and 'show them what is happening in the world'. Both Akkerman and Bosman pointed out the distinction between the quality papers and *Algemeen Dagblad*. In their experience with the latter, the daily usually was not supporting suggestions of soft topics, due to its predominant focus on the national and local news.

Nevertheless, even reporting for one of the quality newspapers, journalists at times still found it challenging to predict the readers' interest, and, thus, consider it is safer to downplay their interest and memory and present the story in the simplest possible way. As Bert Lanting (*De Volkskrant*) explains: "Most people won't remember or are not interested in what is happening around them. Then you see what's happening on your street, what's happening in your town, what's happening in your country is much more important." Similarly, Laura Starink shared she was struggling with deciding on amount of detail she had to put in a story while writing for the public that is hardly interested. In the series of articles politicization of the Referendum on Association agreement she wrote for *De Correspondent*, she attempted to fill in the extreme gap of knowledge that existed among Dutch political parties and citizens. Using own eye-witnessed knowledge about the transition of communism towards capitalism, from the days she used to report for NRC, she wrote about oligarchy during the transition, and how Russian and Ukrainian oligarchs had differed. She reflected that finding a way to explain such historical developments and nuances was a hard process, coinciding with constant weighing of how much interest a relatively disinterested reader will have.

Besides making an individual assessment of the topic's relevancy to the media outlet's public and its convergence with the organizational policy, having a good relationship with the editor was also admitted to be an influential factor. Vennink (*De Volkskrant*) and Akkerman (*Reformatisch Dagblad*) acknowledged having a mutual understanding with their reporters regarding the importance of human stories and reporting on ordinary life in the region. Tom Vennink explains:

I'm lucky with my editor. Because he's not only interested in politics, he finds it important to show that there are people living in Russia and in Ukraine. Sometimes, it almost seems like

there is no people here, there's only a President, called Putin. And some oligarchs, and they decide everything that happens. Which is on the political side, true, to some extent. But, there is 145 million people living here in Russia, and they absolutely not all agree with everything that the government decides. The same in Ukraine.

Floris Akkerman shared that an idea to produce a series of articles about ordinary life in a small Ukrainian city which, amusingly, had identical name to his – Akkerman - was originally proposed by the editor. Journalist also expressed he appreciated having such unique opportunity and called his time reporting there as “wonderful experience”, given that approaching and making connections with locals was much easier than usual after he introduced his name. In this case, mutual understanding with the editor enabled him to publish rather atypical story about Ukraine, while also adding a personal touch to it.

Division of tasks

Shrinking number of the foreign correspondents per organization means that fewer people cover the bigger regions. Usually the broadsheets had two or three correspondents covering Eastern European region from abroad. In *NRC*, as editor Eva Cukier explains, the two are based in Moscow and Budapest. She, at the same time, is responsible for the news Ukraine among other twenty-seven countries that are included in the region, from her desk in Amsterdam, which she found quite challenging. As most of reporters on Ukraine are Russia correspondents, they travelled to Ukraine frequently during first two years of the conflict, and in recent years – about two twice a year. At the same time, however, in case of important political events - like recent Presidential elections in Russia in March 2018 – Russia correspondents ought to stay in Moscow and make the coverage.

4.5. Foreign reporting in XXI century

Seven out of eleven reporters I interviewed are working as freelance foreign correspondents. While being self-employed, they have a contract with one or several media outlets for which they report on the regular basis. This type of employment of foreign correspondence prevails in The Netherlands, as Geert Groot Koerkamp (*Trouw*) explained, due to the high costs for the news organization to support the job. Two correspondents expressed that they had experienced financially struggling time in the beginning of their careers in covering Eastern Europe, admitting that freelance work can be very difficult if there are no events. Therefore, most of the correspondents work regularly for at least two or three media outlets.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

The perceptions that Dutch foreign reporters have on their professional role have their similarities and differences. However, most of them characterized themselves taking a more active stance than neutral informants. While journalists claimed they were reporting the realities of the foreign country, they tried to do it in a nuanced way and represent the country from its different angles, in spite of Western mindset that their home audiences hold. They realized the stereotypical view the majority of their audiences have about Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries, and as their responsibility they envisioned to complicate the general views and show multiple perspectives. They sometimes counterposed themselves with the news agencies, that quote officials and report on statistical numbers. On the contrast, they recognized how their expertise and interest in the region, knowledge of language, history and culture, as well as the actual presence in the field had added considerable value to their work. By proliferating voices of ordinary people, searching for alternative ways to bring up the theme of the conflict to news agenda, finding creative ways to bypass the problem of access to the area, they usually tried to cover topics which in their view were important. By that they exercised their agency in a limited amount of space within the foreign news sections, competing with the primary countries in the global information flow and other wars and important events in the world.

Reporter's knowledge of the language, culture, history of the region affect one's work approach to sources and selection of topics. Personal interest in the region and experiences, the feeling of connection with locals that the foreign correspondents have in Ukraine influence their intentions to cover daily life stories, might give them new story ideas, help with verifying facts. Some also noticed that these personal factors influence their choices on subconscious levels, implying that objectivity in its traditional sense is unreachable. Personal opinion still had to be separated from the "facts", and opinion section was named as a solution. But selection of topics itself was mostly referred as in accordance to personal views on the role of a journalist reporting on a foreign land, as well his or her individual interpretations on what is 'important to know' for the Dutch public, or the specific target group within in. They still try to adhere to the value of objectivity when giving balance to opposing sides of the conflict, but, again, they did it by using own critical judgement of truth and not because it is a golden rule. Some even take a more active political stance, by reporting with features of peace journalism trying to build closer relationships between East and West, and, even "try to prevent the 'third world war'".

Regarding the challenges, they faced, they expressed that being allocated with the task to report alone or with only one or two "fellow" reporters on the big scope of countries in Eastern-European region was very difficult. They have to prioritize and make quick evaluations of what is important for the audience to know and how they can present issue, often very complicated and unfamiliar to their target group. Even though the reporters often expressed appreciation to

opportunities their news organizations provided them with, and to harmonic relationship they had with their editors, they still faced rejections of their stories on Ukraine sometimes. Usually the reasons to that were lack of action and novelty, or recency, when the story pitched, referred to the circumstances in the conflict zones east of the country and Crimea. Similar to the conclusion of Kester (2010), correspondents found it challenging to adhere to “western journalistic standards”, as in the area they often had to deal with unreliable and inaccessible sources of post-Soviet country and in environment of a frozen conflict. They mentioned the importance of relying on own instincts and critical thinking. This also evidences the strong professionalization of journalism in The Netherlands, inherent in the media system of Democratic Corporatist model.

Moreover, considering that most of the foreign correspondents are freelancers, responsibility of covering the travel and living costs, as they admit, can be very challenging. Dutch quality media, including the biggest three newspapers, *Volkskrant*, *NRC* and *Trouw*, the national broadcaster NOS, as well as from more specialized dailies - FD, RD and De Correspondent - these newsrooms allow for deeper and interpretive reporting. Reporters of such media proved to be more inclined for cosmopolitanism view of the world, by attempting to uncover the ‘grey shades’ of secondary countries like Ukraine and other former Soviet regions, and expressing their will to show readers a different from Western world view. Of course, what has been heard the large national-oriented media outlet such as AD is leaning more to limit their international coverage to single events in form of the hard news and issues closely-related to national matters. In the future research, considering a crucial importance given to eye-witnessing experience identified in this study, it will be interesting to interview more desk researchers who report on Ukraine. But it was also found that digital spaces provide innovative solutions to verify information for those who report from the desk. Websites of independent news organizations, social media, Google Earth used by Wouter van Loon, so the generalization about ‘fast’ and ‘bad’ desk journalism in the digital era should not be overstated, similar to the argument expressed by Archetti (2012).

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

1. How did you start reporting on Ukraine/ Eastern Europe?
2. What was the initial idea of the story?
 - How was the story/theme selected?
 - Why was it considered important or worth publishing (drama, importance, recency, proximity, etc.)?
 - Did the editor approve it straight away?
3. How would you justify the choice of these sources?
 - How did you approach them?
 - Is that how it generally works with reporting on Ukraine?
4. In your view, would the same story be published in another newspaper?
 - What, would you say, are the criteria of the (media name)?
 - How would you describe the (media name) audience?
 - How much autonomy do you have in the choice of stories and angles?
5. How did you expect the (media name) readers to perceive the story?
 - How relevant would it be to the national audience?
 - Would they be interested in reading it?
 - What do you usually do to ensure they understand it?
6. What other elements in the content of a foreign news story do you consider important?
7. What we read in academic literature, objectivity is a very important yet contested journalistic standard. How do you understand this concept?
 - How do you usually deal with detaching from personal views, when writing a story?
 - What would an unbalanced story look like?
8. What do you think is your role of a foreign reporter/correspondent?

Appendix 2: Consent form

CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:

Anna Mazur

Kobelaan 396, 3067MD Rotterdam

anyuta60995@gmail.com

+31681790157

DESCRIPTION

You are invited to participate in a research about foreign reporting. The purpose of the study is to understand the opportunities and constraints that Dutch journalists face in covering Ukraine.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms, the questions of the interview will be related to the stories about Ukraine that you have authored.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use a tape recorder for the interview. You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. By default, the names of the interviewees in this study will be reported. Yet, if you prefer, I will make sure your identity will be anonymized for the whole interview or for the particular parts. I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

TIME INVOLVEMENT

Your participation in this study will take approximately 45 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

PAYMENTS

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If it is your preference, your identity will be kept anonymous, either for the whole interview, or for specific part of it.

Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish — Thesis supervisor, Dr. Isabel Awad.

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Name

Signature

Date

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study

Name

Signature

Date

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.

Appendix 3: Interview participants

Name	Professional profile	Media name(s)
Michiel Driebergen	Eastern-Europe freelance correspondent, publicist of books about Ukraine	<i>Trouw, Radio 1</i>
Bert Lanting	Russia and US foreign reporter, former editor	<i>De Volkskrant</i>
Wouter van Loon	Former freelance reporter, currently data journalist at <i>NRC</i>	<i>Metro, NRC</i>
Gert-Jan Dennekamp	Former Moscow and Brussels correspondent, currently reporter Employed, reporter	<i>NOS, Nieuwsuur</i>
Floris Akkerman	Freelance Russia and Eastern Europe correspondent; reporter on Radio 1	<i>De Correspondent, Reformatisch Dagblad, AD, Radio 1</i>
Tobias Wals	Slavicist, freelance journalist	<i>Groene Amsterdammer, NRC</i>
Laura Starink	Freelance journalist, publicist, editor at Raam op Rusland	<i>NRC, Raam op Rusland</i>
Eva Cukier	Editor Russia & Eastern Europe, freelance journalist, writer, editor	<i>NRC</i>
Joost Boosman	Freelance Correspondent	<i>Het Financiaale Dagblad Algemeen Dagblad,</i>
Tom Vennink	Freelance Russia correspondent	<i>Volkskrant</i>
Geert Groot Koerkamp	Freelance Russia correspondent	<i>Trouw</i>

Appendix 4: List of news stories used in the interviews

1. M. Driebergen	Driebergen, M. (2016, April 7). Oekraïense studenten: Nu moeten we het zelf doen. <i>Trouw</i> . Retrieved from: https://www.trouw.nl/home/oekraiense-studenten-nu-moeten-we-het-zelf-doen~a693ae34/
2. B. Lanting	Lanting, B. (2018, February 12). Ex-Navo-chef adviseert Verenigde Naties 'neutrale' vredesmacht te sturen naar Oekraïne. <i>De Volkskrant</i> . Retrieved from: https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/ex-navo-chef-adviseert-verenigde-naties-neutrale-vredesmacht-te-sturen-naar-oekraine--bcdad21f/
3. W. van Loon	Van Loon, W. (2017, February, 2). Oorlog in Oekraïne laait weer op: Dit moet je weten. <i>Metro</i> . Retrieved from: https://www.metronieuws.nl/nieuws/buitenland/2017/02/oorlog-in-oekraine-laait-weer-op-dit-moet-je-weten
4. Gert-Jan Dennekamp	Dennekamp, G. (2017, July 2). Op zoek naar Doebinski, de belangrijkste getuige van de MH17-ramp. <i>NOS</i> . Retrieved from: https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2181078-op-zoek-naar-doebinski-de-belangrijkste-getuige-van-de-mh17-ramp.html
5. F. Akkerman	Akkerman, F. (2017, August 3). Akkerman in Akkerman: Die nieuwe straatnamen zijn verwarrend. <i>Reformatisch Dagblad</i> . Retrieved from: https://www.rd.nl/vandaag/buitenland/akkerman-in-akkerman-die-nieuwe-straatnamen-zijn-verwarrend-1.1425639
6. T. Wals	Wals, T. (2017, September, 27). Vuilnisoorlog beslecht de Oekraïense presidentsstrijd. <i>De Groene Amsterdammer</i> . Retrieved from: https://www.groene.nl/artikel/vuilnisoorlog-beslecht-de-oekraiense-presidentsstrijd Wals, T. (2017, December 14). Oekraïense hipsters moeten naar het front. <i>De Groene Amsterdammer</i> . Retrieved from: https://www.groene.nl/artikel/oekraiense-hipsters-moeten-naar-het-front
7. L. Starink	Series of articles in <i>De Correspondent</i> - 2016: https://decorrespondent.nl/laurastarink
8. E. Cukier	Cukier, E. (2017, December 27). Grote gevangenenruil in Oost-Oekraïne. <i>NRC</i> . Retrieved from:

	https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/12/27/grote-gevangenenruil-in-oost-oekraine-a1586290
9. J. Boosman	Bosman, J. (2017, July 9). In Marioepol zijn geen separatisten meer. <i>Het Financiaale Dagblad</i> . Retrieved from: https://fd.nl/economie-politiek/1208811/in-marioepol-zijn-geen-separatisten-meer
10. Tom Vennink	<p>Vennink, T. (2017, August 3). Jong Kiev danst op vergane glorie. <i>De Volkskrant</i>. Retrieved from: https://verhalen.volkskrant.nl/rave-in-oekraine#9867</p> <p>Vennink, T. (2017, September 29). Langverwachte film over 'de terugkeer' van de Krim naar 'het moederland' in première in Rusland. <i>De Volkskrant</i>. Retrieved from: https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/langverwachte-film-over-de-terugkeer-van-de-krim-naar-het-moederland-in-premiere-in-rusland~b362d394/</p>
11. Geert Groot Koerkamp	<p>Koerkamp, G. G. (2017, June 19). Oorlog komt de machthebbers vooral goed uit. <i>Trouw</i>. Retrieved from: https://www.trouw.nl/home/-oorlog-komt-de-oeckraiense-machthebbers-vooral-goed-uit-~ae274d34/</p> <p>Koerkamp, G. G. (2017, June 7). Oekraïne: Fenomeen vrijwilliger sterk in opkomst — 'Genoeg van die oorlog'. <i>Parool</i>. Retrieved from: https://journa.com/article/LGbNCfTEU_NuZIDIQxMtK8fLqo37CJ1QgQ0zPBNtX6M</p>