

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**

**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism

Department of Journalism

**Master's Thesis**

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**Sebas van Aert**

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**

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**Traditional Foreign Correspondence in  
Crisis? A Dutch Perspective**

Master's Thesis

Author of the Thesis: Sebas van Aert

Study programme: Journalism Studies

Supervisor: Veronika Macková, Ph.D.

Year of the defence: 2024

## **Declaration**

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.
4. During the preparation of this thesis, the author used no external tool or service.

In Prague on 19-7-2024

Sebas van Aert

## References

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## **Abstract**

Due to the advent of the internet, growing financial pressures, and a shifting global news industry, alternative forms of foreign correspondence have entered the media landscape, posing a threat to the future existence of the traditional foreign correspondent (TFC). Expectations about the nearing end of the profession have been tempered in recent years, prompting this research to explore the current position of TFCs within a Dutch context

It does so through fifteen semi-structured interviews with professionals, both TFCs and chiefs of the foreign desk, working for five selected Dutch news outlets. The outcome of these interviews points at an increased usage of non-traditional forms of foreign correspondence, which in certain cases, has taken over part of the tasks of their traditional counterpart. Only in one instance did it lead to a full replacement of the TFC. Overall, the relationship between alternative foreign correspondents and TFCs is not characterized as competitive but more as collaborative. Dutch TFCs, therefore, do not feel threatened by the rise of new forms of foreign correspondence. The adoption of certain tasks by non-traditional foreign correspondents has allowed the TFC to evolve from a news transmitter into a new role, marked by mediation, interpretation and contextualization of those news events. Other significant findings of this research: a drop in the number of Dutch TFC positions, a higher prevalence of freelance TFCs, and an increased working pressure among TFCs. Although these developments parallel the emergence of alternative forms of foreign correspondence, more research is needed to establish a possible direct link between them.

## **Abstrakt**

Vzhledem k nástupu internetu, rostoucímu finančnímu tlaku a měnícímu se globálnímu zpravodajskému průmyslu, vstoupily do mediálního prostoru alternativní formy zahraniční korespondence, které ohrožují budoucí existenci tradičního zahraničního zpravodaje (TFC). Očekávání blízkého konce této profese byla v posledních letech zmírněna, což podnítilo tento výzkum zaměřený na současné postavení TFC v nizozemském kontextu. Tento výzkum zahrnuje patnáct polostrukturovaných rozhovorů s profesionály, jak TFC, tak vedoucími zahraničních redakcí, pracujícími pro pět vybraných nizozemských zpravodajských agentur. Výsledky rozhovorů poukazují na zvýšené využívání netradičních forem zahraniční korespondence, která v některých případech převzala část úkolů svého tradičního protějšku. Pouze v jednom případě to vedlo k úplnému nahrazení TFC. Celkově lze říci, že vztah mezi alternativními zahraničními korespondenty a TFC není charakterizován jako konkurenční, ale spíše jako spolupracující. Nizozemští TFC se proto necítí být

## **Keywords**

Foreign correspondence, endangered species, local journalists, desk reporters, parachute journalists, citizen journalists, the Netherlands

## **Klíčová slova**

Zahraniční korespondence, ohrožené druhy, místní novináři, reportéři od stolu, novináři na padácích, občanští novináři, Nizozemsko

## **Název práce**

Zahraniční korespondence v krizi? Nizozemská perspektiva





foreign correspondents stationed in respectively London (Archetti, 2013) and Germany, Austria and Switzerland (Brüggemann et al., 2017), showed that the profession has undoubtedly changed – e.g. their financial position became more vulnerable – but is surviving. What’s more, the foreign correspondent is ‘doing relatively well’ and works under ‘rather stable working conditions’.

**Expected theoretical framework** (max. 1800 characters):

As a theoretical framework, I was thinking about using Hamilton and Jenner’s (2004) typology of 21st century foreign correspondents. In total they identify eight different types of foreign correspondence, seven of which are presented as non-traditional foreign correspondence, including the following:

1. **Parachute journalist:** When a story happens or breaks, reporters are sent in to cover events in the region temporarily.
2. **Foreign foreign correspondent:** A hired foreign national, a local from the area that is being covered.
3. **Local foreign correspondent:** Reporters for local news stations and newspapers find that local stories often have an international angle. This also includes desk reporters covering foreign events from the headquarters.
4. **Foreign local correspondent:** The foreign local correspondent is a foreigner who works and reports for a foreign news organization whose news is available worldwide on the Internet or via satellite.
5. **In-house foreign correspondent:** particularly prevalent in large organizations with international activities. The staffs of the World Bank and Ford, to name two such organizations.
6. **Premium service foreign correspondent:** Wire correspondents for big media organizations like Reuters or Associated Press.
7. **Amateur correspondent:** the unaffiliated and often untrained de facto journalist who reports on international events.

All of them pose threats to the **traditional foreign correspondent**, defined as ‘a cosmopolitan among cosmopolitans, a man in gray flannels who ranks very high in the hierarchy of reporters’, referring to the classic correspondent stationed abroad while traditionally having a fixed contract with the news organization he is usually working for.

I can utilize this framework to measure the current status of the traditional Dutch foreign correspondent, and see how other forms of correspondence have affected their profession.

**Expected methodology, and methods for data gathering and analysis** (max. 1800 characters):

I plan to do at least 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews (George, 2023) with Dutch foreign correspondents as well as with executives from Dutch media. In that way, I get a grasp of the subjective perspectives of both the professionals working in the field and the decision-makers who are calling the shots when it comes to the deployment of foreign correspondents.

I expect to be able to conduct interviews with traditional Dutch foreign correspondents who are currently stationed abroad, preferably in different regions, and who are working for different media employers. I would also like to talk to so-called ‘parachute’ correspondents and desk reporters who do

most of their foreign coverage from the headquarters. Ideally, I can talk to younger and older generations of foreign correspondents. From the correspondents, I want to hear about their experiences in the field and how the rise of non-traditional forms of correspondence has affected or influenced their daily work.

As for the media executives, I want to interview those persons involved in the deployment of foreign correspondents. This can be either editors-in-chief or heads of the foreign desk of media companies. I am curious to hear about their considerations when hiring foreign correspondents, either on freelance basis or on a full-time contract, and what role foreign correspondents play in the foreign coverage of the medium. Also, I would like to hear if the organization's numbers of traditional foreign correspondents have declined over the years and, if so, if that has resulted in a substitution by non-traditional foreign correspondents.

**Expected research design (data to be analyzed, for example, the titles of analyzed newspapers and selected time period):**

The interviews with the Dutch foreign correspondents and media executives will be recorded and carried out during the beginning of next year. I expect to do most of them online but it might be possible to do some of the interviews in person. Afterwards, the interviews will be transcribed and the transcripts will then be analyzed.

**Expected thesis structure (chapters and subchapters with brief description of their content):**

1. Abstract
2. Keywords
3. Introduction – Describing foreign correspondent as endangered species and questioning it
4. Literature review and Theoretical Framework – Current state of research on (Dutch) foreign correspondence, information on the Dutch media climate, Redefining Foreign Correspondence (Hamilton and Jenner, 2004)
5. Research design – Describing how I found interviewees and how I conducted the interviews
6. Methodology – Explaining why I chose for in-depth semi-structured interviews
7. Findings – Elaborate on my results
8. Discussion/Analysis – Embed my findings in the literature I discussed before
9. Conclusions – Repeat the findings of my research
10. Bibliography (APA)

**Basic literature list (at least 5 most important works related to the topic and the method(s) of analysis; all works should be briefly characterized on 2-5 lines):**

Archetti, C. (2013). Journalism in the age of global media: The evolving practices of foreign correspondents in London. *Journalism*, 14(3), 419-436.

- The article challenges the widespread notion that, in the age of global and instantaneous communication, foreign correspondence is becoming 'redundant'. The study suggests that foreign correspondence is indeed evolving, but that the changes are not necessarily for the worse. In fact, not only are foreign journalists not disappearing, but the heavy use of new communication

technologies – rather than leading to superficial and low-quality reporting – also supports the pursuit of exclusive news-story angles and a fuller delivery of the correspondent’s value.

Brüggemann, M., Keel, G., Hanitzsch, T., Götzenbrucker, G., & Schacht, L. (2017). Diverging worlds of foreign correspondence: The changing working conditions of correspondents in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. *Journalism*, 18(5), 539-557.

- It finds that the traditional correspondent – a professional journalist working full-time for legacy media – may be more resistant to change than expected. In the perception of correspondents, there is not much substitution through parachutes, locals, amateurs, or reporting from the headquarters. Working conditions are not worsening for everyone. Rather, we find diverging worlds of foreign correspondence depending on the media type, the country of origin, and the kind of job contract journalists have.

Hahn, O., Stalph, F., & Steller, T. (2018). Virtual foreign correspondence: Experimental instructions in digital foreign news reporting. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 73(1), 4-17.

- Article that starts from premise that traditional foreign correspondent is under pressure and asks whether a virtual foreign correspondent can replace its position. It says it can’t entirely.

Hamilton, J. M., & Jenner, E. (2004). Redefining foreign correspondence. *Journalism*, 5(3), 301-321.

- The traditional foreign correspondent is threatened due to recent economic pressures on traditional news coverage, global interdependence at the community level and technological innovation, but other, new types of foreign correspondence emerge. They introduce new typology of foreign correspondent: 8 types. “The traditional elite foreign correspondent is a yardstick that no longer measures well.”

Willnat, L., & Martin, J. (2012). 36 Foreign Correspondents—An Endangered Species?. *The global journalist in the 21st century*, 495.

- Coverage of foreign news by the US media has declined significantly in recent years as corporate owners sought increased profits and audiences grew more fragmented. Foreign affairs reporting is expensive, and many news organizations decided that shrinking budgets are best met by closing offices abroad and reducing the number of full-time foreign correspondents.

**Related theses and dissertations (list of B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. theses defended at Charles University or other academic institutions in the last five years):**

Verduijn, S. (2005, August 31). ‘Van onze correspondent’. Een onderzoek naar de Nederlandse buitenlandcorrespondent. *Media & Journalistiek*. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2105/3798>

Date / Signature of the student: [REDACTED] .....

<b>THIS PART TO BE FILLED BY THE ACADEMIC SUPERVISOR:</b>	
I confirm that I have consulted this research proposal with the author and that the proposal is related to my field of expertise at the Faculty of Social Sciences.	
I agree to be the Thesis supervisor.	[REDACTED]
Surname and name of the supervisor	Date / Signature of the supervisor
Further recommendations related to the topic, structure and methods for analysis:	
Further recommendations of literature related to the topic:	

The research proposal has to be printed, signed and submitted to the FSV UK registry office (podatelna) in two copies, **by November 15**, addressed to the Program Coordinator. Accepted research proposals have to be picked up at the Program Coordinator's Office, Sandra Lábová. The accepted research proposal needs to be included in the hard copy version of the submitted thesis.

**RESEARCH PROPOSALS NEED TO BE APPROVED BY THE HEAD OF ERASMUS MUNDUS JOURNALISM PROGRAM.**

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## **Introduction**

Foreign correspondents have been subjected to extensive academic research for over two decades as their position within the journalistic world has come increasingly under pressure. Technological innovations like the advent of the internet as well as financial incentives have led scholars to study their impact on this changing profession.

Part of the research, which significantly accumulated after the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, points out the declining coverage of foreign news on the part of American (Hannerz, 2004; Williams, 2011; Hamilton, 2012), British (Moore, 2010) and German (Altmeyden, 2010) news organizations, and with that the need for foreign correspondents. Particularly the ten-year-period between 1991 and 2001 saw a downfall in U.S. international reporting due to a perceived lack of immediate relevancy of distant events taking place around the globe. Foreign news wasn't 'news you can use' anymore, so its consumption went down (Hannerz, 2004). What also happened, is what Sambrook (2010) calls the 'corporatisation' of news media. This entails cutbacks attributed to the outflow of advertisement funds to internet giants like Google and Facebook, and the relatively high price tag of foreign correspondents. It led multiple scholars to question the future existence of foreign correspondence (Hamilton & Jenner, 2004; Willnat & Martin, 2014).

With the knowledge of today, claiming that foreign correspondence is a dying profession, is rather outdated. This is not to say the field didn't suffer any serious blows. Both in Europe (Terzis, 2014) and in the United States (Willnat & Martin, 2014; Carroll, 2007) full-time correspondents' posts have disappeared and bureaus have had to be shut down to avoid further shrinking of the profits of the large media companies they were a part of. Interestingly, due to a forecasted economic growth in Asia, it is expected that the number of foreign correspondents from countries in this region, most notably China (Galtung, 2014), will only increase (Sambrook, 2010). More concretely, Brüggeman et al. (2017) found that Japanese correspondents working in Germany, Austria and Switzerland outnumbered US correspondents and that China sent as many reporters to these three countries as France, which is expected to have more correspondents due to its close proximity. It is therefore safe to say that the perceived 'crisis' in which foreign correspondence finds itself, is mostly a Western phenomenon rather than a global one.

Nevertheless, multiple studies have shown that Western foreign correspondents are not a thing of the past. Instead of having succumbed to the surrounding threats, they have

adjusted to their novel online environment and adopted new working practices needed in this century (Hamilton & Jenner, 2004). The traditional (bureau-based) foreign correspondent has 'evolved' into a multi-faceted correspondent with, as Archetti (2013, p. 421) notes, "a greater variety of identities" and "distinct professional roles". Some of these alternative identities, such as the parachute journalist dispatched only when there is a big story to cover, are particularly attractive for media owners as they are cheaper than correspondents who are permanently stationed abroad (Hamilton & Jenner, 2004). Others, such as the local journalist covering their region for the foreign news company, have the added value of more in-depth and nuanced knowledge of sometimes complex issues. In other words, they don't have to bridge a potential cultural gap (Bebawi & Evans, 2019).

Not only has the traditional foreign correspondent partly been replaced by his often cheaper and more knowledgeable counterparts, the biggest change might have been the shift in the financial position of those who remained active correspondents. Whilst more than twenty years ago foreign correspondents could still count on a fixed salary as part of their full-time or part-time contract, today most of them have transitioned into freelancers (Galtung, 2014; Williams, 2011; Archetti, 2013). In reality, this often implies that correspondents work for multiple media outlets to survive financially, because a newsroom is no longer able or willing to provide the correspondent with a permanent income that allows them to make a living. Hence, the digital transition did not prove fatal to the traditional foreign correspondent but severely weakened their financial position.

The online environment foreign correspondents work in these days, didn't just pose a threat to their very existence, it was also considered an opportunity by many. In fact, it provided the profession with a whole new set of tools to operate with. With all the immediate online resources, information and social media, the remote region or country was suddenly within reach for everyone (Bebawi & Evans, 2019). This enabled desk reporters, also called 'virtual foreign correspondents' (Moore, 2010; Hahn et al., 2018), to cover their area from the headquarters while staying close to their families (Williams, 2011). For those traditional foreign correspondents still stationed abroad, work practices also changed positively, with some saying it made their work easier than before (Archetti, 2013). Many utilize other media sources as inspiration to find a unique angle for their own story. Nevertheless, this carries a risk of falling into so-called 'churnalism', i.e. the unchecked recycling of existing news stories.



Since foreign correspondents now had to compete with other foreign online messengers, such as bloggers and citizen journalists, their role in the field changed. With the advent of the internet and social media, an abundance of digital sources and voices emerged, taking away the correspondents' position as exclusive storytellers. They were forced to evolve and started shifting their focus to what Hannerz (2004) refers to as "managing meaning", i.e. being engaged in "reporting, representing, translating, interpreting" (p. 3). The emphasis has come to rest on the latter, the interpretation of news events rather than the transmission of bare information. Embedded in a foreign culture while equipped with the same cultural understanding as their target audience, correspondents find themselves in a unique position to 'add flesh to the bones', meaning they can explain and contextualize the complex events happening abroad (Sambrook, 2010).

This master thesis aims to contribute to the extensive literature on the changing nature of foreign correspondence by studying the position of traditional foreign correspondents working for Dutch media. In part, this is to restore some balance in the number of studies that have been done on this topic. As European academics have pointed out in the past, most research on foreign correspondents comes from the Anglo-American world, painting a somewhat bleak portrait of the profession that might not be representative of correspondents in and from the European mainland. In the last decade, though, a growing number of European studies have seen the light of day, showing how the work of a foreign correspondent is still done under stable circumstances.

As mentioned before, it is rather exaggerated to start from the obsolete premise that Dutch foreign correspondents have disappeared in the face of technological changes and economic pressures as there is consensus in the academic field that correspondents have evolved rather than gone extinct. Yet, a comprehensive study is lacking on how this evolution has taken shape amongst Dutch correspondents and how, if at all, they have adapted to their new working environment. Establishing the position of Dutch correspondents in academia may even form the foundation for future comparative research focusing on correspondents' country of origin, as this is one of the main determinants of their position in the field.

This thesis, embedded in the Dutch media landscape, explicitly intends to test the hypothesis that Western foreign correspondents' work is not disappearing but is instead transforming. This has already been put to the test in specific European countries like Germany, Austria and Switzerland (Brügge et al., 2017), and in major European cities

such as London (Archetti, 2013) and Paris (Merle, 2013), as well as through more comprehensive research conducted across Europe (Terzis, 2014). In the Netherlands, one attempt has been made to map the journalistic practices of foreign correspondents based in the country (Kester & Goudswaard, 2014). In all the abovementioned case studies, though, the scope was limited to a certain area, with a focus on the host region of the correspondents rather than looking at their home region.

What some of these researches have demonstrated, is that the situation of foreign correspondents is highly diverging, with some of them working under relatively stable conditions whilst others have to fear for their job. Academics have therefore stressed that it is imperative not to generalize when it comes to the position of foreign correspondents as they heavily depend on variable factors such as the medium they work for, the type of job contract they have and their country of origin. So to conclude something meaningful about the position of foreign correspondents it is worthwhile to pay attention to the correspondent's country of origin. For it is partly the media landscape and economic situation in their own country that determine the correspondents' position abroad. The host country also presents challenges to the correspondent, but of a different kind, ones that are not central to this study.

Over the years, a few studies have zoomed in on Dutch foreign correspondents working for Dutch media, including via a demographic approach (Verduyn, 2005) or by strictly focusing on the increasing group of freelancers amongst them (Janssen, 2017). Whereas the former aims to answer the question 'Who is the Dutch foreign correspondent?', the latter is more concerned with the correspondents' perception of their own working conditions, which would be more aligned with the goal of this research. Yet, the scope of this thesis is broader, as it seeks to address the situation of traditional foreign correspondents in general, regardless of being a freelancer or a full-timer. In terms of methodology this thesis has a more holistic approach since not only (freelance) correspondents are interviewed, but also desk reporters and media executives. However, the extent is less broad and inclusive than a large study that was done eleven years ago by a handful of Dutch media organisations (Lokaalmondiaal et al., 2013). Through both extensive quantitative and qualitative research, they explored the then status of foreign coverage in Dutch media. Although interesting, that question reaches too far for this thesis – in part due to a lack of time and manpower. This is why the decision was made to focus purely on the position of the Dutch foreign correspondent. The mere fact that the last research on Dutch foreign correspondents was conducted seven years ago, in combination with a constantly and rapidly

changing field like journalism, further underscores the relevance of a more updated study like this.

The research question that is central in this master thesis is the following: *To what extent has the rise of non-traditional foreign correspondents affected the position of traditional foreign correspondents working for Dutch news media?* To formulate this question, Hamilton and Jenner's (2004) typology of 21st century foreign correspondents is employed, which makes a distinction between so-called 'traditional foreign correspondents' and 'non-traditional foreign correspondents'. Whilst the former refers to the classic foreign correspondent stationed abroad while having a fixed income paid for by a news organization at home, the latter is an umbrella term for (new) forms of foreign correspondence that have gained prominence over the years and could potentially act as a replacement for the traditional foreign correspondent. These terms are further explored later in this research.

To answer the research question, this thesis begins with an extensive review of the literature regarding the situation of Western foreign correspondents in the 21st century. It outlines the claims that have been made by scholars about the 'dire' state of foreign correspondence, followed by studies that nuance the picture of the profession as an 'endangered species'. Special attention is given to Hamilton and Jenner's (2004) theoretical introduction of so-called 'non-traditional foreign correspondents', which will serve as a theoretical guideline for the empirical part. The second section of the chapter zooms in on two non-traditional types of foreign correspondence in the context of decolonization, which deserves extra attention in an age when the global news hierarchy is shifting. The chapter closes with a detailed summary of the most important aspects of the Dutch media landscape, which leads in the Dutch focus of this thesis.

The empirical part consists of two chapters. The first one, Chapter 2, is devoted to explaining and justifying the methodology of semi-structured interviews with both Dutch media executives and foreign correspondents. Whereas the initial plan was to include desk reporters in the sample, it was decided to exclude this group due to a lower relevance to the outcome of this thesis. In Chapter 3 the findings of the interviews are discussed. The master thesis ends with the conclusion, which contains a summary of the findings, the study's limitations and suggestions for future research. In this chapter, the interview results are analysed on a deeper level and embedded in the framework of literature. This is also the part in which an answer to the research question is formulated.

## **1. Literature Review & Theoretical Framework**

In this chapter, we first delve into the history of Western foreign correspondence and examine, through the work of scholars, what developments have left a mark on the profession. This way, we not only see how the job has transitioned over time, but we also get a clear picture of the current state of foreign correspondence. This helps to later place the findings of the Dutch case against a broader journalistic background, increasing the relevance of this thesis. The section concludes by discussing the work Hamilton and Jenner came up with in 2004, which serves as the theoretical framework of this thesis.

In the second part of this chapter, we elaborate on some topics covered in the first section, namely local and parachute journalists as substitutes for the traditional foreign correspondent. They are discussed in the context of decolonization of foreign reporting; in the global news flow, the Western hegemony seems to be waning, forming a direct threat to Western foreign correspondents.

The last part is dedicated to the Netherlands and its media system. To study the position of Dutch foreign correspondents, it is desirable to have some understanding of the landscape its media and their foreign correspondents are embedded in. It allows us to appropriately value the findings of this study and put them in the right national and global context.

### **1.1 The Transition of Western Foreign Correspondence**

For more than a hundred years, foreign correspondents have been the only gateway to events happening all around the globe (Sambrook, 2010). The first foreign correspondents, according to Cole and Hamilton (2008), were just “friendly souls” (p. 799), mostly of Anglo-American origin and established somewhere on the Old Continent, who wrote letters home or shared their stories and experiences once they had landed back in their motherland.

Slowly but steadily, journalistic practices started evolving from a voluntary “side trade” into a professional business and so-called Western “special correspondents” began filing from abroad (Cole & Hamilton, 2008, p. 801). This culminated in the interwar period when, what Cole and Hamilton (2008) call “the golden age of foreign correspondence” (p. 803), took off. In the words of Sambrook (2010):

The ideological battles of the early twentieth century, with the rise of communism and fascism, and two world wars, cemented the necessity for international reporting

for most Western news organisations and led to the establishment of international bureaux and staff correspondents to guarantee the provision of reliable news. (p. 5)

During this period, the romantic allure surrounding the profession arose due to notable American figures like Martha Gellhorn, Ernest Hemingway and Robert Capa, who engaged in the coverage of multiple wars and conflicts. Besides being the inspiration behind numerous movies highlighting the adventurous nature of the profession, they also contributed to painting the elitist picture of the foreign correspondent, who Cohen (1963) describes as “a cosmopolitan among cosmopolitans, a man in gray flannel who ranks very high in the hierarchy of reporters” (p. 17). Such famous figures created the early foundation for why so many incoming journalism students have the dream of becoming a foreign correspondent at some point in their careers (Terzis, 2014). In the of face all the violent episodes of that era, it also revealed to the audience the crucial role foreign correspondence plays in bearing witness to unfolding events.

During the decolonization period and the Cold War, foreign coverage by Western news organizations – at the time the “biggest, best resourced and most influential news sources” (Sambrook, 2010, p. 6) – reached its climax (Franks, 2006). A predominantly Western audience closely followed developments out of self-interest, either because a distant colony belonging to their empire planned on seceding or because they felt their security was threatened by an Eastern superpower. Every foreign event could be seen through the lens of ‘us versus them’, making many global happenings urgent and immediately relevant (Sambrook, 2010).

### **1.1.1 Loss of the Grand Narrative**

This changed after the fall of communism in 1989, when the interest in remote places waned and foreign news, in conjuncture with foreign correspondence, started to lose its relevance (Franks, 2006; Merle, 2013). Whereas initially foreign conflicts were considered part of a grand, overarching colonial or ideological narrative, now far away disputes were isolated events unworthy of interest and attention (Hannerz, 2004). Hodgson (2002) describes this as follows:

Viewers and readers who are less interested in international news than they were before the collapse of the Soviet Union are not stupid ... They are behaving in a

perfectly rational way. From 1914 to 1991, international news was frightening. It could kill you. Now, rightly or wrongly, people are not afraid that a new war is going to affect them. Its consequences will be borne by foreigners with ragged clothes and the pinched faces of hunger or by a handful of professional soldiers who have volunteered to accept a relatively small chance of coming to harm ... essentially Western readers and viewers have no motive beyond idle curiosity to concern themselves with events abroad. (p. 27)

The end of the Cold War opened the door to globalisation, meaning a high degree of global interconnectedness by means of open trade, air travel and fast technology. From now on, we all belonged to the same “global village” (McLuhan, 1962, p. 21) and the world would be seen as “a single place” (Robertson, 1992, p. 395). In such a society, claims Franks (2006), “the case for well-explained foreign news coverage [is] more important than ever” (p. 91), as what used to be foreign and remote becomes local and personal. Interests that were previously separated by geographical distances now become intertwined, sparking mutual interest in the same event.

Despite a declining interest for international reporting as a consequence of the big narrative loss (Hannerz, 2004), a significant portion of foreign coverage remained, only to adopt a different identity, one less dominated by security and ideology and more by economic and cultural interests. According to Galtung (2014), “the perspectives will vary, but they will be increasingly global and holistic, more ‘relevant to all of us’, less framed as us vs them” (p. 22).

This is not to say that major events, like the Yugoslavia war, 9/11 and the following wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, stopped dominating the news cycle (Sambrook, 2010). As soon as people perceive to be threatened by international developments, the demand for foreign news coverage goes up as they feel their interests are at stake (Hannerz, 2004). These significant global events did, however, not seem to impact the position of foreign correspondents. Though there was a general increase in the demand for foreign news after the 9/11 attacks (Carroll, 2007; Williams, 2011), the downward trend amongst U.S. newspapers continued: the number of foreign correspondents working for them declined from 188 in 2002 to 141 in 2006 (Hiatt, 2007). It must be mentioned that the decrease was almost completely accounted for by smaller and mid-sized newspapers. Larger newspapers

by and large kept their foreign correspondents, possibly, notes Carroll (2007), because they saw quality foreign coverage as a distinguishing niche.

### **1.1.2 The Paradox of Globalization**

As global change was slowly breaking down the geographical and cultural barriers between world citizens, and (online) communication and interaction amongst them was growing, the feeling of interconnectedness erected (Sambrook, 2010). This growing global sentiment seemed to be a lifeline for foreign correspondents, who saw their role in the public debate decreasing towards the end of the twentieth century. Not only did the need for international reporting remain, but technological innovations also made it easier to facilitate communication to and from faraway places. However, the demand for so-called ‘professional strangers’ did not evolve in tandem with the stabilising interest in international reporting. Rather, their numbers, at least in the United States, seemed to go down (Sambrook, 2010). This is what Williams (2011) describes as ‘the paradox of globalisation’. He explains:

As more people go to more places, more quickly than ever before, and the news media enable far off events to encroach into people's everyday consciousness, the men and women who are charged with reporting what is happening in other places are disappearing. While people have a greater opportunity to know, learn and understand more about the world, foreign news is declining. (p. 4)

The paradox of global change in part can be explained by the fact that the technological advancements accelerating the process of globalisation, such as the advent of the internet, practically enabled all its users to direct the flows of information. Due to the newly established virtual connections, people from different parts of the world could exchange information and reveal, in detail, what was happening at their side of the globe (Hamilton & Jenner, 2004). Faster and cheaper travelling also enabled citizens to go ‘see it for themselves’ rather than being dependent on the artificial frame of a foreign journalist (Sambrook, 2010).

Correspondents from now on also had to deal with bloggers and local citizen journalists, new kids on the block who could provide unique and authentic footage from any location and even report on events on the ground just by having an internet connection (Bebawi & Evans, 2019; Willnat & Martin, 2014). These citizen journalists are defined by

Cole and Hamilton (2008) as “individuals without journalistic training or affiliation who become de facto journalists when they report on foreign events and issues, often by posting the information directly on the Internet” (p. 806). They are the ones who arrive first on the scene when a natural disaster occurs or a bomb hits, giving them the exclusive opportunity to record videos with their phones and share it with the world by posting it on their social media account. Whereas in the past a (Western) audience had to wait for the correspondent to arrive on site before they could receive an eyewitness account, today this audience can be informed of the details by watching the amateur journalist’s video that went viral within an hour of the event taking place. We could thus say that ‘bearing witness’ to a situation, one of the correspondent’s key tasks, is going through some sort of decentralization process as it is not exclusively in the hands of Western correspondents anymore.

The foreign correspondent lost its monopoly on producing and sending information from abroad, making its position vulnerable. This only worsened with the arrival of 24-hour news channels like BBC, France 24, Al Jazeera (Morozov, 2010; Willnat & Martin, 2014) that, aided by the internet, provided audiences with an incredibly fast and unlimited access to international news. It made the window to the world even wider than it already was (Williams, 2011). Why need a costly foreign correspondent who takes ages to travel to the news site, when you can be instantly, and from anywhere in the world, informed by free digital news websites?

The arrival of the internet did not only affect the foreign correspondents’ position as the primary distributor of international news, but it also undermined its business model, that of privately funded media in general. It took away advertisements as its main source of income (Franklin, 2014), leading in the case of print media to what some call the ‘death of newspapers’ (*Who killed the newspaper?*, 2006). Some scholars even go as far as to say the whole news industry is in “crisis” (Curran, 2010, p. 472).

Given these increasing financial pressures, executives of corporate media companies, have cut back on foreign correspondents, due to high travel and living costs. It is traditionally one of the most expensive forms of reporting (Willnat & Martin, 2014; Merle, 2013). Reducing revenues forced them to minimize costs and make harsh choices in their budgets, while a downward interest in foreign news steered the editors in the increasingly obvious direction of retrieving foreign correspondents from their remote resident countries. Foreign correspondents, particularly the ones working for Western privately funded newspapers, are on their way back, is the tenor (Hahn et al., 2018). This trend has led multiple scholars,



amongst which is Hamilton (2009), to suggest the traditional foreign correspondent is an ‘endangered species’.

### **1.1.3 A Surviving Species**

Scholars have been wondering how resilient this journalism species is. The way things stand now, it seems to be an exaggeration to claim that universally, foreign correspondents are at the verge of going extinct. Worth noting is that research declaring the demise of foreign correspondence, is mostly of Anglo-American origin, leaving other parts and media environments in the world blank. Archetti (2013) critiques this “homogenizing nature of the claims that are made about foreign correspondence in a global age” (p. 420). According to her, foreign correspondence is indeed changing, but its reality is far more “nuanced and variegated” (p. 420).

In her research, for which she interviewed 25 foreign correspondents working in London, Archetti recognizes the challenges the correspondents are facing today as only some of them can rely on a fixed salary from a single media organization. Simultaneously, she argues that the practices of foreign journalists can widely vary depending on the country they are from (every nation-state has its own media climate) and the type of media (newspapers are doing worse than magazines, for example) they work for. Archetti (2013) therefore calls on her fellow academics to keep on making distinctions and not to engage in what she calls “academic churnalism” (p. 434) – the trend of using each other’s academic work without verifying it.

Other European studies that have appeared in the last decade, demonstrate how the job of a foreign journalist has undoubtedly changed – e.g. more foreign correspondents work as freelancers instead of having a fixed contract (Galtung, 2014) – but is surviving. A study carried out with foreign correspondents stationed in Germany, Austria and Switzerland even showed that the foreign correspondent is “doing relatively well” and works under “rather stable working conditions” (Brüggeman et al., 2017, p. 554).

The reluctance of these European scholars to indulge in generalizing statements is in parallel with Hamilton and Jenner’s (2004) seminal work in which they recognized the threats posed to foreign correspondence, yet observe that “as the traditional foreign correspondents have been pulled out, new and innovative reporters, editors and producers have moved in” (p. 303). The authors predicted that the traditional foreign correspondent (TFC), a Western expat reporting from a foreign bureau to an audience back home, will lose

its position and will partly be replaced by ‘non-traditional correspondents’. Examples include so-called ‘parachute journalists’, which are typically Western journalists who are being flown into a region to cover breaking news, or ‘premium service foreign correspondents’, journalists working for globally consumed wire services like Reuters and AP.

Those internet-based services have enabled the rise of another non-traditional foreign correspondent, which is the desk reporter, commonly referred to in literature as a ‘virtual foreign correspondent’ (VFC) and listed by Moore (2010) as one of the emerging trends in 21st century foreign reporting. The desk reporter works from the headquarters of their news organization and assembles “news stories at home by relying exclusively on wire service reports, phone interviews, online news from abroad and other sources accessed remotely by Internet” (Willnat & Martin, 2014, 507). Though much cheaper than a travelling correspondent, the stories virtual correspondents create “are not distinctive and do not provide a competitive advantage” (Moore, 2010, p. 44) as other media have access to roughly the same stories. After having done newsroom experiments with German journalism students Hahn et al. (2018) concluded that VFCs cannot entirely substitute for TFCs, as they lack the knowledge to add relevant background and context to the story. Nevertheless, they argue:

VFCs and TFCs could complement each other to optimize the partition of work and workflows: Whereas news desks at home could focus on up-to-the-minute news gathering, correspondents based in foreign countries could enhance stories by providing background and context according to their regional knowledge and local investigation networks, remaining a unique selling point for quality media outlets. (p. 14)

According to Hamilton and Jenner (2004), decentralizing innovations in communication infrastructure also opened opportunities for locals wanting to contribute to the coverage of their regions. This could be an untrained amateur journalist (earlier described as a citizen journalist), or a professional journalist native to the region who is hired by either a Western media organization or some non-Western news company. Their coverage could bring perspectives to the table that would otherwise remain unknown to a Western audience.

What is clear is that instead of proceeding to the hitherto popular conclusion that the classic foreign journalist will vanish from the scene, Hamilton and Jenner (2004) tempered

expectations, saying the traditional foreign correspondent is not going extinct but is rather evolving into other forms of foreign correspondence. While the new media landscape undermines the old news flow structures, it allows for foreign events to be covered in entirely new ways by people, they claim:

What we have found is that [economic] pressures haven't so much killed off foreign correspondents as they have forced their evolution. The same changes that create a hostile environment for the bureau-based foreign correspondent make it fecund for others. Economic pressures are not the only forces at work here. Inexpensive and global communication coupled with faster and cheaper travel make investment in bureaus less likely but also drive local media to cover foreign affairs in new and surprising ways. (p. 313)

## **1.2 Decolonization of Foreign Correspondence**

Western correspondents have not only come under pressure through financial hardship and the arrival of new communication technologies, but are increasingly being questioned as professionals themselves. Especially in recent years, scholars have directed their gaze at the role the Western correspondent, typically described as “a white middle-class male reporter” (Sambrook, 2010, p. 47), occupies in the global system of news flows. Academics wonder out loud whether Western journalists are still the right persons for the job, particularly in postcolonial settings (Giotis & Hall, 2023).

As the global information systems have always been (and are still) dominated by Western news organizations, some authors speak of the continuation of “informal and intellectual colonialism” (Thussu, 2022, p. 1579) by the West. Through (covert) radio stations, big mainstream media organizations and influential news agencies such as Reuters and AP, the United Kingdom and United States in particular have been able to set up a vertical one-way street in terms of information dissemination from the West to the rest of the world, directly influencing the narratives circulating there (Thussu, 2022). Add to that the dependency on Western-built undersea cables and satellites necessary for global communication, and you have a situation in which predominantly Western countries do not only control the streams of global information but also the hardware and software it relies on (Thussu, 2022). The mere fact that English is the lingua franca of international communication is yet another proof of the Anglo-American dominance.

In the 21st century, this Western hegemony in global communication is perceived to be waning as so-called ‘emerging powers’, such as the BRICS countries, take up more space on the international stage (Xing, 2018). Especially China seems to pose a serious threat to the UK-USA duopoly on news streams with its ‘One Belt One Road’ plan, which was announced in 2013. As a part of this initiative, China has increased its presence in the Global South by investing in the internet infrastructure through the construction of submarine cables (Xing, 2018; Thussu, 2022). It also developed its own version of internet, with Chinese companies such as Baidu and Tencent dominating the market (South China Morning Post, 2021). By 2021, the Chinese internet was home to the largest number of internet users globally (South China Morning Post, 2021).

Not only has the West lost its monopoly on vital communications infrastructure, but non-Western players have also entered the global market of news gathering, adopting a narrative both paralleling and opposing the Western one (Thussu, 2018). Exponents of this wave of new media organizations are 24/7 news channels like Al-Jazeera (Qatar), Russia Today, China Global Television Network, Press TV (Iran) and TRT-News (Turkey). New communication technologies like social media have enabled them to share with the world a more diverse perspective that goes beyond the Western approach, subsequently setting the global news agenda and contributing to “the process of decolonization of global news” (Thussu, 2022, p. 1587). No longer does information flow exclusively from the North to the South, but also in the opposite direction, leading to a “rise of reporters from the global South reporting on Western and non-Western countries” (Bebawi & Evans, 2019, p. 57).

### **1.2.1 Closing the Gap**

It is against the backdrop of this global shift in the news industry that the critique directed at Western foreign correspondents must be understood. As the West loses its control of the international flow of information, scholars call for a revision of the role of Western foreign correspondents, who, as the eyes and ears of Western media, have traditionally been influential in global communication.

Now that this system has burst open, people around the world are increasingly able to tell their own stories, rather than needing a Western interlocutor to do so on their behalf. Considering that global mobility went up dramatically too, both in the form of migration and travelling, international demographics are much more diverse and intertwined than before. Sambrook (2010) explains this:

The growing interconnectedness of the world, through global communications, ease of travel, increasing migration and more, is changing expectations of international reporting. What was once ‘foreign’ is now better known. For diaspora communities, news from overseas can be news from home. In increasingly multicultural societies, national identity is more complex and a white middle-class male reporter may not be an adequate cultural bridge between the country he is reporting and the audience at home. The importance of diversity is as true in international reporting as in any other area of life. (p. 47)

The gaze of the Occidental correspondent, historically one of the only witnesses to global events, has lost a part of its validity since the worlds of the targeted home audience and inhabitants of the foreign region have grown closer and, in some cases, even overlap. Khan (2019) calls this the “death of distance” (p. 7). Consequently, there is less of a gap to bridge, reducing the need for the correspondent as a mediator (Bebawi & Evans, 2019)

In an online environment where many more have access to the story, it is also easier to hold foreign reporters accountable for their reporting, resulting in more pressure to deliver a fair and accurate representation of the reality (Bebawi & Evans, 2019). This increased international scrutiny has led foreign correspondents in post-colonial areas to be accused of multiple journalistic shortcomings, such as one-dimensional reporting (solely through a Western lens) (Frazier, 2019; Khan, 2019), relying too much on stereotypes, common tropes and pre-conceived ideas (Giotis & Hall, 2023; Fox, 2016; Bebawi & Evans, 2019), and representational othering of people (Nothias, 2020). Williams (2011) provides an example of this:

Doom, death, devastation and distress characterise much of the reporting of the developing world, and without any context within which to place these events the international reporting of the nations and peoples of Asia, Latin America and Africa is deemed narrow and negative. (p. 158)

According to Khan (2019) this is not simply a result of journalistic incompetence, but rather a symptom of the market-driven nature of the profession, since there is apparently demand for such a story: “Journalists create an image of a country according to the Western

audience's preferences or the West's prejudices. They leave many questions unanswered, ignoring them to satisfy the interests of their government or the cultural biases they are born with" (p. 4). In some cases, editors at home have already decided on the angle, headline and tone before the facts are even gathered, creating a situation in which the reporter has to make the facts fit the headline, rather than the other way around (Herbert, 2013).

Especially parachute journalists, who have replaced the traditional foreign correspondent to a certain extent, are accused of falling into this trap (Hussain, 2022). Since they have limited time to familiarize themselves with the culture, language and history of a region, they are increasingly unable to challenge pre-existing assumptions and prejudice about the country, making it more likely those will be reproduced (Williams, 2011; Hussain, 2022). So it is not in itself an issue journalists have pre-conceived ideas (since all correspondents need a starting point), but it is problematic that due to a lack of in-depth understanding of the social context of an area those ideas come to dominate their stories.

Authors have also observed more involvement of local journalists in foreign reporting (Bebawi & Evans, 2019; Nothias, 2020; Plaut & Klein, 2021), partly because they are perceived as better equipped to bridge the cultural gap between foreign correspondents and the countries they cover (Hussain, 2022; Frazier, 2019). Local journalists understand their region both historically and culturally which enables them to accurately depict reality and are therefore less likely to fall prey to ingrained narratives and tropes. It is for this reason that big Western media companies such as Reuters and AP have started hiring more local journalists for positions in post-colonial countries (Sambrook, 2010; Frazier, 2019). David Schlesinger, then Editor-in-Chief of Reuters, said to Sambrook (2010) they employed journalists from 90 different countries:

Local journalists are vital to getting the story right. They know their areas; they have the expertise and the contacts. Many come from the best local media, so they have years of experience covering the story and the key players. (p. 49)

Among local journalists, a distinction needs to be made between local reporters and local producers, also called 'fixers'. Whilst the former are independently working freelance or employed journalists in the country being reported on (Bebawi & Evans, 2019), the latter assist foreign correspondents in their work "by accomplishing a variety of tasks, from conceptualizing stories and arranging travel logistics to networking with sources and

safeguarding journalists” (Nothias, 2020, p. 250). Another difference is that the local reporters are credited for their work through for example bylines, whereas fixers barely get any public recognition for their work (in some cases for safety reasons) (Kotišová & Deuze, 2022; Nothias, 2020; Plaut & Klein, 2021). In Khan’s (2019) words: “fixers are at the bottom of the international correspondence totem pole” (p. 1).

Although local journalists are more familiar with the contextual nuances and sensitivities of their region (leading to a more balanced portrayal of the facts on the ground), at the same time, their embeddedness in society can hinder their reporting. Being a part of the covered country or region, it is inevitable that local journalists bring their own local prejudice and bias into the process (Bebawi & Evans, 2019). They also run a greater risk than foreign correspondents of being targeted by local authorities for their reporting (Sambrook, 2010). Their possible partisanship and vulnerability would put into question their ability to independently bear witness to the events happening, one of the core tasks of a journalist. Moreover, local journalists are said to miss certain story angles. Because of their rootedness in the region, they find certain phenomena all too normal that an outsider would consider noteworthy. A fresh perspective from a foreign correspondent could more easily bring out stories relevant to a global or national audience (Sambrook, 2010; Bebawi & Evans, 2019).

The ideal world, some scholars claim, is therefore a ‘glocal story’, crafted through intensive collaboration between the foreign correspondent and the local journalist. Such a story is defined by Khan (2019) as “global in the sense of being fashioned in the dominant West’s style of investigation and presentation, while at the same time local in terms of getting a real-life, on-the-ground, unvarnished view from within the field of inquiry” (p. 8). By blurring the lines between the correspondent and the local journalist, both parties will question each other’s (biased) perspectives, approaches and routines, subsequently creating stronger, more balanced reporting that portrays reality justly (Bebawi & Evans, 2019).

### **1.3 The Dutch Media System**

For large parts of the twentieth century, the Dutch media system has been characterized by strong segmentation (Kester & Goudswaard, 2014). During this period, the Dutch society, which is ruled by a parliamentary constitutional monarchy, consisted of multiple ideological currents coexisting. In this societal constellation called ‘pillarization’, media tended to follow the lines of these ideological and religious segments, creating an

equally segmented media landscape (Pleijter et al., 2014). Around the 1960s and 70s, the Dutch media landscape began to ‘depillarize’ due to secularization, individualization, and commercialization (Kester & Goudswaard, 2014). This meant that the media bubbles people were in partially burst.

### **1.3.1 Print Media**

The remnants of this compartmented society are still visible today, particularly in the five remaining major national newspapers. To a certain extent, they continue to preach to their own choir. According to the annual Dutch Mediamonitor (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2023), these newspapers are *Algemeen Dagblad* (with an average daily reach of 5,3 percent of the Dutch audience), *De Telegraaf* (4,9 percent), *de Volkskrant* (3,3 percent), *NRC* (2 percent), and *Trouw* (1,3 percent).

Though the print circulation figures of Dutch daily’s have not been shared publicly as of 2018, they have been falling slowly but steadily since 2000 (Pleijter et al., 2014). In between 2000 and 2017, the circulation rates of national and regional newspapers have decreased by over 40 percent (*Telegraaf verliest meeste lezers*, 2017). A managing director of one of the two major commercial publishers in the Netherlands said in 2021 that paper print editions are now going down up to five per cent a year (Pasveer, 2021). And while in 2012 a third of the Dutch population was reached by the print version of a national newspaper, by 2022, this had dropped to only 16 per cent (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2023). This nation-wide trend, in combination with increasing delivery and production costs, prompted the CEO of the other big publishing company to proclaim in 2023 that the end of the print newspaper is nearer than he first thought (Serrure, 2023).

### **1.3.2 Online Media**

Due to the gradual disappearance of print, Dutch newspapers have had to reinvent themselves by building up their online presence through news websites and news apps. This seems to be going well: according to the latest figures of the Mediamonitor (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2023), the online reach of all national newspapers grew between 2018 and the first quarter of 2022, offsetting some of the loss in reach through print. Moreover, for the first time, the online reach of daily papers was one percentage point higher than its paper reach in 2022.

Their reach is limited, however, by other online competitors on the market, such as commercial news websites *Nu.nl* and *RTL Nieuws*, and public broadcaster *NOS*. Considering



all the time spent on online news brands by the Dutch audience, 42 percent is dedicated to online sources from the traditional newspapers and 58 percent to other online news companies (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2023). This shows the new online players are outcompeting the newspapers in the digital arena.

According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2023), 46 percent of online Dutch news consumers use *Nu.nl* on a weekly basis, followed by the website or app of *NOS Nieuws* with 28 percent. The first newspaper appearing in the list is *Algemeen Dagblad*, with 27 percent of news consumers using its online services weekly. An equal 20 percent of people consume the digital version of newspaper *De Telegraaf* and news website *RTL Nieuws* every week. Only 7 and 5 percent of the Dutch public uses online daily's *de Volkskrant* and *NRC* weekly, respectively.

### **1.3.3 Broadcasting Media**

Broadcasting media in the Netherlands have traditionally been dominated by public broadcasters. This changed, Pleijter et al. (2014) state, in the late 1980s when commercial broadcaster RTL entered the television screen, followed by the commercial SBS Broadcasting in 1995. Their introduction caused an increase in the number of TV channels, as well as a rise in the total hours of news programs available to viewers. Ultimately, television became the main medium for Dutch audiences, pushing back the until then dominant newspaper. By 2009, the average Dutch person spent 3 hours a day watching television, compared to 1 hour and 45 minutes in 1980 (Stichting Kijkonderzoek, 2010). In 2023, this decreased to 2 hours and 12 minutes (Stichting Kijkonderzoek, 2023).

Today, there are three Dutch broadcasters left, namely *Nederlandse Publieke Omroep (NPO)*, *RTL Nederland* and *Talpa Network*, each responsible for their own channels. The *NPO* is public, the latter two are commercial in nature. In five years time, the average daily reach of all three broadcasters has gone down (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2023). In 2022, *NPO* still had a daily reach of 47,7 percent, *RTL* 39,2 percent and *Talpa* 30,5 percent. Based on the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2023), the most popular news channels are *NOS Nieuws* (owned by *NPO*) and *RTL Nieuws* (owned by *RTL Nederland*), which 55 and 29 per cent of the Dutch audience watches weekly, respectively.

### **1.3.4 Media Consolidation in The Netherlands**

In the last decade, the media market in the Netherlands has transformed significantly in terms of market shares. Whereas in 2011 the Dutch market consisted of 11 media

companies, in 2022 only five of those were left, meaning fewer media companies possess an increased market share (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2023). Together these enterprises – *NPO*, *DPG Media*, *Talpa Network*, *Mediahuis* and *RTL Nederland* – offer the most popular news sources in the Netherlands, both online and offline.

The end of the gradual amalgamation of Dutch media companies is not in sight yet. In 2023, *RTL* and *Talpa* made an attempt to merge their organizations, but it was blocked by the Consumer and Market Authority as otherwise a too powerful player would emerge in the media landscape (Autoriteit Consument & Markt, 2023). Not even a year later, *DPG Media* announced that it intends to buy *RTL* (*Mediabedrijf DPG Media*, 2023). This request is currently being examined by the Consumer and Market Authority.

The newspaper business is in a remarkable situation, as almost all Dutch newspapers are in the hands of Belgian companies *DPG Media* and *Mediahuis* (Rombaut, 2020). In 2008, these media companies were nowhere to be seen when the newspaper market was still dominated by one British and two Dutch publishers (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2008). Today, from all 8 national newspapers, the 5 largest are owned by these two corporations. While *AD*, *de Volkskrant* and *Trouw* belong to *DPG Media*, daily's *NRC* and *De Telegraaf* are the property of *Mediahuis*. Therefore, as Pleijter et al. (2014) put it, “the diversity of the Dutch newspaper market suggested by the number of titles available is deceptive” (p. 243).

The most important motive behind the mergers and reorganizations that lead to an increasing media concentration is that Dutch media companies face heavy competition from international giants like Google and Facebook within the advertisement market. By uniting they hope to protect or retrieve their advertisement revenue (De Quay, 2023).

It is questionable, however, whether this outweighs the disadvantages of a potential fusion. A Dutch communications scholar called it a ‘worrying development’ since it threatens the plurality of the Dutch media landscape (*Mediabedrijf DPG Media*, 2023). Journalistic trade unions are equally concerned about the growing media concentration as it would make the already precarious negotiation position of Dutch freelance journalists, including many foreign correspondents, even more vulnerable (*Persverklaring NVJ*, 2023).

### **1.3.5 Foreign Correspondence in The Netherlands**

Only a handful of times, (Dutch) researchers have zoomed in on foreign correspondents within a Dutch context. While all of them take a different approach, the common denominator of their endeavours is that almost all are dated from at least ten years

ago, demonstrating how the field has been somewhat neglected academically. Since then, just one noteworthy study has been carried out by Janssen in 2017. This research revolved around the position of Dutch foreign correspondents occupying a freelance position, a phenomenon that has become more commonplace over the years. Janssen (2017) concluded that in the face of economic and technological changes, “Dutch freelance correspondents have to put in more effort than ever for a lower pay” (p. 1). Additionally, the fifteen conducted interviews with freelance correspondents led Janssen to argue that a freelance correspondent working for Dutch media, isn’t a freelancer anymore. This is due to the mutual ‘loyalty’ between the media and freelance correspondents that implicitly forbids correspondents from working for rival news organizations, limiting the freedom typical to their freelancers’ existence.

Three years before this research, Kester and Goudswaard (2014) sent out a questionnaire to foreign correspondents who were at the time members of the Foreign Press Association of the Netherlands, gathering an overview of the types and practices of foreign correspondents stationed in the Netherlands. According to their study, the average correspondent working in the Netherlands was over 40, well-educated and very experienced (Kester & Goudswaard, 2014). The gender balance was around fifty-fifty and most of the correspondents were freelancers.

The focus of this thesis, however, is not on foreign correspondents in the Netherlands working for foreign media. It instead centres around Dutch correspondents working for Dutch media while stationed in other countries.

In that specific context, Dutch researchers have looked at the change in the number of foreign correspondents and available correspondent positions within Dutch media. This distinction is relevant as one foreign correspondent can fulfil multiple correspondent positions at the same time, be it for the same medium or for another news organisation. Dutch scholars Vasterman and Van der Valk (2006) found that compared to 1995, in 2006, the total number of correspondent positions in Dutch media had gone down by more than half, from 658 to 323. Counterintuitive as it may be, the number of correspondents did not fall during this period, leading Vasterman and Van der Valk (2006) to conclude that the decline in the number of correspondent positions means that the correspondent has fewer media platforms available to drop off his stories.

A follow-up study was done by Spierts (2012) six years later, which to this day has also been the last one. In his research, he discovered that the number of correspondent

positions at Dutch news organisations had gone up from 323 to 388. Contrary to expectations, he found that the number of foreign correspondents rose too, from 241 in 2006 to 250 in 2012. This meant that in 2006, a correspondent had an average of 1.34 media clients, whereas in 2012 they had 1.55 clients. Of all 250 foreign correspondents working for Dutch media in 2012, most of them – 204 – were freelancers while 46 were employed by the news organisations (Spierts, 2012).

Of all the newspapers, *Trouw* held the most correspondent positions in that year with 36, followed by *NRC* (at the time called *NRC Handelsblad*) with 22. Then the rest would follow: *de Volkskrant* (19), *het Financieele Dagblad* (19), *het Reformatorisch Dagblad* (16), *de Telegraaf* (15) and *Algemeen Dagblad* (7). Among other players in the broadcasting industry, *NOS* held 35 correspondent positions and *RTL Nieuws* 12.

As for the studies related to the demographic profile of the Dutch foreign correspondent, the most recent (yet obsolete) study found that their average age was 41 years old, one year older than the ‘regular’ journalist working at home (Verduyn, 2005). The majority of them, 53 percent, were freelancers, which was a larger proportion than ‘regular’ journalists (32 percent freelancer). 79 percent of the correspondents were male, roughly in line with the gender division amongst ‘regular’ journalists. Note: this study strictly concerned Dutch foreign correspondents working for Dutch newspapers.

Currently, the common belief amongst journalists is that Dutch foreign correspondents have become significantly younger (Van der Hee, 2014). One national newspaper put it as follows: “correspondents abroad are no longer the established forty-somethings with their permanent contracts, but young freelancers with a sense of adventure” (Vermaat, 2015). Though it is hard to substantiate this claim due to a lack of available and up-to-date quantitative research, there seems to be consensus on this. In a research report on foreign journalism by Dutch media, based on 72 interviews with Dutch foreign correspondents and editors-in-chief of the foreign desk, it was observed that the correspondents indeed are younger than twenty years ago (Lokaalmondiaal et al., 2013). The researchers fear this will result in a deterioration of the quality of foreign journalism, as the older journalists personify the ‘institutional memory’ of the profession. Losing them means losing a wealth of knowledge and experience.

There are multiple factors at the root of this shift, such as the fact that younger journalists are more flexible in terms of having less obligations at home, like a family or a mortgage to pay off (Lokaalmondiaal et al., 2013). Considering these phenomena are nothing

new, the actual explanation lies deeper, namely the increasing financial insecurity of Dutch journalists (abroad) caused by an increase in freelance working arrangements. In line with developments on an international scale (Kester, 2010), “the freelance construction is rather the rule than the exception” (Janssen, 2017, p. 24). In foreign correspondence this implies, as Archetti (2013) states, that most foreign correspondence positions have changed from staff correspondents (receiving a fixed monthly income) to freelance correspondents (receiving a variable income based on the work done). The number of foreign correspondents hasn’t necessarily changed, Archetti argues.

In the Netherlands, the move towards more freelance contracts in the journalism industry began twenty to twenty-five years ago, around the turn of the century (Lokaalmondiaal et al., 2013). Since then, the ratio between freelance and non-freelance journalists has changed from 32 vs 68 percent in 2002, to 46 vs. 54 percent in 2011 (Janssen, 2017). More recent figures on this proportion are not available, nor are more precise data for foreign correspondents only. Regardless, there is no reason to assume that development has not continued in the past years.

It is of significance that the working arrangements are less of a dichotomy than is suggested here. In fact, the word ‘freelance’ is just a journalistic umbrella term for multiple ways of doing business. Lokaalmondiaal et al. (2013) concluded that in the Dutch media landscape roughly four types of freelancing constructions exist amongst foreign correspondents. The most frequently observed was the ‘assignment agreement’, which is when the media organization and the correspondent express verbally or in writing their intention to cooperate. It is predominantly based on a bond of trust and correspondents only get paid for what they deliver. A second arrangement is a ‘retainer contract’. The correspondent receives a fixed sum of money monthly, called ‘a retainer’, to cover expenses such as phone and internet costs. On top of this financial basis, they get paid per production. Then there is the ‘minimum order guarantee’. This is when the correspondent is allowed to deliver productions to the company for a certain amount of money. If, for example, the two parties agreed on 2000 euros and the allowance per piece is 250 euros, the correspondent can sell at least eight of their productions. If nothing is produced, they do not receive any payment. For every production beyond the minimum number, an extra payment will be received. The last, and for the correspondent least favourable construction, is the ‘no cure, no pay’ method. In this case the company will only pay the correspondent if they are satisfied with the final product of the piece. Since these correspondents don’t act accordingly to an

agreement with a singular organisation, they usually try to sell their work to multiple potential clients.

Regardless of the form of freelance journalism, the income of freelance correspondents is always to a certain degree dependent on the work done. According to the Dutch respondents of the same study, this has consequently led to an increased pressure to produce (Lokaalmondiaal et al., 2013). Time is literally money, which is viewed as a limitation of their (artistic) freedom. The decision to leave the house and go cover a story, is strongly determined by whether it can be turned into a saleable product. The researchers themselves put it as follows:

The need to produce quickly and a lot to make ends meet sometimes comes at the expense of quality and depth. Bread-and-butter writing, when articles are written based on popularity and potential market, rather than for reasons relating to content and based on solid investigative journalism, can be the result, correspondents warn.  
(p. 21)

## **2. Methodology**

This chapter depicts the methodology used to answer the research question of this thesis, namely: *To what extent has the rise of non-traditional foreign correspondents affected the position of traditional foreign correspondents working for Dutch news media?*

The main method chosen is semi-structured interviews, which forms a crucial part of qualitative research. Why is this the case and how this method contributes to answering the research question is explained in the first section of this chapter. In the second section, a broad sketch is given of the research design while zooming in on the respondents and interviews. The third and last section is about thematic analysis, the method used to analyse and structure the given responses.

### **2.1 Semi-structured Interviews**

The reflection of the respondents was explored through semi-structured interviews, defined by Adams (2015) as “a blend of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions” (p. 493). According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), it is a method seeking “to describe the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subjects” (p. 91). It is a way of gaining “access to subjective viewpoints” (Schmidt, 2004, p. 6), which is relevant in this context as the perception of the respondents is the gateway to answering the research question. The aim is to find out what they think about the current position of Dutch foreign correspondents. Conducting an interview allows to penetrate their thoughts.

In the words of Adams (2015), semi-structured interviews are useful “if you need to ask probing, open-ended questions and want to know the independent thoughts of each individual in a group” (p. 494). In this case, the group identified is Dutch journalists involved in foreign reporting, both the chiefs of the foreign desk and the foreign correspondents. The semi-structured nature of the interview makes it possible to steer the conversation into a certain direction while leaving room for free association and surprising answers from the respondent (Adams, 2015). This meandering dialogue opens a way to examining unexplored territory, potentially allowing for new academic insights into the current position of traditional foreign correspondents.

A downside of this form of interview, especially in comparison to structured interviews with a limited set of questions, is that it is time-consuming and labor intensive, as is explained by Adams (2015):

The process of preparing for the interviews, setting up the interviews, conducting the interviews, and analysing the interviews is not nearly as quick and easy as you might think. The time and effort required to do all of it right is considerable. SSIs usually entail the arduous task of analysing a huge volume of notes and some-times many hours of transcripts. (p. 493)

While a standardised questionnaire would perhaps cost less time, it wouldn't enable the interviewer to ask improvised follow-up questions, which allows for a deeper dive into a (sub)theme once an interesting point has been made. This fits the overall goal of this thesis, which is to get a profound grasp of the respondent's outlook on the topic, rather than painting a perfectly representative picture of the profession.

## **2.2 Research Design**

This research can be characterised as qualitative in nature, which according to (Hesse-Biber, 2007) means that “the goal is to look at a ‘process’ or the ‘meanings’ individuals attribute to their given social situation” (p. 119). It is about getting an in-depth understanding of a person's perception of a certain phenomenon that person is involved in. In the case of this thesis, the attitude of Dutch foreign correspondents and their chiefs towards the professional position of the traditional foreign correspondent is fundamental. The purpose is to find out what ‘meaning’ they attribute to the current role this profession occupies in the Dutch media landscape.

To give the research also some objective backing, a small quantitative element was added to the qualitative part. Quantitative research, according to Watson (2015), “encompasses a range of methods concerned with the systematic investigation of social phenomena, using statistical or numerical data” (p. 1). It implies that a certain trend is measurable. In context of this thesis, this method was applied to detect if there is a trend in the number of foreign correspondents working for five Dutch media. This was done by comparing the number of foreign correspondents currently working for those Dutch media, with the number of 2012, when the last known tally was done. The data of today were obtained by scanning the online colophon of the news organizations in combination with an extra check during the interviews. The numerical comparison promises to give an extra insight into the current status of the Dutch profession – however limited to the five media



organizations involved. This part is complemented by a simple overview of the ratio of employed to freelancers among traditional foreign correspondents. Unfortunately, a comparison with the past is not possible here because no data from that time are available.

### **2.2.1 Respondents**

To focus on quality over quantity, usually small samples of respondents are being used (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Therefore, only fifteen semi-structured interviews have been conducted in total. Five of the interviewees are (deputy) chiefs of the foreign desks of five of the biggest media organizations in the Netherlands, namely *NOS*, *RTL*, *de Volkskrant*, *NRC* and *Trouw*. The chiefs are in charge of a team of desk reporters working at the organization's headquarters in the Netherlands and a network of foreign correspondents spread out across the world. This group was interviewed because, due to their overlooking executive position, they are deemed to have a unique insight into the fluctuations and developments that have taken place or are taking place in the world of Dutch foreign correspondence. Moreover, they have a say in the who, when and where of the deployment of foreign correspondents and are familiar with the (financial) considerations behind such decisions, making them a valuable type of respondent in this research.

The other ten respondents are traditional foreign correspondents (TFCs) working, amongst others, for the same five Dutch media organizations. In this context, a TFC is defined as a journalist stationed outside the Netherlands in a country or region about which they are reporting to a predominantly Dutch audience. Since the research centres on their position, they are indispensable as interviewees as they can share their working experiences and explain if, and if so how, the rise of non-traditional forms of correspondence has affected or influenced their work. As professionals working in the field, their subjective perspective on their own profession is a determining factor in the outcome of this thesis.

Considering one of the respondents not Dutch (yet is native in Dutch), the focus is on foreign correspondents working for Dutch media instead of solely correspondents of Dutch origin. Another requirement that was left aside in the definition of a TFC was that foreign correspondents should be part of a foreign bureau or have to be employed by a news organization. Since both phenomena are not as widespread as they were before (many of the bureaus have closed and employed correspondents are rather the exception today), including them as a condition in the sample would mean excluding the vast majority of foreign

correspondents working for Dutch media. This would create a misleading image of the current status of traditional foreign correspondents in the Netherlands.

The TFCs are carefully chosen as to make sure they are equally divided across the world, which is necessary to include as many different (cultural) circumstances and contexts in which they operate. Two TFCs have their place of residence on the African continent, two are located in Asia, three in the Americas, one in the Middle East and two in Europe.

Some of the TFCs – ranging in age from 31 to 70 – are versed in both written and audiovisual journalism whereas others are specialized just in writing, depending on the news medium they are working for. Whilst a number of them have just started their careers as a TFC, some of their colleagues have been in the business for more than half their lives. This makes for a good mix in respondents, providing both fresh reflections on the job as well as perspectives based on years of experience. And because the samples consist of both male and female TFCs, it avoids the risk of missing viewpoints more prevalent amongst a particular sex.

The respondents were identified via the websites of the five media, which formed the starting point of the research. Candidates were then contacted through different channels, varying from email and Instagram to Whatsapp. In all cases, they were directly requested to participate in the research, with the content of the message tailored to the respondent’s personal situation. In about half of the cases, no mediation was needed to get in touch with the person, either because an adequate network was already in place or because respondents replied directly to attempts to contact them. As for the other half, connections were made possible thanks to the reference of a previously interviewed respondent working for the same organization or in the same region as the desired candidate. This is known as the snowball method, described by Parker et al. (2019) as a method in which participants who have earlier agreed to participate in the study, are asked “to recommend other contacts who fit the research criteria and might also be willing participants, who then recommend other potential participants” (p. 3).

**Table 1: Respondent Profiles**

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Working arrangement</b>	<b>Experience in current role</b>	<b>Date interview</b>	<b>Interview type</b>
Chief 1	Woman	55	Employed	1 year	15-1-2024	Video call
Chief 2	Woman	60	Employed	7 years	14-3-2024	Video call
Chief 3	Woman	35	Employed	2 years	11-4-2024	Phone call
Chief 4	Man	59	Employed	4 months	6-3-2024	Video call

Chief 5	Man	62	Employed	5 years	11-4-2024	Video call
TFC 1	Woman	42	Freelance	12 years	14-3-2024	Video call
TFC 2	Woman	35	Freelance	6 years	20-3-2024	Video call
TFC 3	Woman	62	Freelance	23 years	27-3-2024	Video call
TFC 4	Woman	51	Employed	12 years	4-4-2024	Video call
TFC 5	Woman	33	Freelance	7 years	9-5-2024	Video call
TFC 6	Man	30	Freelance	10 years	5-4-2024	Video call
TFC 7	Man	70	Freelance	41 years	9-4-2024	Video call
TFC 8	Man	31	Freelance	1 year	9-4-2024	Video call
TFC 9	Man	31	Freelance	1,5 years	16-4-2024	Video call
TFC 10	Man	38	Employed	15 years	26-4-2024	Video call

(Source: conducted interviews)

### 2.2.2 Interview Scenarios

All interviews were conducted between 15 January 2024 and 9 May 2024 and lasted between 42 and 80 minutes. One outlier took about 130 min. The language of communication was Dutch, and all interviews were done through Google Meet – except for one via phone call. The interviews were recorded after the interviewees had given their consent. The online form of the interview made sense given the nature of the foreign correspondent’s job and the location of the researcher, which was neither in the Netherlands (where the chiefs of the foreign desks work) nor in one of the foreign correspondent’s places of residence.

The interviews were based on two interview guides, one for interviews with the TFCs and one for interviews with the chiefs. According to Hesse-Biber (2007), an interview guide for semi-structured interviews is a list of written open-ended questions that need to be asked in order to uncover themes relating to the topic. In this case: the influence of non-traditional foreign correspondents on the current position of TFCs. The interviews were designed based on the earlier performed literature review. Main themes that surfaced during the review were translated to a set of questions, and used as a starting point for the interviews. It needs to be stressed that the questions were really just a first point of reference. As can be judged by the time some interviews lasted, more spontaneous questions were added to the basic ones listed below:

- What considerations go into the decision to station a foreign correspondent abroad?
- In case you decide not to station a foreign correspondent in a particular region, how do you ensure that reporting from that region or country is still done?

- To what extent have alternative forms of foreign correspondence replaced the traditional foreign correspondent?
- To what extent will the traditional foreign correspondent be replaced by alternative forms of foreign journalism in the future?

The above questions were directed to the foreign desk chiefs of the five media organizations. The following set of questions was used in interviews with TFCs:

- How has the profession of a TFC changed over the years?
- How has the advent of the internet influenced your job as a TFC?
- To what extent do you collaborate with non-traditional foreign correspondents?
- What are the (dis)advantages of TFCs compared to non-traditional foreign correspondents?
- Do you, as a TFC, have the feeling you belong to an endangered species? Why (not)?

### **2.3 Thematic Analysis**

After having conducted all fifteen interviews, the answers given by the interviewees were transcribed and grouped thematically. A theme, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (p. 10). In this thesis, a theme was thus qualified as one if it contributed to shaping an image of the current position of TFCs. Initially, more themes were created than necessary to answer the research question, forcing the researcher to filter out redundant themes and compile a list of only relevant themes.

The themes emerging during the analysis were created inductively, meaning they were coded ‘bottom-up’. More precisely, the relevant themes were solely based on the given answers and were coded while analysing the responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). No pre-existing coding frame was used to fit in the responses. This method of analysis was chosen to keep an open perspective towards all answers and not pre-emptively steer the outcome of this thesis in a certain direction. Of course, there were certain initial expectations and hypotheses involved in doing the interviews and their analysis. However, they played a

minimal role during the analysis as the semi-structured interviews went beyond those pre-existing ideas and concepts. Having an exhaustive list of prepared coded themes would have limited the interviewees' creativity and free association and subsequently the depth of the results of this research. In the end, a final list of 6 themes was drawn up, which is discussed in the next chapter.

### 3. Findings

In this chapter, the results of the empirical research are presented. Firstly, the quantitative findings are discussed, followed by a more extensive qualitative part. Whereas the quantitative part is only partly based on the semi-structured interviews, the qualitative section fully leans on the answers given during the interviews.

The quantitative section comprises a numerical comparison of foreign correspondent posts and an overview of how many foreign correspondents are freelancers. The part is used to give a first indication of today's state of TFCs working for *de Volkskrant*, *Trouw*, *NRC*, *NOS* and *RTL*. This contributes to answering the second part of the research question, namely whether the position of TFCs has changed or not.

The quantitative section is complemented by the qualitative section, which consists of themes drawn up during the inductive thematic analysis of the responses given by the interviewees. The contribution of the qualitative part is twofold. Firstly, it is utilized to determine the current state of TFCs and show how the profession looks like today. It also zooms in on the emergence of non-traditional foreign correspondents like desk reporters and local journalists, thus exploring the relationship between the first and second part of the research question.

#### 3.1 Traditional Foreign Correspondent Positions

In terms of TFC positions held by the selected media, broadcaster *NOS* has the highest number with 28 posts, followed by newspaper *Trouw* with 26. The list is completed with *NRC* (20), *de Volkskrant* (15) and *RTL* (10). At all organizations, the number of correspondent positions equals the number of TFCs working for those media. This means all correspondent positions are filled by one TFC. Only in *de Volkskrant*'s case, more TFCs are retained than there are positions. Two of the positions are filled by two TFCs, bringing the total number of TFCs to seventeen.

As can be observed in Table 2, all five media companies have seen a decline in the number of TFC positions compared to 2012, when the last official count was done. The biggest drop is seen at *Trouw*, with a loss of ten correspondent positions. Next comes *NOS* with a disappearance of seven posts, followed by *de Volkskrant* with a decrease of four posts. *NRC* and *RTL* both lost two correspondent positions compared to 2012.

It should be mentioned here that the research methods of the abovementioned study from twelve years ago are largely unknown to the researcher of this thesis. What working

definitions were utilized and how data collection was conducted have not been transparently visualized. It is known, for instance, that some of these media outlets work with traditional foreign correspondents on such an irregular basis – e.g. foreign correspondents who are on stand-by or have only worked once or twice for the organization – that they are not counted as part of the outlet’s network of TFCs. While this type of correspondent post was not included in the census of this thesis (in almost all cases, the colophons on the media’s websites were used as the main guideline) it could very well be possible they were included in the tally twelve years ago. The results of this numerical comparison should therefore be taken with a grain of salt.

**Table 2: Number of TFC Positions**

	<b>2012</b>	<b>2024</b>
de Volkskrant	19	15 <sup>1</sup>
Trouw	36	26
NRC	22	20
RTL	12	10
NOS	35	28

(Source: Spierts, 2012 / media colophons / conducted interviews)

The fall in the number of correspondent posts that is suggested by this comparison does not correspond to the answers given by the interviewed (deputy) chiefs of the foreign desk. With no exception, each of them claimed that the number of positions and correspondents has remained relatively stable in the past years. That is, at least for the duration they have been chief. “In my two years as a deputy chief in foreign affairs, there have been no changes”, says chief 3. “There have been staff alterations; meaning that people have left and new people have come, but no posts have disappeared.” Another head of foreign affairs, chief 1, describes the trend concerning TFC positions as “fairly steady” while admitting it “fluctuates”, referring to those TFC posts that are filled only occasionally due to their lower relevance.

Statements about fluctuations that would have taken place before the chiefs entered their executive role were mostly based on (educated) guesses and for that reason not taken

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<sup>1</sup> *De Volkskrant* has 15 correspondent positions yet 17 active TFCs since two of the positions are filled by two correspondents.

into account. It therefore belongs to the possibilities that the downfall shown in the table occurred before the current chiefs (the longest-serving chief has been in place for seven years) were head of the foreign desk.

The executives' observation that the number of TFCs working for the five media outlets has not gone down in recent years is shared by some of the TFCs themselves. TFC 1 believes the total number of TFCs working for Dutch media has shrunk but sees no decline in the number of TFCs working for the five selected media. "For those still around, it has not necessarily gotten worse", she concludes. One of her colleagues, TFC 2, agrees and even states the correspondent's network of one of the outlets has grown. "Recently, an official correspondent post in Warsaw was opened to cover Central and Eastern Europe. Previously, this was done by a mix of correspondents in surrounding areas." The claim is confirmed by chief 2, who says that it led to an increase in the total number of TFCs working for the organization.

More news organizations allege to have doubled down on their foreign reporting. "In recent years, partly due to the war in Ukraine, our foreign desk has only become bigger", chief 3 explains. "This is thanks to a new team of what I call ambulant correspondents reporting from and on Ukraine." Chief 5 also points at Ukraine as the main reason for its increased foreign coverage:

Since February 2022, we have done 25 reporting trips to Ukraine, which is a huge intensification of what we used to do. We did so by sending two of our other foreign correspondents there. Besides that, we have deployed one of our editors in Kyiv. While he is not officially a correspondent, he does things we also ask from our correspondents.

Though the total amount of international reporting has gone up in these cases, strictly speaking, the number of TFCs – which is the focus of this section – has not. What's more, in the case of one outlet, the choice to increase their presence in Ukraine went at the expense of other TFCs, according to chief 5:

I believe it is important we cover the big developments well. But those trips to Ukraine are very expensive. Seriously expensive. Still, I would rather spend that money on Ukraine than on a correspondent post in France or South America. That is



not a cutback, it's just a certain allocation of resources. In fact, we are spending more money on foreign reporting than let's say five years ago.

In the past five years, this Dutch media company has lost its TFC positions in both France and South America, partly as a consequence of the abovementioned decisions. In return, a new correspondent in Spain was installed, bringing the total loss of TFC positions to one. According to chief 5, this calculation does not do justice to the TFC's share in the outlet's foreign coverage, which he claims has increased on balance. This can be attributed to a tripling in the output of the South East Asia correspondent and an Africa correspondent transferring from a part-time to a de facto full-time contract.

### **3.2 Freelancers**

The (decline in) number of TFC positions only paints part of the picture regarding the current state of TFCs. What seems to be a clearer observation is the grown share of freelancers amongst the foreign correspondents. Though most chiefs and TFCs attest to this trend, they note this is not a tendency of the last years, but started earlier.

“The time when all correspondents were regular staff and the correspondents' children went to school at the newspaper or other media's expense, yes, those days are over”, says TFC 7. His words are in line with those of chief 4. “Over 20 years ago, when I started at the company, more foreign correspondents belonged to the permanent staff. At that time, five or six were staff members, today only one of them is left.” The reason behind this shift according to chief 4?

I think it is just a way to save costs. Someone once told me – but I am not certain of that – that retaining a foreign correspondent in the United States costs just as much as four journalists employed here in the Netherlands.

Though also tax and legal reasons are mentioned, budget cuts seem to be the leading motive as to why news outlets prefer freelance contracts over employment contracts for their foreign correspondents. TFC 10 called it the “impoverishment of the media”, meaning there's less and less places where you can get a (permanent) job as a TFC. This aligns with TFC 6's perspective, who says the market of Dutch foreign correspondence is saturated. “There used to be more smaller magazines and broadcasters involved in foreign reporting

but they have all disappeared, he explains. “There is simply less money and thus less work in foreign correspondence.” TFCs today are therefore mostly concentrated at the major Dutch media companies, where there is still enough funding available for permanent on-the-ground foreign reporting. Simultaneously, many of those big outlets have had to close their foreign bureaus. Today, only a handful of bureaus remain, mainly concentrated in Washington D.C. or New York and held by the broadcasting companies. TFC 10 visually explains to what extent his situation has changed:

When I took over this job from my predecessor in 2015, we had a huge bureau abroad. I remember it was full of stuff, varying from old cameras to microphones and safety helmets. Although I still work from a bureau today, it is much smaller than it was. Now all the office equipment easily fits in my hand baggage.

In the last five to fifteen years, the heads of the foreign departments claim no large alterations have been observed in the ratio between employed TFCs and freelance TFCs, giving the impression the news organizations find themselves in a relatively steady period. Today, the ratio employed-freelance amongst TFCs looks like this:

**Table 3: Ratio employed-freelance amongst TFCs**

	<b>Employed</b>	<b>Freelance</b>
de Volkskrant	3	14
Trouw	1	25
NRC	6	14
RTL	3	7
NOS	8	20

(Source: conducted interviews)

Within all five media organizations, freelance TFCs constitute more than half of the total correspondent network. One can therefore conclude it is by far the most used working arrangement for TFCs. But as mentioned in the literature review, the term ‘freelance’ is just an umbrella term for a variety of working arrangements, with some offering more financial security than others.

The most commonly used freelance construction by the five outlets is the ‘retainer’,

or what some would call a ‘primary client’ contract. This comprises a fixed amount of money paid monthly to the TFC in exchange for their services. The amount and number of services expected in return varies per media company and even per TFC. Whereas some outlets choose to work with a higher amount more similar to a full-time salary, others opt to pay their TFCs a lower amount that allows them to only cover basic expenses, like internet costs. Generally, the lower the retainer amount, the less work or availability is expected from the TFC, and the more likely it is they get paid per self-initiated and delivered production. Furthermore, since they are not legally employed, many of them are allowed (or even encouraged for tax technicalities) to have other clients.

The retainer construction gives some TFCs the feeling they are employed while in reality they are not. “I call myself an employed freelance journalist”, says TFC 1, who receives a higher monthly retainer. “Regardless of whether I produce little or a lot, I receive a fixed income.” TFC 7, also a retainer recipient, confirms: “In practice, there is almost no difference between me and an employed TFC, except for the fact that they pay taxes in the Netherlands.” The retainer also gives him the feeling, despite his label as a freelancer, he belongs to the outlet he is working for. “Despite not being employed, I do feel like part of the team. I get invited for their correspondent days, am allowed to use their laptop and receive all news and updates about the state of the company.”

A highly similar but slightly different freelance construction that is being used by some of the Dutch outlets is the so-called ‘minimum order guarantee’, which is explained by TFC 2 as follows:

Me and my outlet have reached an agreement on how many productions they can expect from me and have tied it to a fixed amount of money I am paid in return. In case I exceed the minimum, I can send invoices for the extra work done. If I don’t reach the minimum, I still receive the agreed amount. So suppose something happens in the world outside my region, like the war in Gaza and Ukraine, I might not receive any calls for a very long period. But because of the agreement, my income is guaranteed.

TFC 9, who has a similar arrangement with his news organization, admits it is a welcome financial back-up:

I once had a period of around three weeks in which I had been preparing a royal state visit. After all the time I had put into preparing it, the whole event was cancelled, leaving me with nothing. Luckily, I was then able to fall back on the agreement.

As with the retainer, the same applies to the minimum order guarantee: the lower your agreed minimum, the more invoices you can send. According to TFC 9 this variable part of their income makes for an extra push to work harder. “Although I don’t believe people really need it, it is a good incentive; the more you produce the more you earn.”

This financial stimulus is even more present in the last observed working arrangement, which is the ‘assignment agreement’. It implies that, even though both the news organization and the TFC have expressed an intention to cooperate, the TFC only gets paid per delivered production. It is thus purely variable; all income depends on the TFC’s productivity and pitching skills, no fixed amount is transferred monthly. According to TFC 3, who has been freelancing for more than twenty years, it is an exhausting lifestyle. “I call myself a cowboy freelancer. So to speak, you start at zero every month and you have to try to earn enough to make ends meet. It's quite intense. And I am kind of sick of it, too.” TFC 1, who receives a retainer now, looks back at her ‘real’ freelance period with a similar sentiment. “The first period of my foreign correspondence job was really tough”, she says. “I was very lucky that the position I’m in now became vacant at that time. Otherwise, I would have told a completely different story.”

Part of the reason why the work is considered challenging within this freelance construction is that their outlets have not legally committed to purchase at least a certain number of productions. This is well explained by TFC 5, who after seven years of being a TFC for her outlet still doesn’t have a contract:

When I started working for the outlet, they told me they were willing to buy four articles a month for roughly a thousand euros. Yet, this was not a guarantee, but rather an expression of willingness to pay in case I deliver. If I don’t produce or if they don’t like the topics I’m proposing, I don’t have an income.

This freelance construction is not only mentally taxing for some of the TFCs, but is also believed to negatively impact the quality of their reporting. “When you are employed, you can focus much more on content than as a freelancer”, says TFC 10, who entered salaried

employment almost ten years ago. “As a freelancer, you always have to negotiate about money, sending invoices and following up on payments. That is annoying. When employed, you can really pour yourself into the work itself.” That being paid per production is detrimental to the quality of reporting, is confirmed by TFC 5. As the payment depends on the published number of characters, and not on the amount of time invested in the production of the piece, less time is spent on doing the work. That time is precious and might as well be used for preparations of a next production. “Knowing that you only get paid per character, of which only a maximum number may be published, I am not going to do that extra research or interview”, she says. “Although it probably makes the piece better, it costs me extra hours or days for which I am not compensated.”

Though most TFCs have negative associations with the assignment agreement, others seem to have a more positive outlook on this construction. “I have never had a fixed contract and I would have never wanted it differently”, says TFC 6. “I decide when I work, where I work and what I work on. Besides, it can be many times more financially beneficial than an employment contract, depending on your innovativeness, ambition and work ethic.” This perk has been mentioned multiple times by respondents, such as TFC 2. “I receive more with this arrangement than I would have with a retainer”, she says. A retainer would also mean she could always be called upon by her outlet, limiting her freedom. “I just want to have the space to say no.”

Though less common, it does happen that TFCs, like TFC 2 and 6, opt for a more variable freelance construction instead of a fixed one, or even an employment contract. This is confirmed by chief 3: “We have cases in which the correspondent has requested to have a more flexible working arrangement since they wanted to have more clients. For us that is okay.” A consideration that plays a bigger role in whether to dispatch a freelance or employed TFC is the geographical location of the TFC, says chief 3. “The choice for a freelance or employed arrangement does not depend on the person, but on the correspondent post. How important is it to us and what do we expect from it, are questions we ask ourselves during this process.”

### **3.3 Working Pressure**

Another factor that determines the current position of TFCs, besides their sheer number and working arrangements, is their daily work practice. During the interviews, virtually all TFCs said they have seen an increase in working pressure within the profession.

The main reason for this is the digital sphere in which all media companies operate today. With the advent of the internet more than twenty years ago, media outlets were forced to rethink their work routines, as were the TFCs. TFC 7, who has been in the profession for more than forty years, saw this transformation unfold before his eyes:

During the 80s, I experienced my most free period of my working life. Nobody supervised me and I was the one deciding what I did and when. Back then, I used to give my written articles and recordings to flight attendants who would then deliver those to my editors in the Netherlands. When the first computers came along in the 90s, the switch took place. From that moment on, I have had to be available at all times. If there was news, they called me. My work has become much more hectic as a result.

When the internet had just arrived, maintaining the website was all but a priority, TFC 1 remembers. “Back then the website was more like a copy of the newspaper, which was the main focus. I didn't really have to worry about the website, meaning I just had one deadline a day.” Now, outlets seem to have swapped priorities and developed ‘online first’ strategies to optimize their presence in the digital sphere. “You have deadlines all day long”, TFC 1 continues. “With all the news that comes in, you have to immediately weigh up: am I going to do something with it or not? That makes the whole job more restless.” TFC 2 confirms that the deadlines have changed. “We don't wait for the news broadcast or the newspaper to be printed anymore. Whenever news comes in, the deadline is as soon as possible. This has increased the pressure.”

The optimization of outlet's online strategies has resulted in, amongst others, new storytelling forms such as podcasts, newsletters, liveblogs and quick phone interviews. Because of their unique expertise and geographical advantage, TFCs are sought-after contributors to these platforms and are expected to be available regularly, leaving them with more work on their plates than before. “The internet is never turned off”, says TFC 6. “We have to continuously serve our audience. And because of that, we have become more centipedes than ever before.” Not only are the TFCs expected to update their outlet's platforms, they should also maintain their own social media channels, says TFC 9. “Since we represent the brand online, we are expected to be present there too. As a consequence, we are constantly occupied with the job, even in our private spheres. It is therefore more a

way of life than a job.” TFC 10 adds: “Before, you made one television story and that was it. Now, you also make a video for the website, Instagram and TikTok. Plus, you operate a Twitter channel.” TFC 8 describes the increased working pressure as a consequence of operating more channels as follows:

When I write an article for the newspaper, the article should go online before the print deadline, and ideally even earlier so it can be included in the newsletter. Then we are also expected to turn the article into a podcast version and write about it on Twitter or LinkedIn. And when the radio calls, you do that too. So yes, my work completely dominates my life.

The arrival of more online channels didn’t take away work from the TFCs but instead brought them more work. Especially for the freelancers amongst them who have moved along with the transition and adopted new multimedia skills, the digital sphere provided them with new opportunities. TFC 6 explains: “I started out as a writing foreign correspondent, but I soon found that I could earn twice as much by also making a radio version of my printed stories. That’s when I decided to learn how to make radio stories.” As a freelancer, TFC 2 also considers the variety of platforms a financial blessing rather than a curse. “I no longer have to go story hunting and leave my house to earn money. I still do it, but by regularly doing radio recordings in addition, I have a more steady income.”

Although chief 5 can attest to the invoices of freelancers going up, he sees that employed TFCs or those with more fixed freelance contracts, have to work harder for the same amount of money: “Due to the growing online sphere, much more is demanded of the correspondent. I believe in that respect we have reached the limit of growth. The working pressure is quite high.” Also chief 3 admits that a lot is expected from the modern TFC. “We expect our correspondents to be available for our other departments too, such as economy, art or the podcast desk. So yes, they have to do many things at the same time.”

On top of having to serve all the departments, particularly correspondents stationed outside of Europe note that the scope of the area they cover has become bigger. “As a result of the general impoverishment of the media, we have more regions and countries to report on these days”, says TFC 10. “That means there is a lot more on our plates.” “We have become a specialist in an even bigger area”, TFC 6 comments. “Though I am all but an absolute specialist in many of the countries I cover, I know more than the average Dutch

person.” TFC 7 confirms but is sharper in his wording: “The correspondent has to do more and is supposed to know something about everything. It’s maddening.” That the TFC has become a jack-of-all-trades is also noticeable in the broadcasting world, where it has become a rarity to have your own cameraman with you. “I have the luxury of still having a cameraman/editor”, says TFC 10. “There are many freelancers who produce everything themselves, that is to pitch, edit, write and submit.” Some TFCs specialized in writing are sometimes even asked to take on the role of photographer. “For financial reasons, my outlet often asks us to take the picture”, says TFC 3. “Only in special cases, of which I feel there are less and less, we hire a professional photographer.”

All the chiefs claim their organization has foreign news high on the agenda, and see foreign coverage as one of their distinguishing marks. And with TFCs as their ‘eyes and ears’ abroad, the outlets are highly reliant on their work as it is their reportage that will make them stand out from the rest. All departments within the organization seem to want something from the TFCs, since they can bring a unique perspective to the table. This is not only limited to the outlet itself, but also happens within the media concern the outlet is part of. This can be seen clearly in the case of Dutch newspapers belonging to the same corporate publisher as Belgian newspapers. “Since Belgian newspapers cannot afford foreign correspondents anymore, they reuse articles written by TFCs working for Dutch newspapers”, says TFC 1. This way, fewer correspondents are needed overall, which saves money for the publisher, but leaves aspiring TFCs with empty hands. So, although the number of foreign correspondents working for the outlets involved might not have gone down drastically in recent years, within the corporation they are part of, the total number has fallen.

The trend is clear: as there are less foreign correspondence positions and TFCs in the whole industry, the lucky ones that did manage to get hold of a position are being used to their full potential while more media rely on them. According to TFC 4, this sector-wide shift to merge part of the operations and to have less TFCs do more work also has its positives. “Yes, partly it has been a cutback, but I don’t mind being efficient with money. If by working a bit harder we can retain or place a correspondent somewhere else, to me that is just a win-win.”



### 3.4 Desk Reporters

At all five media outlets, the number of desk reporters, non-traditional foreign correspondents doing foreign coverage from the headquarters, has not seen any significant changes. According to chief 3, desk reporters have always been part of their organization. “Our desk reporters have their own beat, which corresponds to the region of the foreign correspondent. The desk reporters support the correspondent through brainstorming on stories and story ideas and by being a back-up in case necessary.” Within the other news organizations, the desk reporter has a similar function, yet not all of them are responsible for a defined area in the world but instead focus on any potential global news event.

When it comes to the work distribution between the TFC and the desk reporter, it is generally the desk reporter who does the fast news and the TFC who is responsible for long-form productions such as background pieces or reportages. “In case there is a bomb attack in my region”, says TFC 7, “it is the desk reporter reporting on it. Back in the days, it was me who had to do it. Nowadays they leave me free to give background and context.” TFC 6 has a similar story: “For the short news, which is done by the foreign desk, you don’t need a foreign correspondent”, he says. “Potentially, you could leave all that to the correspondent but then how much time is left for them to make long stories and reportages? I therefore see the desk reporter as complementary to the correspondent.” According to TFC 5, who gets paid per production, it occurs regularly that her story pitches are passed on to a desk editor. “If something happens that can be covered from behind the desk, they usually leave it to a desk reporter or an intern. It is cheaper for them since they will not have to pay me.” All in all, the role of the desk reporter has increased, believes TFC 10. “These days, desk reporters pick up story angles, do research and produce the story themselves”, he says. “You also see more phone journalism, which is a typical example of the work desk reporters do.”

To a certain extent, the desk reporter has replaced part of the TFCs job. Yet this does not mean they have disappeared; just their task description has changed. While the TFC used to produce more news, desk reporters, who rely mostly on wire services, have taken over this task. This allows for the TFC to focus on those stories that distinguish the outlet from their rivals. “My core business is reportages, reportages, reportages”, says TFC 8. “I am here to produce stories of which the audience thinks: wow, I never looked at it like that.” Chief 4 shares a similar vision of the TFC’s tasks: “From the correspondents we expect they cover the *couleur locale*, the things you cannot do from a distance. Much of the news is simply done by foreign editors behind their desks.”

The added value of the TFCs is their presence in the country or region they cover, which results in story angles and ideas that are harder to find when working from a headquarters in the Netherlands. “As a correspondent you get your story ideas by just chatting with people over a diner or a coffee”, says TFC 4. “It’s all about taking in the sounds of the country and listening to where it’s going. It is impossible to do that from behind the desk.” TFC 8 has had similar experiences: “Every time I visit a country, I leave with at least three new story ideas. That is because you talk to the people, such as taxi drivers and fixers, and then you see it for yourself.” Also being surrounded by the local news, can be inspiring, says TFC 5. “Often, I read something in the local or national newspaper, which ties in with my experience here or what I hear around me. It is usually a combination of both.” To explain why it is necessary to have a TFC on the ground, TFC 1 makes the comparison with covering the Netherlands from abroad:

If you were to report based on online sources such as online media, Facebook, TikTok, etc, the selection of topics would not match with what is actually happening in the Netherlands. That is because people on social media want to create a certain image and mainstream media have certain biases towards the new and the exceptional. So you would not get to experience ordinary life properly. You would get a certain picture of the Netherlands, but if you live there, you would notice that many people are more moderate than appears online and that many things work better than media make it seem.

Surely, the desk reporters also travel and do stories on location, but much less frequently. They are allowed to do so, in order to become better at their job, says chief 5. “Observing and experiencing the area you cover for yourself means you are more committed after the trip, causing you to follow the region twice as intensely as before. And going there also makes you a better storyteller.” Chief 4 agrees an occasional trip is beneficial to the desk reporter’s work. “For those foreign editors to do their job properly and write better about those countries, they have to go there themselves once in a while.”

Whereas these trips are usually not a replacement but an addition or a back-up to the work of TFCs, within one outlet there are some indications that the TFC has been replaced by the desk reporter as a cheaper alternative. Since the TFC in that region left a couple of years ago, no new person has been stationed there. “We cover South America from the desk,

meaning we go on reporting trips every now and then”, says chief 5. “Recently, a desk reporter went to Colombia for ten days and before another reporter went to Peru to do some stories.” According to chief 5 this is a new phenomenon within the company. “We have always had foreign editors, but they never went running stories on their own in South America. That’s new.” As mentioned in Chapter 3.1, the choice to not deploy a TFC in the region was made in the context of limited resources. “I would like to have someone stationed in South America, but not at the expense of the rest”, chief 5 concludes.

### **3.4.1 Parachute Journalists**

The parachute journalist, which is essentially a desk reporter flying out whenever news breaks somewhere in the world, is not popular amongst the interviewed chiefs. The main reason for this is their “lack of knowledge and feeling with the region”, as chief 1 puts it. Popular or not, the chiefs collectively admit that sometimes you don’t have a choice but to send out a parachute journalist. “It is impossible to have someone everywhere in the world where potentially an earthquake or flood could occur”, says chief 4. “Therefore, you will have to send out people.” TFC 7 sums up well how the hands of Dutch media are tied in this context:

It would be beautiful if Dutch media had bureaus everywhere and could send out people from there, like the BBC has. The thing is that the BBC can afford it and we can’t. Therefore, journalists will continue to be flown in, sometimes resulting in shit productions. It is almost inherent to when you're sent on a trip that you have yet to read up on what's going on.

In such urgent cases, outlets have slightly different considerations when it comes to picking who should go. “We tend to send reporters who do not work at the foreign but at the domestic desk”, explains chief 2. “Editors from the foreign desk occasionally join them as support.” Chief 4 indicates they are “very pragmatic to the point of being opportunistic” in these situations. “We ask: who can go and leave tomorrow?”

Apart from the fact that the parachute journalist is barely used by the news organizations, it is important to note that both the parachute journalist and the TFC are used for different purposes. Whereas it is the parachute journalist’s job to cover big breaking news events, it is the TFCs task to produce more contextual long-form stories. Taken together, the

parachute journalist thus poses no real threat to the TFC.

Another thing that became clear during the interviews is that the contradiction between TFCs and parachute journalists is in reality a false one. In their own region, TFCs are just as much a parachute journalist as a desk reporter would be. “Theoretically speaking, I cover around forty countries”, says TFC 10. “In most of them, I don’t live. If anything happens outside of my host city, I am basically parachuted into there. So journalism is sometimes by definition parachute jumping.” Chief 1 seems to agree on this point:

Of course, as a parachute journalist, you have a knowledge gap, but so do the correspondents. If you look at Latin America, Africa or Asia, those areas are so enormous. If our correspondent Latin America [who does not live in Argentina] has to go to the Argentine Pampas, it is not as if he has ever been there before. So that disadvantage plays just as much a role here.

Still, chief 1 believes more use should be made of desk reporters. Not necessarily as parachute journalists during breaking news, but in a more permanent way. “I think we should fly in our desk reporters from the Netherlands more in case we cannot afford to have a correspondent in that area.” The question is, however, how much cheaper it is to have a TFC replaced by a desk reporter who flies out every now and then. “If it is a one-off, it is more expensive to go with a desk reporter than with a correspondent”, says chief 4. “Yet it might be cheaper in the long run to have a desk reporter going than to have a correspondent stationed there permanently.” For now, the financial situation within the organisations is not sufficiently pressing that this trade-off needs to be made, as a result of which the (parachuting) desk reporter is still mostly stuck behind their desk.

### **3.5 Local Journalists**

Another emerging non-traditional foreign correspondent is the local journalist, whose role seems to have grown within Dutch media outlets, but only to the extent that their rise is not a threat to the position of TFCs. Especially during the pandemic, Dutch media organizations seem to have experimented with the use of local journalists, as the TFC’s mobility was restricted due to the global safety measures in place. Chief 2 recalls how the local journalist was a godsend during this period:

During covid, we made more use of local journalists because no one could travel. We would tell them to shoot a certain topic after which the correspondent or an editor in the Netherlands would edit it and make it a whole.

Chief 5 talks about a similar experience during the pandemic:

We did stories about Japan remotely by working with a local producer and cameraman. We made arrangements with them on the type of shots we were looking for. It was almost like giving them a grocery list; three ounces of this, three ounces of that. Very detailed. And it turned out to work.

Limited access to places is not an issue that strictly occurred during the pandemic. According to most chiefs, it is a global trend. They say it becomes increasingly difficult for TFCs to work in certain countries, if they are admitted at all. “There are so many places in the world we cannot go anymore”, says chief 1. “You simply don’t get a visa or accreditation. In a world shifting further and further away from democracy and freedom of expression, we have to start working with local journalists. There’s no escaping it.”

Besides some African countries, nations like India, China, Russia, Thailand and Indonesia are mentioned in this context. More recently, the Gaza Strip has joined this list. Nearly all Dutch outlets work with local journalists in these areas in order to get stories to the Dutch audience. “Because we cannot enter Gaza at the moment, we have local teams working for us who capture things both at our request and on their own initiatives”, says chief 2. Chief 4 adds: “The advantage is that you can be present while you cannot be there. It is the only way we can tell what is happening there.”

Though Dutch news organizations have been experimenting more with local journalists as a way to fill up the news holes and expand their local access, their overall role in the production remains limited. Only rarely does the scope of their work go beyond the traditional ‘fixing’ work, which has been part of the working routine of local journalists assisting TFCs for decades. This means that the local journalist is still largely seen as a useful help in getting contacts and access, doing camera or photo work, translating and adding valuable (cultural) context. TFC 8 unfolds his perspective of the local journalist’s added value as follows:

The fixer is as good as the size of their phone book. For me, a good fixer has the phone number of the one minister I want to talk to rather than the number of their spokesperson. Or if I want to do a story on Roma people, a good fixer knows which town is interesting to visit for this and why.

The extent of the local journalist's involvement in the final product depends on the relationship and dynamics with the TFC. TFC 9, for instance, says he is open to the local journalist proposing their own story ideas. "I sometimes tell the fixer to suggest their ideas to me if they have something I hadn't thought of. That's only great." According to the respondents, this way of doing things is rather the exception than the rule. Most of the time, it is the TFC who comes up with topics and maintains control over the process. "I produce, they roll", TFC 6 summarizes. The local journalist is just there to assist throughout the process. Therefore, none of the TFCs feel like they have to some extent been replaced by the local journalist as it is still them who have the final say over the story. So far, the increasing popularity of local journalists has not led to the elimination of the correspondent as an intermediary.

Both chiefs and TFCs still see the TFC as irreplaceable when it comes to their foreign coverage. The most frequently given reason for this is that the local journalist is presumed to be unfamiliar with the Dutch audience, as opposed to the Dutch TFC. This gives the TFC an advantage in their foreign reporting since they know better what this audience deems interesting and what it wants to see or read about this region or country. TFC 5 explains this as follows:

News is not an objective given. News is what is considered news worthy by the audience – in my case highly educated older Dutch people – I produce for. 99% of what I read in newspapers from my host country is about local affairs. This is important for people who live here as it affects their community, but totally irrelevant for people in the Netherlands since it doesn't tell them anything about how this society here works.

To be Dutch and to know from which frame of reference a Dutch person thinks, does not only come in handy while looking for the right story angle but also during the production of the story. "I believe it is in our favour that we can get into the skin of a Dutch person",

TFC 3 argues. “Because the editorial team wants us to make the story accessible to a Dutch audience.” TFC 6 follows up:

One of the most important tasks for a correspondent is to make the story interesting for the Netherlands. The Dutch audience needs to understand why they are consuming the story. And to make it interesting for them, you have to tell or frame it in such a way that it becomes relevant for them. A local journalist cannot do that as they are not familiar with the Netherlands.

Dutch TFCs arrive at a new place while wearing their ‘Dutch glasses’, allowing them to look at their new host region with a fresh outlook comprised of Dutch norms, values and perspectives. The longer they stay in their region, the more those glasses fall off, says TFC 5. “After all those years, some things here have become self-evident for me as I have gotten so used to them. While I don’t consider those things news anymore, my Dutch editor still thinks they are.” TFC 1 had a similar experience when she was a foreign correspondent in her own country, while working for a Dutch medium:

Before starting in that position, I had lived seven years in the Netherlands. This made me look at my own country with a more Dutch gaze, which helped me in writing about my homeland. Because you just see what your reader is interested in, what they would like to know. And the longer I lived in my home country, I felt that look was slowly fading, and that I regained my native view. It meant that I could no longer look at it objectively as a third person.

It is for this reason, most outlets have some sort of rotation policy when it comes to their TFCs, meaning that they alternate after a certain period of time, often around three or five years. In this way, they aim to minimize the chances of TFCs merging too much with the society they live in. This could lead to sympathizing with certain groups in society, at the risk of losing their independence as a journalist. Though not all TFCs seem to agree with that assumption – “I believe you are born a journalist and so keeping your distance is something you do naturally”, says TFC 7 – it is this potential lack of objectivity that makes Dutch news outlets reluctant to be too reliant on local journalists. “Whilst a Dutch correspondent is always independent abroad, you can’t tell with a local journalist”, chief 2

says. “You have to screen that person to see if they are politically coloured.” TFC 9 tells about his own experience: “I found out that in one of the countries I cover, many fixers work for the ministry of information, which is all but ideal. They collaborate with the institution you are reporting on. That is not what I want.’

As local journalists tend to be even more rooted in the region, some chiefs prefer to have TFCs involved, who can act as an intermediate that can guarantee more objective reporting. “I think it is a big objection that, particularly in areas where we have no one, where we can't see for ourselves, we have to rely on people who are possibly partial”, says chief 1. “Admittedly, this also happens with biased reporting in the Netherlands. The difference is that we have more possibilities to verify this through our own experiences and observations here.” TFC 2 also argues that TFCs have more freedom to do critical reporting than the local journalists:

As an outsider you have the advantage you can leave the country again, allowing you to have a more critical outlook on certain stories. Whereas if you get into trouble in the place where you live, you got a serious problem.

Another reason outlets like to work with TFCs instead of local journalists is for the simple fact that the working language of those media is Dutch, which is commonly spoken and written by the TFCs and very rarely by the local journalists. “It is a practical problem”, says chief 2. “Our correspondents conduct conversations in Dutch on radio and television all day long, so the fact that a local journalist does not speak Dutch is inconvenient.” Chief 3 agrees: “We are a Dutch-speaking medium so you have to be able to speak and write in Dutch, which is a limiting factor for local journalists.” Chief 5, who is involved in filling the vacancy of a foreign correspondent in Italy, says he even received a handful of applications from native Italians: “Right now, that is just impossible - even if it were to be just print. Only when AI can translate their Italian into flawless Dutch will it become a feasible model. But even then I don't see it happening.” In this sense, the Dutch language becomes a protective layer to safeguard Dutch foreign correspondence for Dutch speakers only. Chiefs indicate that the translating work as part of the feedback loop is just too much work, which is why local journalists have a more prominent role at big English-, French- or Spanish -speaking media than with Dutch media, sees TFC 2:



Where I work, the English- and French-speaking media, like The New York Times and BBC, make much more use of local journalists as those languages are often spoken by the locals. They have made that transition much more than Dutch-speaking media.

A final underlying factor that explains why local journalists haven't taken over the work of Dutch TFCs is the simple lack of trust chiefs have in them. Although there is no ill intention behind that, newspapers and broadcasters prefer to work with TFCs whose working methods they know over local journalists with whom they have no previous experience. TFC 8 unfolds this:

Journalism is very much a profession of trust, which is something you have to build up. I have been working five years now for this organization, which has allowed me to get familiar with the working method of the outlet and made it possible for them to see how I work.

Chief 1 confirms this is indeed one of the most important considerations when sending out TFCs. "Ultimately, it is a matter of trust. It is about having confidence in that person's observations and analyses, which is why it is nice to have a correspondent whose way of working and thinking you are familiar with." In case of a local journalist, it is harder to determine the journalist's reporting skills and integrity, as they haven't had the chance yet to build up years of credit like the TFCs have. "The problem is that we would have to collaborate with people we don't know that well", says chief 4. "We don't know how good they are and what their stances are. And in a far-off foreign country that is even harder to verify."

The chiefs say they want their 'own eyes and ears in the region' so they can conduct their own journalism without being dependent on others. What makes a particular pair of eyes and ears 'theirs' is determined by how much they trust the observations made by those eyes and ears. This trust, in turn, depends on the journalistic method according to which these observations are made. And since local journalists are assumed not to be familiar with the preferred working method of the outlet, their observations are usually not taken into account in the final production. This results in the classic division of roles with the local journalist in the position of fixer and the TFC as the author of the piece.

### **3.5.1 Citizen Journalists**

Citizen journalists, locals acting as de facto journalists without having had any sort of training or experience, are not at all taken seriously by the Dutch outlets as a potential substitute of the TFC. Despite having the advantage of speed – due to their immediate geographical connection to the location in question they can be on site much faster than a TFC – they lack all other journalistic qualities desired for by the outlets. What’s more, the emergence of citizen journalists hasn’t made TFCs redundant but has instead made them more indispensable than ever, TFC 7 explains:

Today everyone has a mobile phone, meaning a lot of video footage is circulating on the internet. It is up to us as foreign correspondents to verify and interpret that stream of images. In that sense, our role has only become more important and we are needed more than ever since we have to explain the meaning behind it.

### **3.6 A Threatened Profession?**

As a final question, the TFCs were asked whether they felt their job as a TFC is under threat. None of the TFCs was ringing the alarm bells about the current position of Dutch TFCs, some were even slightly optimistic while comparing their situation to their foreign colleagues. “I don’t think we have much to complain about”, said TFC 2. ‘I have heard stories about the fees at French media which are significantly lower than ours. Also, we in the Netherlands have kept up with inflation relatively well, which is not the case in France.’ TFC 8 has a similar perspective:

I don’t see Dutch foreign correspondents as a threatened species, but it does shock me when I see the number of correspondent posts filled by people from Central and Eastern Europe, which are nil. Therefore, I do think we are a threatened species in Europe, but not in the Netherlands.

This is not to say that no grievances exist about the current state of the Dutch profession. Although TFC 1 didn’t experience any hardship herself for the past period, she thinks sector-wide less and less money has become available. “Although I don’t see a clear decline in the number of Dutch foreign correspondents”, she says, “it is safe to say that generally, the financial means of Dutch media are going down. This definitely has an impact

on the sector and the number of foreign correspondents in total.” Multiple TFCs believe they are underpaid and that the financial conditions of the job have deteriorated. Particularly the freelancers without a fixed income don’t always have it easy. “I believe the circumstances should improve”, says TFC 3. “And I am talking about the payment in specific.” According to TFC 3, this is a widespread sentiment amongst many Dutch journalists working for private media, not just the freelance TFCs. “Recently, we have done two strikes to ask for an increase in our income. And the enthusiasm was quite big.” TFC 5 agrees about the financial side of the job. “We are threatened in the sense that you really have to want to do it. Because it's not a well-paid job. You don't have security. You don't have a safety net. Unless you have that externally.” Also TFC 6 sees it has become harder to be a TFC these days. “There's just less money for it. So there is also less work basically. There are obviously fewer permanent contracts in journalism. So in that sense, it has become tougher.”

As a result of the worsening working arrangements of TFCs, the profile of the TFC has changed. The most notable development: the TFC has become significantly younger. TFC 1 sums up this trend well:

Years ago, when a correspondent was still employed, the position used to be filled in by someone with lots of experience who was in the second half of their career. They had already proven their worth. Today, due to the fact that most of those positions are freelance posts, the position is filled in by younger people. Because of the different financial conditions, it has become harder to combine the job with maintaining a family.

TFC 9, who is himself one of these young TFCs, shares his perspective on this: “Undoubtedly, it has become more complicated to be a correspondent than twenty years ago”, he says. “Challenges abound, such as financial uncertainty, variations in the quantity and type of stories media want to take up. But still, I see enough opportunities to build up the job in a creative way.” The deteriorating financial stability of TFCs has not only resulted in a shift in age but also in a different type of person doing the job, which is explained by TFC 10:

There are two types of people doing correspondent work. It is either something you do temporarily because you think a certain country is interesting, or it is your calling

and you keep doing the job for the rest of your life. The first form is not a threatened species as there are sufficient young freelancers who are willing to take on an adventure for a couple of years and then return home. The real foreign journalists, however, those who could never live or work in the Netherlands but only abroad, are seen less and less.

Besides looking at the current challenges, TFCs raised concerns about the future of the profession as budget cuts might be lurking. “We are expensive, meaning we are one of the first to be cut”, says TFC 7. “I see that danger, especially as I have often witnessed correspondents being immediately ousted in times of financial crisis.” In the context of publicly financed media in the Netherlands, some TFCs are worried political change in the future – during the writing of this thesis, potential government partners were in negotiations on a new coalition agreement – might bring about a shrinking of the public budgets devoted to Dutch public media. TFC 4 puts into the following words:

Currently, four parties, all of whom are not the biggest fans of the NPO, to put it mildly, are negotiating in The Hague. This is of course a shadow on the horizon, which we observe with concern. I am not saying this will have an immediate effect on the correspondent posts, as it will entirely depend on how the editorial board handles that. But in the end, it is all about money and whether they can continue paying us.

Although this fear of the whims of national politics or corporate media executives is ever-present, the TFCs do not seem to be scared the profession will die out in the coming years. They expect and hope the public continues to see the value in upholding foreign reporting, especially in times when the world order seems to be tilting. “It is important to keep our eyes open for regions like South America, Africa and Asia as their share on the world stage will only get bigger while the West’s will only get smaller”, says TFC 4. “We have to be aware of that.” “If we want to keep on doing serious journalism”, TFC 7 adds, “it is almost impossible for the foreign correspondent to disappear. Yet, if media organizations decide to cut back on correspondents anyways, we might have a different conversation in two years.”

## **Conclusion**

*To what extent has the rise of non-traditional foreign correspondents affected the position of traditional foreign correspondents working for Dutch news media?* This is the research question that was central in this thesis. In order to answer it, a literature review was conducted to see in what (academic) context this research takes place. Not only was zoomed in on the historical development of Western foreign correspondence, but also the decolonization process of the profession, which plays a role in the debate around non-traditional foreign correspondents, was given due attention. The chapter was finalized with a section in which the Dutch media landscape was explored.

To gain an insight into the current position of traditional foreign correspondents working for Dutch media, fifteen semi-structured interviews were done with professionals active in the industry. Five of them are chiefs of the foreign desks of five news outlets in the Netherlands, the other ten are traditional foreign correspondents actively working in the field for those same five media. After having conducted the interviews, the answers were transcribed and grouped thematically, resulting in six central themes which were discussed in the previous chapter.

In this last chapter, the findings of the research are summarized while they are being embedded in a broader academic framework. At the same time, an answer to the research question is formulated. In the second section of this chapter, the limitations of this thesis are listed, of which the choice of the five news organizations was the most important one. The section addresses the motivation behind this selection while also giving attention to its representational weakness. The section ends with a relativizing paragraph explaining why the limitation is surmountable considering the thesis' nature. The limitations are followed by suggestions for future research, which is the closing section of this chapter and thesis.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The first finding that emerged was that the number of traditional foreign correspondents working for the five selected Dutch media outlets has declined. Today's numbers show a (stark) decrease in TFC positions within all outlets when compared to figures from 2012. But since no insight can be obtained in the way those numbers have been established, these should be taken with a grain of salt. Moreover, this conclusion contradicts with the answers given by the respondents. According to almost all interviewed chiefs, who have been occupying their position varying from four months to seven years, no noteworthy

changes in the number of TFC positions have occurred while they have been in charge. Only one outlet has lost a TFC below the line. According to the chief of that organization, this is not to say less funding has become available for foreign reporting, as the war in Ukraine has forced the outlet to redistribute their money differently.

If relied more on the chief's answers we can see a clear parallel between Hamilton and Jenner's (2004) theory that the foreign correspondent is not as dead as predicted in the years before, but survives so far, at least in a Dutch context. The answers also align with Brüggeman et al.'s (2017) conclusion that foreign correspondents deployed in Germany, Austria and Switzerland are "doing relatively well" (p. 554), as the same can be said for those TFCs working for the five selected Dutch media outlets. An overlap with Hamilton and Jenner (2004) can, interestingly, also be detected when looking at the suggested decrease between 2012 and 2024. A decline in TFC posts demonstrates that the traditional foreign correspondent is indeed disappearing, which was partly foretold by the two researchers.

The second finding of this research is the grown share of freelancers amongst the foreign correspondents, which is witnessed by both the interviewed chiefs and the TFCs. Like the decline in the number of TFC posts, this also seems to be a development that started a long time ago; in the last ten years no big fluctuations have occurred in the ratio of freelancers amongst TFCs. This discovery coincides with the outcomes of multiple international (Galtung, 2014; Archetti, 2013; Kester, 2010) and Dutch studies (Janssen, 2017; Lokaalmondiaal et al., 2013) in which it was concluded that it is rather the rule than the exception that a TFC is a freelancer. Moreover, the varying types of freelance arrangements – retainer contract, minimum order guarantee and assignment agreement – that were found in this thesis overlap with those identified by Lokaalmondiaal et al. (2013), showing the freelance constructions for Dutch TFCs have remained largely similar to those in use ten years ago.

The third finding that surfaced during the interviews is the increased working pressure of traditional foreign correspondents. Since the arrival of the internet, Dutch media outlets have switched their priority from print, radio or TV to their online platforms, resulting in an almost 24/7 working routine for TFCs, who are considered popular contributors to those channels. It thus seems that the digital sphere brought Dutch TFCs more work instead of taking it away from them, as was suggested by, amongst others, Williams (2011) and Willnat and Martin (2014). Whereas for the employed TFC this means having to do more work for the same amount of money, freelancers can benefit from this as more work for them

also implies issuing more invoices. The increased working pressure does not only seem to be a result of the optimization of outlet's digital strategies but also of a general impoverishment of the Dutch media. This has resulted in a lower total number of TFCs active in the corporation or sector the media organizations are part of, which has led to a higher reliance on those TFCs who managed to get a correspondent position and who have, therefore, become a jack-of-all-trades.

The fourth theme that was identified during the interviews is the role of the desk reporter, a non-traditional foreign correspondent, in the foreign coverage of the Dutch media organizations. Their numbers don't seem to have increased recently within most selected outlets. For quite some time already, they are considered an established force within Dutch foreign reporting, which is in the spirit of Moore (2010), who categorised the desk reporter as an emerging trend in 21<sup>st</sup> century foreign reporting. In line with Hahn et al.'s (2018) claim that desk reporters haven't substituted but rather complemented the TFCs, it is quite standardised practice that the desk reporter supports the TFC in their work by producing the fast news. In this way, the TFC has more room and time to focus on the production of pieces in which more context or in-depth understanding of a global phenomenon is given.

In that sense, the desk reporter has taken over a task of the TFC. This enabled the TFC to evolve, like Hamilton and Jenner (2004) claimed, into a different type of correspondent who is more committed to fieldwork rather than the work that can be done from the desk. Only at one of the five media outlets a TFC was completely replaced by desk reporters who occasionally go to a region to produce stories. In this case, the TFC is actually substituted by a non-traditional foreign correspondent due to limited financial means within the company, confirming Hamilton and Jenner's (2004) claim – albeit to a very limited extent – that TFC's are slowly being pulled out and that more hybrid forms of foreign correspondence are entering the field.

The parachute journalist, who is essentially a desk reporter parachuted into a breaking news area, is used very little by the Dutch outlets. One can therefore hardly speak of a rise of this type of non-traditional foreign correspondent. At the same time, parachute journalists are being used all the time by the news organizations because TFCs, who have to cover vast areas, are in essence parachute journalists who are being flown in once something happens within their region. The parachute journalist and the TFC either coexist (with the parachute journalist doing the breaking news and TFCs the long-form productions) or are one and the same person. Therefore, the parachute journalist does not pose a threat to the

TFC.

The fifth finding is the role of the local journalist, which has grown over time, like Plaut and Klein (2021) also found, but who's rise still does not challenge the position of current TFCs. As opposed to many of the other developments within the world of TFCs, the rise of the local journalist seems to be a more recent one that gained momentum during the 2020 pandemic, when outlets were more dependent on local journalists since the TFCs were locked in their countries. The services of local journalists remain sought-after, especially within countries with restrictive regimes where it is hard for the TFCs to enter. But to say that local journalists have replaced the TFC is rather exaggerated as the TFCs still have the final say in the production, as a result of which the local journalist in most cases remains a 'fixer'.

The TFC is therefore, contrary to Bebawi and Evans' (2019) claim that the need for a TFC is decreasing, still a desirable mediator in Dutch foreign reporting. Though local journalists are considered an indispensable gateway into local communities, they are not seen as a better cultural bridge than the TFC. This is mainly because the local journalist is believed to not have enough connection with and understanding of the Dutch audience, on behalf of whom the TFC is reporting. While local journalists probably know one side of the bridge better than the TFC, they have little knowledge of the other side. This leads outlets to prefer a Dutch-speaking TFC who is familiar with the audience's frame of reference and who, due to their relative distance from the foreign society, is at lower risk of biased reporting.

The citizen journalist, a local amateur journalist, is not considered a serious replacement of the TFC either, mainly due to their one-dimensional skills in fast reporting. In fact, according to some TFCs, the rise of the citizen journalist has made their position stronger than before as they are wanted interpreters of the footage circulating on the internet, most of which has been uploaded by citizen journalists. This is in line with the assertions of Sambrook (2004) and Hannerz (2004) that the role of the TFC is shifting from a mere transmitter of bare information to a so-called 'manager of meaning' whose job it is to make sense of the flow of digital information coming from abroad and guide the public through complex global events by offering, amongst others, in-depth and updated on-the-ground reporting.

A sixth and last thing that became clear during this research is that none of the interviewed TFCs felt seriously threatened by the rise of non-traditional foreign



correspondents as a potential substitute for them. This is not to say that some of the TFCs are not worried about the financial decline in the Dutch media landscape at large, resulting in worse payments and more unstable freelance arrangements. Although it is a big exaggeration to claim that Dutch news media are in crisis, like Curran (2010) proclaimed for journalism as a whole, it is clear that Dutch (private) media are generally impoverished, resulting in less financial security for TFCs. While this is manageable for a young adventurer without having a family to support, which is in line with Vermaat (2015) and Van der Hee (2014), the ‘real’ foreign journalist who prefers to work abroad their whole life, seems to slowly die out. And while the TFCs agree their profession is sustainable for now, they also see the potential danger is far from over. As one of the most expensive forms of journalism (Willnat & Martin, 2014; Merle, 2013), budget cuts as a consequence of political and/or business decisions are always lurking.

All findings taken together, to what extent has the rise of non-traditional foreign correspondents affected the position of TFCs working for Dutch news media? As the use of most non-traditional foreign correspondents has increased, this has in some cases led to a partial takeover of some of the TFC's tasks, but only in one case to a full replacement of their job. Overall, the interviewed TFCs, do not feel threatened by the gradual rise of alternative forms of foreign correspondence. The redistribution of tasks between the ‘new’ foreign correspondents and TFCs, whose relationship is characterised by co-existence and collaboration rather than competition, has prompted the TFC to evolve into new roles. These roles are less marked by passing on news facts and more so by mediating, interpreting and contextualizing facts, which is consistent with Hannerz’ (2004) view of modern TFCs as engaged in “reporting, representing, translating and interpreting” (p. 3). This also proves the point of Hamilton and Jenner (2004) who argue that the traditional foreign correspondent would not go extinct but is rather evolving. The emergence of the desk reporter and the local journalist has not taken away work from TFCs, but only redefined their job. The rise of the citizen journalist has even brought the TFC more work.

Other significant developments in the position of Dutch TFCs, such as a decline in the number of TFC positions compared to twelve years ago are; a higher prevalence of freelance working arrangements and an increased working pressure among TFCs. Although these developments parallel the emergence of alternative forms of foreign correspondence, it needs to be mentioned that this thesis has not been able to prove that there is a direct relation between the two.

A decline in the number of TFCs could hint at a partial replacement by non-traditional foreign correspondents. At the same time, more freelancers as a TFC could be a sign Dutch media attach more value to their TFCs and want to keep them at all costs. In this pressing financial climate, they might prefer to offer a TFC a freelance contract over having to let go of them and switch to a, perhaps cheaper, alternative foreign correspondent. The increased working pressure for TFCs could also be a symptom of news organizations opting for TFCs instead of non-traditional foreign correspondents. Perhaps they realize how important TFCs are for setting apart their journalism and brand from the rest and therefore choose to have a TFC working twice as hard instead of hiring two reporters who work solely from their desks.

## **Limitations**

As discussed in the literature review, the Dutch media landscape consists of more news organizations than the five Dutch companies chosen as a frame for this research. This inevitably leads to an incomplete representation of the Dutch media climate – and the position of TFCs within it. If comprehensiveness was to be the goal of this study, all news organisations had to be considered, from all major media companies to the smallest magazines and radio stations. But since the aim of this research is not determined in terms of width, but rather in terms of depth, the inclusion of those media just for the sake of numbers would not be justified. More value is attached to the vertical exploration of this topic than to the horizontal approach of it. And the smaller the number of respondents involved, the easier the desired level of depth is achieved.

Regardless of this methodological demarcation, it still deserves an explanation why the biggest newspapers of the Netherlands, *Algemeen Dagblad* and *De Telegraaf*, and the largest online medium *Nu.nl*, were not included in this study. The principal reason for selecting the two broadcasting companies *NOS* and *RTL*, plus newspapers *de Volkskrant*, *NRC* and *Trouw*, is that traditionally they have attached a lot of value to their foreign reporting, resulting in a significant network of foreign correspondents (see literature review) that is known and recognized by the Dutch audience. Over the years, they have made the foreign correspondent one of their unique selling points by continuing to invest in the profession. When it comes to a study like this revolving around the Dutch foreign correspondent, one naturally focuses on these organizations that are firmly rooted in the Dutch ecosystem of foreign news coverage. Underneath lies the assumption that if there was

a notable change in the position of a TFC, it would certainly be detectable in these five media. Compare it to fishing: if you want to catch fish to study them, it makes more sense to fish in a pond full of fish than in an empty pond.

The news organizations that were left out have a less established reputation of foreign correspondence, at least one that is less visible and known to the researcher, who's bias certainly plays a role here considering a lower level of familiarity with the foreign reporting of these media. This might also have a reason; a significantly smaller network of foreign correspondents and a higher reliance on wire material makes a medium less likely to stand out in terms of foreign reporting. One could argue these media should have been included due to such indications that point towards a potential deterioration of the TFC's position. Perhaps the most notable developments are taking place at the fringes of the media ecosystem rather than at its core. Yet for abovementioned reasons it was decided differently.

In any case, as a consequence of the exclusion, developments regarding foreign correspondents working for *Algemeen Dagblad*, *De Telegraaf* and *Nu.nl* were not explored in this research, carrying the risk that the picture painted through this study is rosier (or bleaker) than the actual reality of TFCs. That risk was only increased by the methodological choice to just interview those TFCs working for one of the five selected news organizations. As a result, strictly TFCs assured of work on a permanent basis, either as regular freelancers or as fixed employees, were interviewed. Aspiring foreign correspondents with a dream but without a job – the unlucky ones – were not taken into account, making it impossible to accurately reflect on the current Dutch media landscape of foreign reporting.

Still, it should be repeated that the emphasis of this thesis is not on including as many perspectives as possible, but on gaining in-depth access to the perspectives of some involved in the business. This research does not hold the promise to give a fully accurate representation of all TFCs, but instead offers an insight into the subjective reflection of professionals on the changing circumstances of traditional foreign correspondence. The research is only representative in the sense that the developments reflected on by the respondents are industry-wide and thus most likely also felt by their colleagues, those working for other Dutch media and potential competitors on the sidelines of the profession.

It is also worth mentioning that this research works with only a small set of potential threats facing TFCs. While mostly economic, digital and neocolonial challenges are central to this thesis, security threats and restricted access for journalists also hinder TFCs in their work. Though mentioned briefly in Chapter 3.5, not enough attention was paid to this theme,

as the subject was approached mainly from the country of origin of the TFC instead of their host country or region.

A final limitation is that this thesis fails to explain a potential relationship between the rise of non-traditional foreign correspondents and the three determinants of the current position of TFCs, namely the suggested drop in the number of TFC posts, the emergence of freelance TFCs and the increased working pressure among TFCs. This would give an even more complete picture of how those alternative forms affect the job of the TFC. But due to the limited scope of this research and therefore lack of sufficient data, no direct link could be drawn between, for example, the rise of desk reporters and/or local journalists and the decline in TFC posts. This would be based on mere speculation and thus not worthy of being included in this thesis.

### **Further Research**

Since many Dutch media outlets and Dutch (ex-)foreign correspondents have been left out in the methodological part of this thesis, for reasons mentioned above, it would make sense to set up a broader (quantitative) research in which many more relevant perspectives can be taken into account. This implies striving for a sample with other Dutch news organizations and (ex-)TFCs who work or have worked for those outlets. With its vast network, the trade union for Dutch journalists could potentially play a role here. A new census should be carried out, ideally by the same researcher and with the same methods used as in 2012, to find out how the number of TFC posts across the whole industry has changed from then onwards. This should be done to get a system-wide picture instead of one painted by the lucky few still in the business, at the risk of painting a rosier picture than the reality of Dutch TFCs actually looks.

This research focuses exclusively on Dutch media outlets and the TFCs working for them and could therefore be taken as a starting point for additional research in which TFC's country of origin is central and not their host country, city or region, like was the case in previous studies (Brüggeman et al., 2017; Archetti, 2013; Merle, 2013; Teris, 2014; Kester & Goudwaard, 2014). As Archetti (2013) states, the reality of foreign correspondence is “nuanced and variegated” (p. 420), meaning the practices differ per country and news organization. For this reason, it is academically valuable to zoom in on countries separately and approach the issue through the lens of specific media outlets located within those nations, as was done in this research. That is one way to get to a nuanced and in-depth picture

of the current state of traditional foreign correspondence and to not fall prey to generalisations regarding the matter. In order to complete this picture, more research is needed in different countries to gain a better understanding of the media systems there and the role TFCs play in it. Particularly European media, which have traditionally played an important role in (Western) foreign reporting, deserve extra attention, partly to counterbalance the extensive research on the subject coming from the United States.

Further research could also be done into the TFC's working conditions in their host country or region. It is especially worth looking at security threats and hostile regimes and/or citizens they face that make their work extra challenging. This would contribute to creating a more comprehensive picture of the current state of Western foreign correspondence.

Finally, what deserves more examination is the relationship between the rise of alternative forms of foreign correspondence on the one hand and the number of TFC positions, the ratio of freelance-employed among TFCs and the increased working pressure for TFCs on the other hand. This research has already demonstrated how non-traditional foreign correspondents have partly changed the working practices of the Dutch TFC, but seeing how this affects their numbers, working conditions and arrangements, can illuminate the subject from additional angles.

## Summary

S nárůstem netradičních zahraničních korespondentů došlo v některých případech k částečnému převzetí úkolů tradičních zahraničních zpravodajů (TFC), ale pouze v jednom případě k jejich úplné náhradě. Celkově se dotazovaní TFC necítí ohroženi postupným vzestupem alternativních forem zahraniční korespondence. Přerozdělení úkolů mezi "novými" zahraničními korespondenty a TFC, jejichž vztah se vyznačuje spíše koexistencí a spoluprací než konkurencí, přimělo TFC k vývoji do nových rolí. Tyto role se více zaměřují na zprostředkování, interpretaci a kontextualizaci zpráv než na samotné předávání faktů, což je v souladu s názorem Hannerze (2004) o moderních TFC jako o zpravodajích, překladatelích a interpretech. To také potvrzuje tvrzení Hamiltona a Jennera (2004), že tradiční zahraniční zpravodaj nezmizí, ale spíše se vyvíjí. Vznik deskových reportérů a lokálních novinářů tedy TFC o práci nepřipravil, ale naopak ji nově redefinoval. Nárůst občanských novinářů dokonce přinesl TFC více práce.

Další významné změny v postavení nizozemských TFC zahrnují pokles počtu pracovních pozic TFC ve srovnání s před dvanácti lety, větší převaha pracovních dohod na volné noze a zvýšený pracovní tlak mezi TFC. Tyto změny nejsou nutně přímým důsledkem vzestupu netradičních zahraničních korespondentů. Jde ale určitě o dvě strany téže mince. Obě jsou do jisté míry výsledkem obecného úpadku nizozemských médií. Přesto je třeba zmínit, že přímý vztah mezi nimi nebyl v této práci prokázán.

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