

From Press History to the History of Journalism

National and Transnational Features of Dutch Scholarship

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Abstract

In this essay the historiography on journalism in the Netherlands is critically examined. Three stages are distinguished in scholarship, moving from press history, i.e. mapping the institutional history of the press, to journalism history to the history of journalism. The latter indicates a shift from history focused on news production and professionalization to an approach that also includes the content, form and style of news coverage. It is argued that this pattern is not necessarily unique to the Dutch case and might be present in other European countries as well. Furthermore, following in the footsteps of Carey and Curran it is contended that a transnational grand narrative of journalism is implicitly in evidence in European historiography. This narrative is a story of continuous progress in which the development of journalism is interpreted as a long road from a partisan press to press freedom, including the establishment of an autonomous profession independent of political and economic powers that obeys more or less the objectivity regime and the practices and formal conventions resulting from it. This article concludes with a plea for a more nuanced history of journalism that takes reflective styles of journalism seriously and demonstrates the interplay between national specificities and transnational universals.

In retrospect, the year 1972 can be regarded as a watershed in Dutch journalism and press history. H. J. A. Hofland, just sacked at the bleeding liberal daily *Algemeen Handelsblad*, published a volume of essays that soon achieved an iconic status. In *Lifting Paving Stones, Or True Stories about the Authorities in the Country of Faits Accomplis*, Hofland criticized Dutch politics and its cup-bearer: journalism.¹ He argued that Dutch journalism was subservient to politics and the authorities. Hofland believed news was suppressed rather than revealed, which he saw as deceiving the public. His critique echoed the words of political scientist Hans Daalder, who characterized the Dutch press as 'an iceberg that has to keep more under the water line than it can show' (Daalder, 1964, pp. 32-33) in his 1964 inaugural lecture. Two decades later, Hofland (1988) elegantly summarized his critique in the title of a public lecture, 'Submissiveness is Worse than Censorship'. If the press were a dog, it would look the other way and never bark.

To understand Hofland's argument and the development of Dutch journalism history, it is essential to know that until the 1970s, the Dutch

press favored a reflective style of journalism. One aim of the news media was to educate, instruct and influence readers to accept certain political or socio-cultural positions. So the media preferred opinions and analyses to news and reporting. Journalists subjectively interpreted the news for their readers, and many of the media were openly partisan (Broersma, 1999, 2007; Wijfjes, 2004). The press and broadcasters were largely incorporated into the socio-political system. Starting in the late nineteenth century, Dutch society was 'pillarized' along religious and political lines. The distinctive Catholic, Protestant and Socialist communities each had their own political parties, labour unions, churches, schools, universities, social welfare organizations, athletic clubs and so on, which were subsidized in part by the state (Lijphart, 1968; Blom & Talsma, 2000). The leading principle was that every religious or social community should have the right to organize its members' societal lives with as little state interference as possible and should be able to freely do so.

The country's newspapers, magazines and broadcasters were closely aligned to these distinctive 'pillars' that were part and parcel of its national

¹ Dutch title: *Tegels lichten. Of ware verhalen uit het land van de voldongen feiten*. Reprinted six times, the last time in 1996, the book has never been translated.

unity. To a large extent, they were instruments to voice the opinions of the various communities and promote their interests. They also established a sense of belonging and discipline among their own ranks. Some of the media were owned by political parties, labour unions or other interest groups, but most of them were private enterprises that supported a political point of view because they genuinely believed in it or simply for commercial reasons. In addition to the pillarized media, there was a strong Liberal press, Liberal in the British sense of the word. Other media, mainly focused on local or regional markets, characterized themselves as neutral (Wijfjes, 2004).

In *Lifting Paving Stones*, Hofland characterized Dutch journalists as lackeys of the authorities. They nod respectfully when politicians speak to them and never question their statements. More a pamphlet than a solid analysis, the volume set the standard for evaluating pre-1970 Dutch journalism as backward, anachronistic and something for reporters and historians to be ashamed of. Although there is an element of truth here, for the sake of argument Hofland exaggerated the obedience of Dutch journalists in well-phrased hyperboles (cf. Koedijk, 1997). This rhetorical strategy turned out to be successful. By diminishing the profession as *non-journalistic*, he set the standard for a new journalism independent of politics and more oriented towards critically judging the authorities and their political decisions. In doing so, he simultaneously earned a reputation as a critical intellectual and a proponent of a more Anglo-American conception of the journalist as the watchdog of democracy.

Hofland certainly hit a nerve with his book. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, the media loosened the ties with their pillarized communities and indeed the whole pillarization system started to crumble as a result of the social emancipation launched in the 1960s. Newspaper circulation rose quickly, and so did the number of journalists and the level of professionalization. Newly established journalism schools at the college level emphasized the autonomous role of professional journalism and its democratic function. Hofland's book became a landmark for new generations of journalists. It is an inspiring critique that finally set the course for critical journalism and became a frightening reminder of the old times, when the press and politics were intertwined. Other prominent journalists presented similar images of the past (for example Blokker, 1992, 2010; Schoo,

2009), but none were as well timed and persuasive as Hofland's account. *Lifting Paving Stones* helped motivate his peers to elect him Dutch Journalist of the Twentieth Century in 1999. Furthermore, in 2007 a major journalistic award in The Netherlands was called the Paving Stone (*De Tegel*) as a tribute to Hofland and the term he coined in the title of his book.

Scholars of Dutch press history cannot avoid Hofland's legacy either. In studies since the 1980s, when media history burgeoned as a field in Dutch academia, the notion of professionalization is dominant. The development of journalism is depicted as a tale of oppression and limited professional autonomy before the last quarter of the twentieth century, when emancipation and professionalization take off. In this essay I critically examine this historiography and argue that this interpretation of Dutch journalism history, dominant in the professional discourse as well as academic scholarship, fits into a transnational grand narrative of journalism. I conclude with a plea for a more nuanced history of journalism that takes reflective styles of journalism seriously and demonstrates the interplay between national specificities and transnational universals.

From press history to journalism history to the history of journalism

Media and journalism history has long been a strange bedfellow in Dutch academia. Long abandoned to dabblers and former journalists, it only managed to secure a position at Dutch universities after World War Two. The number of scholars in this field has remained relatively small, however, and many do not devote all their research time to media and journalism history. The rise of journalism education at Dutch universities since the 1990s has created an institutional foundation that stimulated scholarship but also caused a shift to journalism studies more focused on contemporary topics. However, the origins of Dutch press history go back to the 1860s as an activity for individuals with a fierce interest in the press and its history.

I distinguish three stages in the historiography on journalism, moving from press history, i.e. mapping the institutional history of the press, to journalism history to the history of journalism. At first glance, the move from journalism history to the history of journalism might seem like little

more than a play on words, but it indicates a shift from history focused on news production and professionalization to an approach that also includes the content, form and style of news coverage. Needless to say, there is no clear temporal demarcation between the stages; instead, new methodological approaches, theoretical viewpoints and topics complement earlier ones. I neither want to suggest that one approach is superior to another. The existing narratives are merely complemented and challenged by alternative ones. Lastly, this historiographic pattern is not necessarily unique to the Dutch case and might even relate to the development of history as a discipline. When a field of study emerges, it usually starts by researching and outlining structures and institutions as the basis of the field. Once the contours are marked, in this case of the media landscape, it is possible to move on to media performance and content.

The press became a subject of study in the Netherlands in the second part of the nineteenth century thanks to the work of one scholar, W. P. Sautijn Kluit (1838-1894). Trained as a lawyer, he was triggered by the works of the famous French press historian Eugène Hatin, who visited the Low Countries in the 1860s.

Kluit had to start from scratch and trace archival sources and copies of newspapers at a time when libraries and archives were just getting set up. At this early stage of accumulating collections, newspapers and magazines were certainly not regarded as the most important material to collect. The microscopic-bibliographical studies Kluit successively wrote are exploratory. He mapped the early institutional history of a few newspapers and magazines and the press policy of the provincial and national governments (Hemels, 1993, pp. 48-53, 63).

Kluit's efforts are a prime example of the first period in historiography, i.e. press history. Scholars like R. van der Meulen, H. J. Scheffer, Maarten Schneider and Joan Hemels followed in his footsteps. Until the 1980s the study of the press was largely still a matter of individual scholars collecting and exploring sources and back issues of newspapers. They wrote institutional histories based on the collected material, often quoting it at length. At this stage, presenting factual infor-

mation seemed more important than analysing it and presenting the results in comprehensive narratives. Moreover, they treated the press as a separate category that can be more or less isolated from the society it is part of.

In 1978, Schneider and Hemels published the fourth edition of *The Dutch Newspaper* summarizing earlier research findings in an almost encyclopedic collection of facts. It provides a useful overview of the institutional development of the Dutch press, but lacks an organizing narrative and is thus still of a random nature. Descriptive histories focused on biographies of well-known publishers and journalists (for example Scheffer, 1976; Peijnenburg, 1976), the institutional development of newspapers, magazines and the press in general (for example Van der Meulen, 1885; Hemels, 1969, 1981; Scheffer, 1981), as well as the political context of the press (for example Cramer, 1958). Other studies are devoted to

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the coverage of important historical events such as the Russian Revolution or the Nazi regime in Germany (Stoeltinga, 1976; Van Vree, 1989).

As in other countries, Dutch press history unfolded in splendid isolation. It focused almost exclusively on Dutch topics without taking

international developments or influences into account. Every now and then, studies referred to journalism in France, Germany, the US or the UK, but merely to emphasize the specific Dutch nature of the press. In particular, news-centered and sensation-loving Anglo-American journalism served as an awkward counterpoint. Newspapers that focused on a mass market and appealed to people's emotions were generally frowned upon in the Netherlands (Broersma, 1999; Wolf, 2010). It was everything bourgeois enlightened Dutch journalism did not want to be. In studies on the Catholic press, of course the relationship with the Vatican was an issue. But other than that, press history remained confined to the Netherlands and, to a large extent, it still is. The fact that press history is closely connected to the nation state does not come as a surprise though, since media systems were and still are nationally confined as well (cf. Broersma, 2010b).

A peculiarity of Dutch press history, however, is

that it was largely confined to the same pillarized structures as the media. Catholic scholars wrote studies on Catholic publishers, journalists and media at Catholic universities. Catholic amateur historians and journalists mainly interested in the media they worked for also published studies. Protestant, Socialist and Liberal media were mainly studied by authors of the same ideological affiliation as well. This has led to committed press histories, which some would call biased, but at any rate they were hardly detached or scholarly. Authors identified with the subjects they were studying. Many works were written to add luster to anniversaries or other special occasions and are merely anecdotal. Nostalgia and pride colour these accounts of the illustrious past of their own media and heroes. What journalism is or how it functions in society in various periods were not the issues at hand. It was taken for granted that periodicals and broadcasting networks were instruments to support the political, social and cultural emancipation of the various pillars.

In the 1990s the focus shifted from press history to journalism history. The institutional approach dominating the first century of media research in the Netherlands laid the empirical foundation, making a shift to a broader, cultural framework possible. A new generation of historians built upon the work of their predecessors. Most of them were university educated and worked in an academic setting. Press history lost its popularity at social science faculties, which did not continue chairs in this field, but the establishment of journalism schools at Dutch universities and the rise of cultural and media studies at Liberal Arts or Humanities faculties made journalism and media studies more fashionable. The new generation was interested in international scholarship, mainly from the US and the UK, and was more oriented towards theoretical debates, paradigms and approaches. As a result, they were more accepted in academia. This led for example to the founding of a Committee for the Advancement of Media Historical Research (1989-1995) at the Royal Academy of Sciences, which sketched research perspectives for the field and advocated an improvement of the research infrastructure (Wijffjes & Blom, 1995).

Newcomers in the field tended to criticize the dominant one-sided focus on institutional history. In a review dated 1992 Frank van Vree, the leading scholar of this generation, noted the lack of diachronic studies conducted on topics like 'chang-

ing styles or subcultures and image transformations' and 'comprehensive studies of the significance of the media for culture and society'. He concluded that 'These are major deficiencies, for they are after all the heart of the matter' (Van Vree, 1992, p. 100; cf. Wijffjes, 1999). His argument echoed a well-known quotation from renowned US journalism scholar James Carey, who stated in 1974 that journalism history was still 'something of an embarrassment'. He advocated a cultural approach to shed light on journalism, journalists and news processes. Studying the history of the reporting, journalistic practices and forms aiming to represent social reality at a given moment could offer fresh perspectives on old grounds and show how journalism constructs social reality (Carey, 1974, p. 86). Michael Schudson's *Discovering the News* (1978) was also a major influence. Schudson did what Carey preached and wrote a history of journalism exploring the development of reporting and professional norms and relating it to changes in politics and society.

Two decades later, Carey's challenge was taken up by Dutch press scholars. Scholarly attention drawing upon concepts from sociology and cultural studies focused on the newsroom and the norms and practices of the weird species inhabiting it. In 1996 Van Vree himself published a monograph on *de Volkskrant*, a newspaper transformed in the 1970s from a partisan medium owned by the Catholic Labour Union to a high-circulation quality paper. He analysed how this metamorphosis occurred and why it was so successful. The interplay between an editorial staff looking for new reporting techniques to grasp rapid social change and a potential reading audience looking for a newspaper that recognizes and voices its mentality, lifestyle and opinions was concisely examined. Editorial policies, newsroom organization, styles of reporting and the rephrasing of professional norms were topics introduced in this successful effort to write true journalism history. Other scholars followed the lead, analysing journalistic routines and norms based on interviews and research in newspaper archives. In a 1999 review, media historian Huub Wijffjes even spoke of a revolution.

By the time these studies were written, the view on press history voiced by practitioners like Hofland had been widely accepted. In *Lifting Paving Stones* the Greet Hofmans affair served as a metaphor for the submissive attitude of the press (cf. Wijffjes, 2007). The ingredients of this tragedy at

the Dutch royal court included a pacifist queen, her pro-NATO husband and a faith healer (Greet Hofmans) who lived at the palace to cure their almost blind daughter, as was revealed by the foreign press. The Dutch newspapermen who knew about the crisis in the royal marriage and the supposed influence of the prophet on the queen all held their tongue. In almost every press history published since *Lifting Paving Stones*, the Greet Hofmans affair is a compulsory paragraph. It is used to illustrate the lack of press autonomy in the 1950s and how journalists supported the status quo in society (e.g. Mulder & Koedijk, pp. 307-336; Wijfjes, 2004, pp. 298-306; Koole 2002, p. 101).

Earlier press historians took it for granted that journalism was part of the pillarized system and this was even a source of pride. In the 1990s however, it was usually a given that in the Netherlands *real* journalism, as opposed to the lip service of the past, only dated back to around 1970. Ample attention was devoted to analysing this professional discourse of change that clearly served the personal strategies of a new generation of journalists challenging the status quo in the field. Although some distinctions were drawn, especially regarding relations between the press and politics, the core of all the narratives is that the late 1960s and 1970s are indeed a watershed. By then a process of professionalization is believed to have started, leading to real journalism as opposed to the servile role prevalent in earlier decades. The pattern is recognizable because the same can be said of the field of history in general. Historians no longer considered themselves representatives of a specific community or pillar, writing history to serve its interests, but professionals who worked at a national level and could focus on whatever they wished.

Professionalization as the engine behind modernization thus came to be the dominant framework for journalism history. Van Vree (1996) framed the metamorphosis of *de Volkskrant* in these terms. In his narrative, the paper and its staff liberated themselves from the galling stranglehold of pillarized politics and achieved the autonomous position needed to be successful in a society in

transformation. It is argued that reporting, investigative journalism and a new role conception as a watchdog for democracy have resulted from this process of professionalization. Though less explicitly, Wijfjes (2004) applied the same framework in his erudite monograph on the cultural history of Dutch journalism between 1850 and 2000. He contends that journalism always presented itself more as an attitude and a vocation than as a strict profession, but he nonetheless observes a trend towards organization and professionalization.

Journalism history built upon earlier institutional histories. The available knowledge about the press system made it possible to take the next step and study the production of news. By doing so, it added a valuable layer to the existing scholarship. However, what was written in the papers

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or broadcasted, the news itself, remained underexposed. Wijfjes (2004) had to contend with the fact that timewise, he could not conduct research into news content himself and there was no secondary literature on this topic. For his comprehensive overview of 150 years of journalism history, this is why he merely relied upon memoirs,

autobiographies and other books by journalists, the records of various pillarized trade unions and discussions in the trade press. And this is why his study is more about the collective self-image of journalism – what it wanted to be and the picture it painted of itself in retrospect – than a record of whether and how these ideals and good intentions were actually expressed in the content of the news. The same thing can be said of a recent study on the largest popular daily in the Netherlands *De Telegraaf* (Wolf, 2010). It is a strong example of journalism history that focuses on newsroom culture and colourful journalists, though what actually attracts the readers – its content and style – remains a mystery. This results in only half a history of reporting, which also gives a rather romantic impression of the journalist as an adventurous bon vivant.

A third more recent shift is from journalism history to the history of journalism. This approach aspires to a more integrated form of history by systematically analysing the content of news and integrating it in the institutional and journalistic production context. It distinguishes itself from

studies that reconstruct the coverage of certain themes or events by examining form and style conventions that allude to journalistic norms and broader cultural discourses and determine how news is structured and how social reality is organized (Broersma, 2007). The power of journalism mainly lies in its ability to provide the forms in which things are declared to be true, as Schudson argues. The content of news changes every day, but form and style conventions assure the ritual function of news. They thus determine how we experience the world. Schudson (1995) speaks in this respect of the politics of narrative form, and Barnhurst and Nerone (2001) contend in their seminal study on the form of news that 'form embodies the imagined relationship of a medium to its society and polity'.

Historians have long despised content analysis because they tend to distrust the random sampling of material, which is a necessity if a daily newspaper is researched over a long period of time, and social science methodology in general. They argue that history is too personal and messy to fit into the structures and theories of social science. This sentiment is perhaps most aptly voiced by Robert Darnton (1990, p. 60) who suspects that social scientists 'live in a world beyond the reach of ordinary mortals, a world organized in perfect patterns of behaviour, peopled by ideal types, and governed by correlation coefficients that exclude everything but the most standard of deviations'. Furthermore, content analysis is either quantitative or qualitative, a labour-intensive methodology that many researchers resist. Wolf (2009, p. 17) even calls it, and not without good reason, 'sheer torture for every newspaper lover'.

Even today, the content of newspapers is still largely overlooked in media history, and not just in the Netherlands but in other European countries as well, except for important and inspiring works like Jürgen Wilke's *Nachrichtenauswahl und Medienrealität in vier Jahrhunderten* (1984). The analysis of news content is still mainly left to the social sciences and barely applied to historical periods. However, in the near future when newspapers are increasingly digital and easily searchable, arguments related to availability and time will be countered, at least in part. This will make the combination of content analysis and historical research more doable. But even so, analysing content in such a way that it generates valid results will still be time-consuming and give rise to all kinds of new methodological challenges. Media

historians, traditionally accustomed to dealing with scarcity and limited access to sources, need to develop new research strategies to anticipate the current trend towards a profusion of sources, especially media content.

The advantage of systematically examining media content is, however, that it demonstrates how news media represent social reality and structure the world for their audiences. It makes it possible to ask new questions and provide new answers to old ones. Stereotypes about pillarized journalism can be verified and changes occurring in the media as a result of professionalization are far easier to analyse. In my study of the regional newspaper *Leeuwarder Courant* (1752-2002), for example, a content analysis shows how the scope of the newspaper and its readers broaden in 250 years. The speed and geography of news changes, textual genres and new topics like sports and national politics are introduced while older genres and topics fade, and the order and design of the paper reflect transformations in the professional ideology and tone of writing. In other words, the toolkit of journalism changed, which affected how social reality was represented and how the newspaper attributed meaning to it for its readers (Broersma, 2002).

Rutger de Graaf's (2010) thesis about local media in two Dutch cities in the nineteenth century almost exclusively focuses on their content. The institutional and journalistic history of the newspapers and pamphlets he examines remain vague. So there is no context in which news is produced historically, which makes it hard to evaluate transformations in the content of news. De Graaf does nevertheless shed new light on the media interplay as regards such functions as presenting news and offering a platform for discussion. He also analyses how new genres and reporting techniques entered the paper. By comparing his results with those on the *Leeuwarder Courant*, as is possible after a systematic content analysis has been conducted, a more valid picture is depicted. In *Reporting at the Boundaries of the Public Sphere: Form, Style and Strategy of European Journalism, 1880-2005*, the research project currently being conducted at the University of Groningen, an international comparison is drawn. The content of news is largely linked to national boundaries, but the form and style of news are concepts that transcend borders and allow for comparative research. Three types of newspapers (popular, quality and partisan papers) in three media systems (France, UK and the Netherlands) are examined

in a large-scale quantitative content analysis and compared at the national and transnational level. This makes it possible to verify old hypotheses and address new research questions. The initial outcomes show that reporting routines associated with New Journalism are introduced in the UK and the Netherlands far later than is assumed in the literature. Furthermore, the Dutch papers look far more alike than their British counterparts, which is probably a result of the more competitive press market in the UK (Harbers & Den Herder, 2010).

In recent decades, research on the Dutch press and journalism has made huge advances. Table 1 summarizes the shift from press history to journalism history to the history of journalism and its effects on scholarship. The attention now devoted to the production and content of news, professional

A transnational grand narrative of journalism history

The three kinds of journalism histories I distinguish above are in evidence in other European countries as well. In most countries, the first stage of institutional history, sketching the structure and organization of the media landscape, is fully explored. This is not the place for an extensive literature review, but in countries like the UK (Griffiths, 2006; Williams, 2009), France (Bellanger et al., 1969-1976), Sweden (Gustafsson & Rydén, 2010) or Belgium (De Bens & Raeymaeckers, 2007), comprehensive studies are published giving a factual overview of the historical development of the national media landscapes. Histories of many influential media organizations as well as biographies of important journalists and publishers are also written. So the corner-

Table 1. Dutch Historiography

	<i>Press History</i>	<i>Journalism History</i>	<i>History of Journalism</i>
Period	1865 >	1990s >	2000s >
Institutional	Pillarized histories by scholars and journalists within the pillar	Closely linked to rise of journalism programs, and media and journalism studies at universities	
Framework	Emancipation of ideological groups	Professionalization of journalism	Representation of social reality
Focus	Institutional histories focused on newspapers as organizations and political context	Focus on newsroom organization, practices and professional norms	Focus on form, style and function
Character	Descriptive	Analytical, critical	

norms and meaning-making by newspapers offers valuable new insights into the historical development and social and cultural functions of journalism. Compared to the numerous institutional histories still being published, mainly by journalists who usually write the history of the medium they worked for, studies on reporting and, to a larger extent, news coverage are still scarce. A great deal of work remains to be done in this respect. Another issue is the international orientation of scholarship. Although new generations of historians are definitely more aware of international scholarship and theoretical approaches, when it comes to media, topics and events, the study of journalism history is still primarily confined to national boundaries (cf. Broersma, 2010b).

stones for a 'history of reporting' (Carey, 1974) have been laid. However, the second and third stages of research into journalism are less widely explored. Although more detailed studies, usually in the form of chapters or journal articles, are published on the transformation of norms, routines and practices of news production, the structural examination of news content still seems to be virgin territory.

Moreover, a nation state framework still dominates the history of journalism. Even two volumes that explore the diffusion of the news paradigm (Høyer & Pöttker, 2005) and changes in the form and style of newspapers (Broersma, 2007) across Europe consist of individual chapters presenting

national case studies. Barely any comparative, let alone transnational research is conducted into the history of journalism. This raises the question of whether there is indeed an encompassing scholarly framework that could be used to study journalism in Europe, and if so, whether it would make sense in view of the national nature of the press. I argue though that to a growing extent, a transnational grand narrative of journalism is implicitly in evidence in Dutch historiography and in other European countries as well. This narrative is a story of continuous progress that links up well with Hofland's account of the emancipation of journalism and the scholarly framework of professionalization and modernization. In the transnational grand narrative James Carey (1997) calls the 'Whig interpretation of journalism history' and James Curran (2002, 2009) the 'liberal narrative', the development of journalism since the nineteenth century is interpreted as a long road from a partisan press to press freedom, including the establishment of an autonomous profession independent of political and economic powers that obeys more or less the objectivity regime and the practices and formal conventions resulting from it (cf. Broersma 2007, 2010b).

Rooted in Anglo-American journalism and scholarship, this narrative is predetermined by predominantly Anglo-American perspectives on what journalism is or should be. In an article comparing France with the UK, Jean Chalaby (1996) even calls journalism itself an Anglo-American invention because the discursive norms, practices and strategies thought to characterize the profession emerged in the US and the UK. News and not views, neutrality and not partisanship, independence and not involvement are its slogans. In various national historiographies (cf. Høyer & Pöttker, 2005; Broersma, 2007) this is turned into an almost universal pattern of journalism development whenever and wherever it takes place. Most northern European countries seem to more or less fit into this pattern. In southern Europe, where politics, power and the press are still more intertwined, it functions as a counterpoint for critique on what is often framed as the regrettable

immaturity of the profession. As a fixed template for national journalism histories, this grand narrative goes beyond European national boundaries and offers a comprehensive framework for comparative or transnational journalism history.

However, the problem with this dominant, almost inescapable narrative is that it is normative, teleological and anachronistic. Firstly, it is normative because it treats journalism as a one-dimensional activity, a watchdog or trustee of the public, which is there to serve one important function, i.e. a democratic one. Journalism is despised as bad, not real or half-baked if it does not control power to an extent that satisfies the normative ideal. So what to do with journalism that mainly aspires to entertain, opionate, satirize, promote specific interests or strengthen communities? Are

Unfortunately, the question of what journalism is and how this concept has been discussed and attributed with new meanings over time and in different national settings has barely been addressed in the scholarly works on journalism history. Journalism seems to be a more or less fixed category that hardly needs to be conceptualized or historicized.

Hofland's 'collaborators in half truths' (Koedijk, 1997, p. 211) actually journalists and can their 'servile silence' (Hofland, 1972, p. 127) be regarded as journalism? In short, if a normative perspective is applied, much of what contemporaries perceived as journalism is not taken seriously.

Secondly, it is anachronistic because it examines journalism history from the perspective of present-day norms. It diminishes the existence and influence of other journalistic styles, which do not centre around news facts and objectivity, but around literature, reflection and opinions, and have long been a vital part of European journalism (Broersma, 2007, p. xi). Henry Faas, long-time political reporter at the Catholic *Volkscrant*, concluded in retrospect that he and other journalists have not been critical enough of politicians. However, this is not because they were cowards, he states, but because they agreed with their political leaders and felt at ease in the Catholic community (Faas, 1986, p. 220). In short, it is hard to determine in retrospect when journalism reaches a stage of autonomy. A more nuanced approach is needed than an assessment in terms of living up to the ideal standard of what journalism should be. However, although considerations like Faas' are well-documented in Dutch journalism history and not by any means obscure, they are still hard to fit into the grand narrative.

Lastly, this narrative is teleological because it backs a foregone conclusion. It analyses and evaluates the pace of journalistic development according to the extent to which the desired outcome is reached. Wijfjes (2007) speaks in this respect of a 'belated take-off' and Van Vree notes that it is not until the 1960s that journalism reached a final stage of development. Only by then it was a 'mature profession' (Van Vree, p. 164). Although a narrative in which journalism achieves greater autonomy vis-à-vis politics and develops into a recognizable profession obviously makes sense, this might nonetheless lead to a unidirectional and static interpretation of journalism history. A more dynamic approach might be offered by Bourdieu's field theory, which does not think in terms of linear progress, as connoted by modernization or professionalization, but argues in favour of something relational. Different agents in the journalistic field use different strategies, discursive forms and styles to distinguish themselves and stand out in the field. It emphasizes heterogeneity and struggle instead of homogenization. Moreover, it offers an opportunity to unite institutional, sociological and textual approaches to journalism history. Agents like media organizations

and individual journalists do after all position themselves in the field through their practices and performance, professional discourse and news coverage (cf. Benson, 1999; Chalaby, 1998).

Unfortunately, the question of what journalism is and how this concept has been discussed and attributed with new meanings over time and in different national settings has barely been addressed in the scholarly works on journalism history. Journalism seems to be a more or less fixed category that hardly needs to be conceptualized or historicized. This has been an obstacle to the serious analysis of other styles and forms as interesting in themselves since they do not belong to the domain of journalism. They are treated like the odd man out and are too often interpreted as a disruption or a necessary stage in the development of journalism as an independent profession, as merely a step towards modernisation. A more nuanced approach acknowledging how media construct meaning in different ways, articulate social worlds and build communities, and how societies are shaped by different representations of social reality through various journalistic media would be more than welcome.

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