Discussion and Conclusion

In this final chapter the analyses of the survey data and in-depth interviews are connected to the research questions of this project: describing and explaining the basic, occupational and professional characteristics of Dutch journalists; analyzing the findings in comparison with similar research projects in other Western democracies of recent years; and exploring the articulations of multiculturalism, infotainment and the Internet to contemporary Dutch journalism. I will not specifically address each of the research questions and their answers in detail here, as this has been done in the extensive concluding sections of the previous chapters. The purpose of the discussion and conclusion is threefold:

- to assess what is ‘Dutch’ about Dutch journalists;
- to pinpoint how multiculturalism, the Internet and infotainment specifically challenge journalism’s ideal-typical values;
- to discuss the consequences of the findings and conclusions of this project for journalism studies in general and journalism education in particular.

The central aim here is to integrate the various strata of research and theory applied in this project, and connect the findings to the global picture of journalism introduced in the first two chapters of the book.

Dutch journalists

The project is located in a long tradition of (inter-) national journalism survey research, which has developed parallel to a process of what Hallin (1992) has described as a period of ‘high modernism’ in journalism. That process—especially apparent in societies with more or less established democratic systems of which journalism forms an integral part—can be characterized by a gradual, consensual adoption and routinization of certain norms, values and goals by professional members of the (mainstream) news media. This ongoing and increasing professionalization of journalism has inspired a vast number of studies about the emergence and establishment of such consensual routines and values in the newsmedia, as well as it has provided scholars with a wealth of more or less comparable data and findings regarding the characteristics of journalists in several countries. After making a selection of countries—Germany, Australia, Great Britain and the United States—I used this material (in chapter III) as a way
to describe a particular profile of Dutch journalists. But what can be considered to be 'Dutch' about Dutch journalists? A number of differences between countries stand out, which help to address this issue in detail: age, education, newsroom organization, audience orientation, and media roles.

**AGE.** Dutch journalists are on average between four to ten years 'older' than their colleagues in Great Britain, Germany, Australia, and the United States. I would like to suggest that this has to do with a particular feature of the Dutch media landscape: a relatively late introduction of commercial news broadcasts, and the stability (especially in terms of subscription rate) of the national and regional newspaper market. One could argue that this has both halted an influx of (large numbers of) new, young journalists into the profession, as well as offered the existing reporters and editors no particular incentive to move into different areas of newsgathering. The data show that especially newspaper reporters hardly ever switch employers, while online journalists – the 'newest newpeople' – are the ones who tend to move on to another newsroom every twelve months or so. The somewhat inverted age pyramid may provide near-future opportunities for younger and minority peoples to enter the profession – as indeed the data suggest that among less experienced journalists (and journalism students) more women and ethnic minorities are represented.¹

**EDUCATION.** What Dutch journalists share with their American (and to lesser extent their German) colleagues, is a high standard of formal education. The predominance of on-the-job training can perhaps be seen as typical of the Anglo-Saxon tradition in journalism education shared in Great Britain and Australia. As British and Australian journalists also share a similar, quite 'conventional' attitude towards their work – emphasizing an immediate government watchdog role above all else – this suggests that formal journalism education does play an important role in diversifying the (attitudes and views of the) population of journalists in a given national setting. Journalism education is sometimes accused of its potential 'homogenizing' effect on (the attitudes and views of) reporters and editors; these findings suggest that such an accusation must be modified. But not all is well regarding the effects of formal journalism education: I also found that Dutch journalists coming from one of the four schools for journalism in The Netherlands are much more lenient towards questionable methods of newsgathering than their colleagues (more on education at the end of this chapter).

**NEWSROOM ORGANIZATION.** In terms of occupational characteristics I found during the phone interviews that Dutch journalists think of themselves
as all-rounders, mentioning a vast array of job descriptions, titles and functions in the newsroom. The experiences in other countries suggest that this may be a continental (North-) European phenomenon, as Anglo-American newsrooms are centrally organized with a high division of labor as compared to the somewhat 'holistic' approach of for example Dutch and German media companies. Esser (1998) suggests this means that the division between opinion and factual reportage is somewhat artificial in holistic newsrooms, as the writer of both is often the same. This argument ignores the strict organization of for example sections within newspapers, and rigid formula-based formats of magazines and newscasts. For this project it is important to note however, that the overall organization of newwork in The Netherlands is more similar to German journalism, than to British or American journalism. Dutch media companies and scholars alike should therefore perhaps use Germany much more as a frame of reference in their thinking about journalism in The Netherlands, than (particularly) the United States.

AUDIENCE ORIENTATION. One result in terms of audience orientation stands out for Dutch journalists: they do not seem to interact a lot with members of their audience (save regional reporters), and rate feedback from their colleagues and superiors higher. Several previous studies regarding Dutch journalists' images of their audience suggest that one can indeed speak of a highly ambivalent relationship: on the one hand, the audience is important to the work of journalists – but on the other hand journalists do not feel inclined to actively pursue communication with their publics, nor would they deliberately change their ways because of audience criticisms and complaints. It is tempting to ascribe this attitude to the relatively stable and 'secure' media market in The Netherlands, where people have been working on average between fifteen and twenty years in journalism, not threatened in their position by a steady influx of new (younger, higher educated) colleagues or (massive) shifts in the 'loyalties' of publics. On the other hand I have to concede, that it is the most 'static' group of journalists – reporters working at regional dailies – who say they rate their regular discussions with members of their audience most important. These journalists tend to live in the communities they serve. The other selected countries – save Great Britain – do not have a similar national print media culture (Germany: none, Australia: The Australian, United States: USA Today), which intrinsic regionalism may account for the relatively higher level of audience interaction.

MEDIA ROLES. Dutch journalists are more explicit in their support for an analytical, explanatory role for the media in society than their colleagues else-
where. It is questionable whether this is typically Dutch, as several contemporary studies suggest that the news has become more interpretative throughout the 20th century. What is interesting though, is the result that Dutch journalists say it is much more important to follow the public sector (including business and government) critically, than to for example investigate government claims or giving people a chance to express their criticisms – in other words: journalists in The Netherlands have internalized the right to criticize for example government and business, rather than serving as a filter, investigator, and platform of (criticisms of) the public sphere. Dutch journalists are indeed much more vocal in their wish to have an actual influence on politics and the public agenda, indicating that they see themselves as an important and somewhat righteous ‘player’ in the public sphere. Future surveys among journalists in the United States (again in 2002) and other countries should illuminate whether this somewhat sermonizing mindset is an international trend or a particular feature.

Dutch journalism

The next step is to assess how multiculturalism, the Internet and infotainment can be seen as specifically changing or challenging journalism's core values. For this purpose I conceptualized journalism as a distinct ideology consisting of more or less shared values, which are idealypical in character. Especially from the 1950s onwards the body of literature has contributed to this macro-level understanding of journalism as a profession based on an ideology, rather than a profession in the ‘traditional’ sense with a formal and codified body of knowledge, a universally endorsed barrier of entry, formalized structure of education, and a representational organization of some kind. This does not mean that no trade unions, institutional education programs, or codes of conduct exist in contemporary journalism; it means that these come in many different shapes, sizes and formats, and that no formal consensus exists as to how these aspects of professionalism should function exactly. Professionalism in this respect should be seen as a to some extent linear process over time and space within which ideal-typical values of an occupational ideology are shaped and (re-) defined. The building blocks of this shared ideology of journalism can be summarized in five more or less coherent categories of ideal-typical norms and values, as voiced by most (Western) media practitioners and scholars: journalists provide a public service (as watchdogs or ‘newshounds’, active collectors and disseminators of information); journalists are impartial, neutral, objective, fair and (thus) credible; journalists must be autonomous, free and independent in their work; journalists have a sense of immediacy and speed; journalists have a sense of ethics, validity and legitimacy. These can be considered
to be the overarching 'rules' or benchmarks for the professional journalist, which in the Dutch context should be set against the history of professionalization of journalism in the Netherlands – a history closely connected with the so-called 'depillarization' of society, a complex process to which Dutch journalism actively contributed by wrestling itself free of party-political or religious doctrine, and embracing professionalization within the context of freedom of expression and media pluriformity ideals.

Studying the (relatively scarce) literature regarding studies on and among journalists in The Netherlands, I found that public service, neutrality, autonomy, immediacy, and ethics have different meanings in different contexts – both in time and space. This temporal-spatial distinction is important, as it suggests that the emergence of (the acceptance of) these values in Dutch journalism cannot be seen independent of the period in which the studies were conducted (cf. the element of time), nor independent of the specific national and cultural context in which these studies were located (cf. element of space). This led to an appreciation of the existence of (a version of) the consensual occupational ideology of journalism among Dutch newsmedia professionals, where the five ideals each have had its own specific development and meaning in the Dutch setting:

**Public Service.** The public service ideal in The Netherlands has shown particularly in studies among regional reporters in the urban core district of the country (the Randstad), and in studies about the ways journalists feel about reporting pressing social issues in a multicultural society. Servicing the public is seen – according to such studies – in The Netherlands as an influential or even educational role for the media, where 'the public' is a valued, but faceless, partner. In other words: journalists in such studies are less than clear about who their public in fact is. On the other hand I have to note that the lack of published scholarly studies on local and regional media other than those available in the Randstad prohibits a full understanding of the issue.

**Objectivity.** Neutrality as a professional ideal-typical value was framed as 'objectivity' in the 1970s or as 'fairness' in the 1990s; several researchers concluded that Dutch journalists seem to identify themselves easily with the ideal of professional distance. An important aspect herein is the element of time, as the ongoing depillarization of Dutch society in the 1960s and 1970s particularly inspired the media to position themselves (publicly) as operating independent of political or religious interests. Yet at the same time, studies (in 1968 and 1976) showed that a vast majority of Dutch journalists considered themselves 'neutral' while reporting affiliations with (or supporting) a political par-
ty, or in the 1990s applying 'fairness' while maintaining close relationships with for example (certain) politicians in The Hague.

**FREEDOM.** The autonomy of journalists in The Netherlands has been at the forefront of studies among journalists throughout the latter half of the 20th century. The issue has somewhat modified over time, moving from the perceived threats of media concentration to press freedom (in the 1970s) to the dangers of parliamentary reporters reportedly having too 'intimate' relationships with their political sources (in the 1990s), preventing them from being overtly critical. A specific example - in which Dutch journalism is again more similar to Germany than to Anglo-American journalism - of an operationalization of autonomy is the widespread introduction, adoption (and study) of so-called editorial 'statutes', in which the hierarchical relationships within a media organization are stipulated and positions of for example individual journalists protected.

**IMMEDIACY.** In terms of reporters' sense of immediacy I found that studies in The Netherlands do not seem to critically address this aspect of journalism, but acknowledge that ideals of speedy delivery and fast-paced work sometimes create problems for journalists, in particularly regarding the editorial integration of minorities such as women in the 1980s and ethnic minority reporters in the 1990s (in an otherwise white, male dominated newsroom). A newsroom culture that is based on production routines within a given fast-paced working environment may be seen as less capable to take the time to diversify and broaden its perspective - not only regarding colleagues, but perhaps also regarding news selection criteria.

**ETHICS.** Parallel to the history of 20th century professionalization of journalism runs the history of professional codes of ethics. In The Netherlands studies (since the late 1980s) have shown that the profession's perception on ethics for a long time was dependent on whether a certain newsgathering or reporting practice was deemed harmful to the dignity and standing of journalists. In the course of the 1970s that criterion changed to a judgment on whether a journalist exceeded, given the journalist's responsibility in society, the limits of what is acceptable in society at large.

This listing of the specific contexts (in terms of time and space) of the five ideal-typical values in Dutch journalism does not necessarily presuppose that these are more or less 'typically' Dutch, but that these ideals have different meanings in different settings. This also suggests (as the bulk of the literature does) that contemporary areas of changes and challenges in the news media -
the multicultural society, Internet and infotainment – can be assumed to force journalists to address and possibly redefine their values in order to do their work.

**Journalism and Multiculturalism**

The reporters specializing in writing about topics concerning the Dutch multicultural society expressed through their comments a specific awareness of their work as a negotiation between occupational ideology and its ideal-typical news values, and perceptions of complex social reality. These journalists said it is sometimes difficult to strike a balance between personal views and professional beliefs (for example: being anti-racist and conscious of negative stereotyping, but having to write about problems as this is seen as intrinsic to the definition of news). Throughout their incohesive accounts of their work these experts refer to 'the' journalism in The Netherlands and the editorial policies of their media organization in order to legitimize their choices in writing about multicultural issues. Being objective, ethical or serving the public means in this particular context to be aware of the complexities and sensitivities within and about migrant (and native) cultures – in indeed to acknowledge the sometimes skewed construction of a multicultural social reality apparent in news stories. Freedom and immediacy on the other hand serve as challenges to an awareness of diversity. The organization and routinization of the news and its industry are singled out by the journalists we interviewed as examples of 'how journalism works' – yet at the same time these factors can be seen as largely unarticulated aspects of newwork. One could say that journalists do not have a coherent understanding of the complexities of multiculturalism – despite the long history of immigration in The Netherlands – and refer in their arguments to a policy or profession that they cannot define in clear terms as well. For me these inconsistencies explain at least some of the sometimes excellent, but also often highly problematic Dutch news coverage of for example issues involving ethnic minorities. If (as deducted from the in-depth interviews we held) journalists perceive multicultural awareness as a challenge to the 'conventional' way newwork gets done – which I have shown to be an ideologically driven process – multiculturalism indeed brings a fundamental change to journalism in The Netherlands.

**Journalism and the Internet**

Online journalists and editors are in their opinions bound by the technology and infrastructure of their work. The experts use digital jargon such as 'hyperlinks', 'multimedia' and 'interactivity' as moderating aspects to discuss their ways of establishing new rules, skills and standards for working in an online
environment. These experts connect their views on the nature and (near) future of their profession - as a distinctive type of journalism developing next to radio, television and print - to the technological and infrastructural potential (or lack thereof) of their working environment. What this means for their norms and values remains largely undiscussed, or is treated as subordinate to (benefits and promises of) technological advances. Yet in their comments, the online journalists do express worries regarding that what they have been taught or grown accustomed to - their occupational ideology - and that with which they are faced in an online environment. Some of the rules do not seem to apply anymore - or apply to the extreme (such as ideals of speed and immediacy). The largely unverifiable and faceless nature of much of the communication and information on the Internet for example causes reporters to feel challenged in their notions of ethics and objectivity (cf. fairness). The perceived freedom of online journalists also bring them in conflict with their public service ideals, as most of them are only free to the extent of autonomously reproducing (parts of) the content of a mother-medium (cf. 'shovelware') without in fact applying all their idea(l)s of offering online publics content geared towards the defining unique characteristics of the Internet: hypertextuality, interactivity and multimediality.

JOURNALISM AND INFOTAINMENT

The editors of Dutch serious-popular and gossip media most explicitly address their work in terms of ideal-typical journalism (ethics, truth, public service, investigative skills), but are also quick to add irony to their accounts - expressing awareness of the contradictory nature of this way to give meaning to their work. These experts make it clear that in their decision-making a most literal definition of values like objectivity and ethics is applied, while at the same time deliberately looking for (and even strategically planning to break) the fine lines between what is considered 'right' and what is seen as going 'too far' - which unclear standards for them can even be seen as set by competitor-colleagues in the same genre. In this domain of journalism we found during the interviews the most explicit negotiations going on between journalism's conventional ideal-typical norms, and the situational standards set by tabloid editors in order to fit their popular journalistic magazine genre and format. Public service, objectivity, freedom, immediacy and ethics are all consciously 'up for grabs' in popular journalism one could say - but these values are not dropped altogether. This is an important aspect of the conclusions regarding infotainment journalists in The Netherlands, as for example editorial autonomy is equally important to them as to their colleagues elsewhere, but in this popular journalistic domain it seems to mean to write creatively without the
constraints of newspaper formulas or necessary notions of 'truth' - rather than for example the freedom of working independent from commercial interests. On the other hand, these editors at the same time acknowledge to adhering to a strict magazine formula and emphasizing the predominance of sales figures as editorial guideline for decision-making.

This assessment suggests, like the analysis of the 'Dutchness' of Dutch journalists and their occupational ideology over time and space did, that the application and function of journalism's core values varies across different domains, areas and sections in the news media. At the same time the rather undefined 'deep structure' of the ideal-typical values of journalism remains unchanged, or at least is not actively discussed. This means that although one cannot speak of a journalism in The Netherlands as having a certain meaning which is a constant, or is equally valid across the population of its practitioners, one may argue in favor of a definition of Dutch journalism as an occupational ideology similar to that of journalism in other (Western) countries. In this sense it is important to note that an occupational ideology is carried by its professionals; journalists in all domains apply similar ideological notions (such as objectivity and truth, ethics, public service ideals) to define and position themselves inside the profession of journalism. In other words: journalists in to some extent marginalized domains of the media system (the 'multicultural' beat, online reporting, tabloid journalism) use the same ideal-typical values as benchmarks for their work as can be found in the dominant field of research among journalists worldwide. They seem to do so in order to legitimate themselves and their work. This conclusion indeed reveals how powerful, if not hegemonic, this occupational ideology works and is carried by journalists throughout the profession.

**Consequences**

In this project several methodological considerations, research findings, and overall conclusions can be singled out for detailed discussion. What I am going to address, is the role this kind of research and this project in particular can (and in my opinion: should) play in discussing the structure and quality of contemporary journalism education. There are several reasons for doing so. Education is one of the cornerstones of the professionalization of journalism, and therefore contributes to shaping and defining its values. The survey shows clearly that a background in formal journalism education has a significant effect on one's professional identity. The analysis of multiculturalism, the Internet and infotainment as contemporary trends furthermore shows that journalism's values are under negotiation, which is a development largely ignored in educational programs. Furthermore the developments in the Dutch media
industry (as well as survey data regarding the inverted age pyramid in the journalism population) suggest that in the near future new employment opportunities for young reporters will arise – which younger journalists will predominantly be coming from one of the journalism schools and departments in The Netherlands. Students of journalism are taught a more or less 'uniform' notion of what journalism is. They seem not to be inspired (nor told) to actively seek out the different meanings and functions of the taken-for-granted values of their (future) profession – such as ethics of newsgathering practices. As shown in this project, the discursive space of journalism's ideology, its ideal-typical values and the professional identities of (Dutch) journalists should be seen as dependent on temporal, spatial, structural and subjective influences – and at the same time as more or less universal indicators of how media practitioners define and locate themselves and their competitor-colleagues within the profession of journalism, and how they tend to apply these ideological criteria to exclude certain others. In a study of journalism education programs across the globe, Gaunt (1992: 18-19) identified six overall parameters of curricula, ultimately consisting of a combination of background and skills courses. What he did not do, is acknowledge that these courses are implicitly dependent on the particular interpretation and application of journalism's ideology in a given national setting, and in the context of a specialization in a specific medium-genre (as no journalism schools tend to educate their students in other genres than – 'hard' – news). At the outset of this book I mentioned the fact that our understanding of journalism and journalists is generally based on studies among journalists working (full-time) in mainstream 'hard' newsmedia. Considering the findings and conclusions of this project, I would like to argue that such an approach does not contribute (anymore) to an adequate preparation for journalism students to enter an increasingly critical, digital, commercial, and multicultural society. How can we expect a journalist in contemporary society to respond to the challenges lying ahead, if he or she is not trained to discern between the general and the particular? Between his or her occupational ideology and the situational application of its ideal-typical values? Between the constraining and enabling capacities of structures and subjectivities to his or her individual professional identity? For me, this is the most fundamental insight I have gained from working on this project.

This project has shown journalism's values are not at stake in a discussion on the professional impact of the multicultural society, the Internet and infotainment, but the particular understanding and application of those values is. This seems to be a paradox: journalism throughout the (Western) world is based on a more or less similar consensual occupational ideology – yet at the same time the set of ideal-typical values of this ideology vary in their respective meanings.
and functions in different sections and domains in contemporary journalism, as indeed these values can be seen as changing over time and space. For the argument presented here I feel that the descriptive and to some extent interpretative framework of this project does suffice to say: journalists in The Netherlands are not always typically Dutch, but they are always typically journalists.