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Dutch Speaking to Dutch. Broadcasts from the Netherlands to Indonesia during the Decolonization War (1945–1949)

Vincent Kuitenbrouwer

ABSTRACT

Dutch international radio broadcaster Radio Nederland Wereldomroep (RNW) was founded in 1947, during the decolonization war in Indonesia. This paper explores the nature of the broadcasts to Indonesia in the early years of RNW. It is argued that these broadcasts must be seen in the context of the Dutch violent military effort to reestablish colonial rule in Southeast Asia. Moreover, this broadcasting strategy, which was mainly aimed at reaching out to white agents of empire in the Indonesian archipelago, can be seen as a continuation of broadcasting practices during the late colonial period in the 1930s, when Dutch were speaking to Dutch.

The golden age of radio broadcasting as a long-distance mass medium between the 1930s and the 1970s for an important part overlapped with the end of the European colonial empires during the era of decolonization (1945–1975). In fact, there was an important historical contingency between the two phenomena. Radio broadcasting was an important instrument, both for European proponents of empire and anti-colonial nationalists, to mobilize support for their respective political ideals. Decolonization, on the other hand, had an effect on the international media landscape as it led to an increase in the number of broadcasted languages and voices. As countries became independent, they started to operate transmitters to reach out to audiences inside and outside their borders. In response, Western stations extended the number of broadcasting languages to engage with more listener-groups abroad.

In the current historiography, however, the nexus between radio and decolonization has barely been explored. Looking at British and US literature about international radio broadcasting, the main focus has been on the Cold

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War. One episode that has attracted some attention is the debacle of British radio-propaganda during the Suez Crisis, but that is connected to the twin failure of western broadcasters to reach out to anti-communist activists during the Hungarian Uprising that took place at the same time (Rawnsley, 1996). In recent years, pioneering studies have appeared about “guerrilla radio” broadcasting by liberation movements in Southern Africa and the Caribbean by scholars who have found relevant archives in the regions they describe (Bronfman, 2019; Lekgoathi, Moloi, & Saïde Eds, 2020). Considering the historiography of decolonization, or the rise and fall of colonialism more broadly, sound has also been a topic of neglect. Although academics working in these fields have used media-sources, their main focus is on visual sources, overlooking (or rather not hearing) auditory cultures (Scales, 2013).

During the decolonization war in Indonesia (1945–1949), radio played an important role, and both sides used the medium to rally support for their political goals. The Indonesian republicans, headed by President Sukarno, used broadcasting as a means to build the Indonesian nation. In the preceding decades Indonesians had the opportunity to gain experience with radio under the auspices of foreign occupiers. In the 1930s, Dutch authorities had allowed Indonesians to broadcast an “Eastern programme” on the frequencies of the colonial broadcasting company that had stations throughout the archipelago as long as they refrained from “political propaganda” (Witte, 1998, chapter 5). During the Japanese occupation, which started in March 1942, all radio stations in the archipelago were placed under strict central supervision and were obliged to broadcast pro-Japanese propaganda. Nonetheless, the Japanese employed Indonesians to operate these stations who, as a result, had access to equipment and received training (Wild, 1987, pp. 28–30). Building on these experiences and with the radio hardware they acquired from Japanese storages after the end of the Second World War Indonesian republicans succeeded in setting up an effective broadcasting system to mobilize political support for their cause and their (para)military campaigns (Wild, 1992, *passim*).

On the other hand, the Dutch also used radio in their attempts to annihilate Sukarno’s republic and reestablish colonial rule in Indonesia. They relied on broadcasting infrastructure set up in the 1930s when Dutch colonial elites had used radio to bolster the imperial ties. In addition to the broadcasting system within the archipelago, there was also an international station to broadcast from the Netherlands to Indonesia. During the Second World War both these broadcasting systems were shut down by the Axis Powers that conquered the Netherlands and its colony in Southeast Asia (Germany and Japan), but in 1945 and 1946 both systems were revived to make propaganda for the pro-colonial cause. Looking at the broadcasts from

the Netherlands to Indonesia in this period it is striking that most of them were in the Dutch language, clearly meant for people in the archipelago who tried to reestablish the colonial regime.

In an essay on radio during the liberation struggle in Algeria, Franz Fanon noticed a similar broadcasting strategy by the French in the late 1950s. He argued that colonials used radio to connect with French culture, evoking feelings of nostalgia and belonging. “[T]he Algerian, with his own brand of humor had defined Radio-Alger as ‘Frenchmen speaking to Frenchmen’” (Fanon, 1965, p. 74). With this pun, Fanon referred to the flagship program of the broadcasts from London to Nazi-occupied France during the Second World War that were meant to stir up resistance against the Third Reich: *Les Français parlent aux Français* (Chadwick, 2015). Fanon’s remark serves as a starting point for thinking about radio broadcasting as a political weapon during the Indonesian decolonization war, and the entanglement of this history with radio-propaganda during the Second World War.

I will explore this theme by focusing on Dutch broadcasts transmitted from the Netherlands to soldiers fighting in Indonesia (1945–1949). In recent years, archives of the Dutch international broadcaster Radio Netherlands Wereldomroep RNW (that transmitted between 1947 and 2012) have been deposited at the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision in Hilversum and I have been able to access this material, on paper at the Institute itself and a number of digitalized sound recordings that are available through the online platform CLARIAH Media Suite.¹ For this contribution, I have studied material that shows that in the early years of Dutch international broadcasting the medium was used for a colonial agenda. As mentioned, the broadcasts from the Netherlands to Indonesia in the late 1940s were mainly in Dutch, which reveals much about the broadcasting strategies of the people who wanted to reconquer Indonesia. In the following pages, I will critically analyze these audio-fragments to establish how the Dutch government legitimated its deployment of military violence in the decolonization war. To understand the context of these broadcasts, however, we have to go back to the very start of Dutch international broadcasting and explore the colonial provenance of Radio Netherlands Wereldomroep. Referring to the words of Fanon quoted above we can say that in these years international broadcasting was a medium for Dutch speaking to Dutch.

The Colonial Provenance of Dutch International Broadcasting

International radio broadcasting from the Netherlands started as a colonial affair. In 1927, the Philips Company in Eindhoven succeeded for the first time ever in creating a direct intercontinental radio connection, from the Netherlands to the Dutch East Indies and to the colonies in the Caribbean: Suriname and the Antilles. The connection was inaugurated

by Queen Wilhelmina, who thus became the first monarch to give a speech via international radio. She started her speech to her listeners in the colonies with a greeting from “heart to heart” illustrating the symbolic bond radio created between the different parts of the Dutch imperial realm (Kuitenbrouwer, 2018).

Due to political and legal problems, it took until 1933 to get a concession for international radio broadcasting, and in that year, Philips inaugurated a regular schedule that was mainly aimed at the Dutch colonial expat community in Indonesia and a parallel program for colonials in the Dutch Caribbean: *Philips Omroep Holland Indië* also known as PHOHI (Witte, 1998). Similar to the main idea behind the Empire Service of the BBC that radio was meant for the “lonely listener in the bush,” PHOHI’s main goal was to provide entertainment to white colonials in the archipelago. But in addition the station’s management prohibited what they called “political propaganda”: e.g., domestic political statements and broadcasts on that put one religion above another one. So more than the BBC, PHOHI was focused on light entertainment, which was considered neutral: popular music was the main element in its programming, taking up more than half of the airtime (Kuitenbrouwer, 2016).

This made Dutch international broadcasts also attractive to listeners from other areas of the world and Philips also aired a non-Dutch program via its transmitter PCJ. The most popular show was “The Happy Station” by Eduard Startz, a polyglot presenter who could announce in a large number of languages and kept a special notebook to pen down phonetical sentences in other languages that reached him via his prolific fan mail. In addition, these letters show that Startz’s choice of popular music was greatly appreciated, also by listeners outside the Dutch colonial sphere, as was illustrated by the many letters he received from listeners from various parts of the British Empire (Kuitenbrouwer, 2019a).

The international broadcasts by Philips came to an abrupt end in May 1940, with the invasion of the Netherlands by Nazi Germany. The government, including the Royal family, fled to London and set up a government-in-exile. The Dutch cabinet ministers managed to secure airtime from the BBC and together with a group of journalists who had escaped as well they started *Radio Oranje*, a daily broadcast of 15 minutes in Dutch aimed at the population in the occupied Netherlands. These broadcasts started in the summer of 1940 and continued until October 1945, after the Netherlands was liberated (Sinke, 2009).

The program of *Radio Oranje* was intended to mobilize support for the government-in-exile to try and end the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. In that sense, it was important to focus on domestic issues, but the Dutch colonies were also of importance. First, they provided an important material contribution to the allied war effort, providing raw materials. But there was

also an important psychological aspect to it. The fact that the colonial regimes in Indonesia and the Caribbean had declared themselves loyal toward the Royal house and rejected the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands was an important boost for the legitimacy of the government-in-exile (Kuitenbrouwer, 2019b, pp. 402 -3). The Japanese conquest of Indonesia in the early months of 1942, following the attack on Pearl Harbor, was a blow in that respect. Leading figures in the government-in-exile were adamant that Indonesia was to return to the colonial fold. Later in the war, when it appeared that the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands was to end sooner than the Japanese occupation of Indonesia, the restoration of Dutch colonial rule in Southeast Asia became an *idée fixe* in the reconstruction plans for the Netherlands (Foray, 2011).

This principle was propagated in the *Radio Oranje* broadcasts. The most famous statement on the imagined colonial future was given by Queen Wilhelmina herself in a speech in 1942 marking the first anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, which is known in the Netherlands as the “Seven December speech.” The attack had been reason for the Dutch government-in-exile to proclaim war on Japan, which subsequently attacked and conquered the Indonesian archipelago. The first part of Wilhelmina’s speech was about those events that, she argued, had created “mutual understanding” between the “people” in the Netherlands and Indonesia as they now both suffered under an oppressive regime. She also made an indirect sneer against Indonesian nationalists who cooperated with the Japanese authorities who heralded the motto “Asia for Asians,” when she denounced the propaganda made by the Nazis and the Japanese for a “new world order.”²

Instead, Wilhelmina argued that the majority of people in both parts of the Dutch realm wanted to restore the unity of the empire, voluntarily and harmoniously. Wilhelmina claimed that this resolve fitted the values as proclaimed in the Atlantic Charter. She therefore thought out loud that the people in the overseas territories in the future could get more self-government in the context of a renewed political assemblage. In addition, she stated that there would be “no place for differences in treatment on the basis of race or ethnicity, but only personal qualities of citizens and need of the different population groups will be decisive for government policy-making.”³

These words echoed the progressive, internationalist ideals that circulated among policymakers at the White House at the time, but historians have questioned their true meaning. The Queen’s biographer, Cees Fasseur, has argued that the main purpose of these words was to create goodwill with the Roosevelt government to persuade the President that the Dutch did not want to return to their old colonial ways and thus secure US approval for reinstalling their regime in the Indonesian archipelago (Fasseur, 2001, p. 377). Also, in other ways, the speech remained a rather vague set of words without much concrete meaning. The text would, however, serve as a framework for Dutch

broadcasts in later phases of the Indonesian question. In the end, it is likely that the majority of the Dutch, and certainly policy-makers, in the 1940s attached more value to the principle of empire unity than to the ideal of self-determination. As would become clear soon after August 1945.

A few days after the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the subsequent Japanese surrender, the republican leader Sukarno proclaimed independence of Indonesia in a short and poignant statement that he read out on the veranda of his house in the city that the Dutch called Batavia and the Indonesians Jakarta. Initially, these words did not have much effect. Although photographs of the statement show he spoke into a microphone, it would take days before this message reached the general population in Indonesia and it took even longer to reach the rest of the world as the republican movement at that specific moment in time lacked strong media organizations. On September 11, however, leading republicans from various parts of Indonesia gathered and decided to found a central broadcasting station: Radio Republik Indonesia. Using the equipment the Japanese forces had left, they were able to set up a broadcasting system with a central editorial policy and various local branches in various Islands of the archipelago (Wild, 1987, pp. 31–2). RRI also provided international broadcasts to propagate Indonesian independence and when these words resonated across the world, they caused a great backlash.

When the news of the Indonesian declaration of independence reached the Dutch government in The Hague, where it had returned after the liberation of the Netherlands in May 1945, it immediately dismissed the idea of an independent Republic of Indonesia. Many Dutch leaders denounced Sukarno as a puppet of the Japanese regime that tried to wrestle Indonesia away from western hands in its final death throes. The government in The Hague decided to reinstall western colonial dominance in the archipelago, but that proved to be difficult as there were no Dutch authorities on the ground: the top brass had left in 1942 and operated from the US, London, and Australia. The Dutch people who remained in the archipelago had been interned by the Japanese. Captured soldiers had been largely moved out of the archipelago, to work in Burma and Japan. In Indonesia, Dutch civilians remained under lock and key, and were severely weakened by the dire living circumstances they had suffered for over three years.

As a result, the Dutch government was rather powerless to move against the Indonesian republicans. Therefore, the first step was to persuade the Allied military command to send a force to Indonesia to take over control from the Japanese. Initially, British and British Indian troops landed in Java where they fought bloody battles with Indonesian republicans, such as in November 1945 in the city of Surabaya. Meanwhile, groups of republican militiamen roamed the streets and frequently attacked people whom they

considered in favor of colonial rule. Therefore, Dutch civilians had to remain in the camps where they could be protected by their former guards of the Japanese army (Van Reybrouck, 2020, pp. 307 -13).

In this situation, the restoration of unity of the Dutch empire seemed to be far off. The Dutch government therefore prioritized to restore the connection between the Netherlands and the Indonesian archipelago. Radio was an important instrument to do this. In September 1944, the leader of *Radio Oranje*, Henk Van den Broek, had returned to the southern parts of the Netherlands that had been liberated from the Nazi regime and started a broadcasting station using equipment in the Philips factory in Eindhoven, which was baptized Radio Rising Netherlands (*Radio Herrijzend Nederland*). In May 1945, when the rest of the Netherlands had been liberated, he went to the main radio broadcasting studios in Hilversum and commandeered the facilities there. For a couple of months Van den Broek had a monopoly on radio broadcasting in the Netherlands.

One of the priorities of Van den Broek and his team was to reestablish international radio broadcasting from the Netherlands. He was allowed to make use of the transmission station at Huizen that Philips had used before the war, but that needed repairs as it had been sabotaged. In October 1945, the station went on air again with the same acronym that Philips had used for its experimental international broadcasts in the 1930s: PCJ. The idea was that people from outside the Netherlands, who had not been able to listen to radio from the free Netherlands for over five years, would recognize these letters and tune in (Kuitenbrouwer, 2019c, pp. 291–2).

The first priority of PCJ was to establish contact with Dutch listeners in the internment camps in the Indonesian archipelago and other parts of Asia. The broadcaster established a daily program in which it focused on connecting with the people in the overseas territories, who had been cut off from the Netherlands from the start of the Nazi occupation onwards. As Van den Broek explained in the first broadcast:

We shall have much to say to each other, much about the sweet and the bitter of the past years, much about our work and ambitions now and much about our hope and ideals for the future. Then there will be bond again, which we have missed for so long, the bond between all who feel and know they are Dutch, all who want to contribute to establish and strengthen the reputation and task of the Netherlands in the world.⁴

The PCJ program contained much talk radio, with news bulletins and features about aspects of life in the Netherlands under Nazi-occupation and its consequences. In addition, cabinet ministers gave speeches about their plans for the reconstruction of the country. These elements were quite formal and therefore the programmers of PCJ also included entertainment in

their broadcasts. Eddy Startz made a comeback with his show to the joy of many listeners. PCJ received its first year many letters from fans, who welcomed back Startz, and his “Happy Station from the friendly nation.”

In the first months after the war, PCJ also sent more personalized information in the form of the so-called “radio beacon” that was broadcasted every day at the end of the program. These were short messages provided by people in the Netherlands for family-members in Indonesia, to let them know how they had fared during the war. In the majority of the messages, the news was good, in the sense that most family members still lived. But some messages contained grim tidings, such as the news for the Jewish family Brest-Penha in Sumatra, who in October 1945 heard that only three of their relatives had survived the war: “The rest of the family has died in Poland.”⁵ These and other transcripts of the radio beacon, containing thousands of small snippets of news that were of great importance to individual listeners, show what vital role radio played in reestablishing contact between people across the globe at a time when other lines of communication were still largely cut off.

This idea of radio as a global communication tool was reinforced when the first letters from the listeners in the internment camps came in, weeks after the broadcasts they referred to. These letters contained descriptions about the emotional reactions of people who heard voices from the Netherlands for the first time in years, which for them was of great moral support. For example, “A women from the Indies,” anonymously wrote in October 1945:

‘Why I write to you? Because we are grateful to the voice of PCJ for the sympathy for the Indies that is expressed in that voice, and because we feel through that voice, the attention and the anxiety of Dutchmen there, for Dutchmen here.’⁶

These words echoed the sentiments that surrounded international radio broadcasting as a tool of empire in the 1930s: which was mainly meant as a medium for white people. In the direct aftermath of the Second World War Dutch policymakers considered radio as an instrument to help overturn Sukarno’s declaration of independence and get Indonesia back into the colonial fold.

The letters from Indonesia that reached PCJ thus provided Henk van den Broek with political currency. Having spent years in London, his dream was to form a Dutch public broadcasting system modeled on the BBC, which would mean that there was one organization that would receive license fees with a monopoly on public broadcasts, domestically and internationally. In the spring of 1946, Van den Broek lost this battle on the domestic front: the old political-ideological broadcasting corporations set up a powerful lobby with the Dutch government and succeeded in reinstalling the old system.

However, Van den Broek did succeed in getting the monopoly on international broadcasts and secured it in a separate institution: Radio Netherlands Wereldomroep (RNW) (Kuitenbrouwer, 2019c, pp. 294–5).

In his lobby for this organization, in the spring of 1947, Van den Broek actively argued that it could help the Netherlands in getting the upper hand in Indonesia, where the situation spiraled into all-out war. In the first annual report, Van den Broek revealed the two arguments that he had presented to the government to get a monopoly on international radio broadcasts. First, he pointed out that radio was a good means to reach out to Dutch people in the Indonesian archipelago who dedicated themselves to restoring the colonial order. Second, Van den Broek argued that cross-border radio broadcasting would make it possible to inform the international community about the situation in Indonesia from a Dutch perspective (RNW, 1948, pp. 6–7).

Radio Netherlands Wereldomroep on paper was an independent body and, like other public broadcasters, it was allocated money that came in from national license fees. But the political context of the late 1940s clearly influenced the statutes of the organization, which stated as its main goals: providing broadcasts for Dutch people abroad and informing the international community about the Netherlands and creating goodwill. In the early organization, these two goals were institutionalized in two separate editorial sections: a section for the overseas territories (Indonesia and the Caribbean). And an international section that provided broadcasts to different regions of the world: English to Oceania, Europe, and North America and Spanish to Latin America (RNW, 1948, appendix). In the remainder of this text, we will explore the use of radio to support the political and military goal of reconquering Indonesia by focusing on programs from the section for the overseas territories, with a particular focus on broadcasts to Dutch soldiers fighting in the Indonesian archipelago between 1947 and 1949.

Broadcasts for Dutch Soldiers in Indonesia

On paper, the Indonesian program of RNW was in line with the principles as set out in Wilhelmina's speech on December 7, 1942, in which the Netherlands strove for a new relationship with its overseas territories in which the race was not an issue. So from the start it included broadcasts in Dutch and Bahasa Indonesia, implicating some sort of emancipation. But looking at the schedule, Dutch was the main staple for the Indonesian broadcasts: of the daily 195 minutes, only 30 minutes were in Bahasa Indonesia (which was spoken by tens of millions of people in the archipelago), the rest was in Dutch (the native language of several hundreds of thousands of colonials).⁷ In addition, it is likely that in this early phase of

RNW the Dutch-language news was simply translated into Bahasa Indonesia and thus there were no efforts to really reach out to the Indonesian population.

In contrast, there were clearly demarcated target audiences for the Dutch broadcasts. The most prominent of these were Dutch soldiers. In 1946, the Dutch government decided to send volunteers and military conscripts to Indonesia to fight the Indonesian republicans. These, generally young, men partook in two large-scale campaigns during which the Dutch army invaded the territory controlled by the republicans: Operation Product in July and August 1947 and Operation Crow (*Kraai*) in December 1948. The Dutch government called these events euphemistically “police actions,” a term that became commonplace in the Dutch debate. Since then, information about acts of violence by Dutch soldiers against Indonesian civilians regularly emerged in Dutch media, but were covered up, under official pressure. The most telling episode took place in 1969, when a veteran confessed on national television that his platoon had been involved in war crimes in Indonesia in the 1940s. In that year, the Dutch government ordered a survey that was published under the title “Memorandum on excessive violence” (*excessen nota*). Labeling the violence perpetrated by the Dutch soldiers as “excessive violence” or “atrocities,” and thus as incidents, this text continued the semantic game of shadows to avoid the term “war crimes” (Scagliola, 2002).

In 2016, the Swiss-Dutch historian Rémy Limpach argued that the extreme violence perpetrated by the Dutch forces in Indonesia was of a structural nature and that these actions should be labeled as a full-scale military conflict (Limpach, 2016). In the wake of this bombshell PhD thesis, the Dutch government has commissioned a large research project into the Indonesian decolonization war, which is now conducted by a conglomerate of Dutch research institutes. The main focus is on the violence committed in Indonesia between 1945 and 1950, and the main question is about the nature of the structural violence. Although the results are only to be expected in the course of 2022, some preliminary publications shed light on the magnitude of the violence.

In between the Dutch large-scale military campaigns Product and Crow, there was endemic violence all across the archipelago, with daily clashes between forces fighting for the Dutch and those loyal to the republic. This conflict thus classifies as a guerrilla-war that is comparable with other military campaigns fought by western troops in Southeast Asia like the “Malayan Emergency” and the Vietnam War. It is estimated that between 1945 and 1950, 150,000 young men were shipped from the Netherlands to Indonesia to fight (Oostindie, 2015, p. 21). The official number of military casualties on the Dutch side is 4,751, and it is estimated that between 10,000

and 25,000 more people of European and Eurasian descent died too. Moreover, it has recently been estimated that at least 97,000 Indonesians have lost their lives in the conflict (Harinck, van Horn, & Luttikhuis, 2017).

In addition, in recent years, veterans who perpetrated acts of mass violence and who had been silent for decades had died and a number of them had confessed in their deathbeds. Some of them appeared to possess photographs and written testimonies of torture scenes and random executions, some of which have been published in national newspapers (Botje, 2015; Hoek, 2017). Such personal sources contain details that reveal that these young Dutchmen, most of whom had no military experience and had never been abroad, fought a gruesome guerrilla-war. There was a constant threat of surprise attacks by Indonesian militias, who hid in dense jungles or populated areas. People who fell victim to republican forces at times were gruesomely mutilated. In addition, many conscripts took part in bloody anti-insurgency campaigns, and structurally committed acts of mass violence and war crimes, including torture, random execution of civilians, and the burning down of villages.

Peter Romijn has written about the great psychological burden on the Dutch soldiers in Indonesia. He particularly focused on men who had fought the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands in the first half of the 1940s and voluntarily joined the Dutch army out of patriotic motives. In line with government's vision on Indonesian republicans, Sukarno and his government were portrayed as henchmen of Japanese fascism and young men in the Netherlands were called upon to "liberate" the Indonesian population from their tyranny. If their task would fail, it was further argued in an orientalist fashion, the archipelago would descend into chaos and "amok." Once in Indonesia, Romijn has argued, the Dutch soldiers had to "learn on the job," and resorted to violence that matched some of the Nazi war crimes in Europe. In this sense one could argue that there was a form of cognitive dissonance on the part of many Dutch soldiers (Romijn, 2012). The psychological dimensions of this story, and the propaganda that accompanied it, have been researched in a number of studies that mainly focus on film, by Gerda Jansen Hendriks (Jansen Hendriks, 2014, pp. 223 -309) and other visual sources, such as press-photographs, by Louis Zweers (Zweers, 2013). Radio broadcasting, however, has not been studied in this context before.

The archive of Radio Netherlands Wereldomroep contains material that proves that the station actively reached out to the soldiers in Dutch. The logbook from 1949 shows that there was a daily broadcast for this target audience of 45 minutes.⁸ Although it is not clear if this was also the case in other years, it is likely that there was a substantial program from 1947 onwards. So radio broadcasting was part of a propaganda campaign to support the mass violence of the Dutch military apparatus in the Indonesian archipelago. The logbook from 1949 shows that there were

various elements that returned in these broadcasts and I also presume that there was continuity in that respect. Below I will discuss sound recordings representing three types of programs from 1949 to explore these formats and the messages that they carried to the Dutch soldiers in Indonesia.

Firstly, high-ranking officers gave formal speeches in which they invoked the “task” of the Dutch forces in Indonesia: to liberate the local population from tyranny and chaos caused by the Indonesian republicans and to bring “peace and order.” On the occasion of the start of Operation Product in July 1947 the commander-in-chief of the Dutch army, General H.J. Kruls, spoke to the Dutch soldiers in Indonesia. In his speech, he euphemistically described the military campaign that was about to start as “the actual creation of the premises for right and freedom.”⁹ This frame, that the Dutch military used violence to bring peace, was in line with the official recruitment propaganda (Romijn, 2012, 319 -324). And it continued to echo in official speeches throughout the conflict. In the summer of 1949, when peace negotiations were well underway, the commander of the rifle guards gave a speech to celebrate his regiment’s 120th anniversary. In it, he said that the founding members never would have expected that the troops would see action in Indonesia, but that they would be proud to see them “to bring peace and to maintain order and right.”¹⁰

Another frame that Kruls presented in his speech about Operation Product was that the Dutch soldiers in Indonesia were “fulfilling duties under very difficult circumstances, with cheerfulness.” Kruls praised these qualities as proof that his men “were made of the right stuff that makes good and dutiful soldiers.”¹¹ This idea echoed in later regiment speeches as well. In 1949, Prince Bernhard (the husband of Queen Juliana who had ascended the throne the year before) awarded a banner to the “*regiment stoottroepen*” (shocktroop regiment) a unit that he helped to found in September 1944 in the then liberated part of the Netherlands. In his speech, he praised the regiment for its fighting in the final push against the Nazi occupation. When he turned to the work of the regiment in Indonesia, he took it up a step by saying that the situation for soldiers there had been far more difficult. “[These circumstances] are indeed so difficult as I have encountered nowhere during the past war [Second World War]. In this war, I have seen action from troops from all nationalities at all possible places in the world. But nowhere it has been more difficult for the morale of the troops as for our men in Indonesia these past few years.”¹²

Although such official speeches were broadcasted regularly, the majority of the broadcasts for the Dutch armed forces in Indonesia did not address the combat experiences of the soldiers but were meant to bring distraction and in that way keep up morale. Following the recipe of the Philips broadcasts from the 1930s, one way to achieve this was to give them a taste of the home country, which is the second type of programming I discuss here. Several

times a week, a special show was recorded in which family members of soldiers in a town were invited to a local theater where they would record a special “greeting program.” One component of such programs were sing-alongs of old Dutch tunes that would remind soldiers of the places they grew up. A show from the province of Friesland, which has very strong local cultural traditions, contained many typical songs from that part of the country, including the Frisian anthem.¹³

The main part of the show revolved around individual family members recording personal messages to their loved ones fighting in Indonesia (usually sons and husbands). These messages were special to the people to whom they were addressed and also could give others the feeling that they were not forgotten back home. Although these messages, short and delivered by people with not much experience talking into a microphone, sound very authentic, the recordings were in fact scripted and edited. One such recording, which was probably edited before transmission, gives us a glimpse of the production process. When a woman who addresses her son starts crying audibly, the announcer jumps in: “No, no, stop it Henk. [. . .] This is not to be included, Henk, we are recording in five seconds from now.” After a short silence, a shortened version of the message is read out without tears. This example shows that the greeting programs were meant to give the Dutch soldiers in Indonesia a sense of connection with the home front, without causing homesickness.¹⁴

Another entertainment format was designed to take the soldiers’ mind off their daily work in another way, by humor and popular music, which is the third category. One example is a series of cabaret shows based on two comic-book characters “taaie en de neut” (tough one and the snifter) (Van den Berg, 1993). These brothers in arms portrayed common male soldiers who shared a deep comradeship and got themselves into all sorts of mischief, usually after drinking too much alcohol. One episode was about a family party where the two were “displayed as heroes of the family. Despite the stiff collars and the black suits the two brothers in arms do not take it too seriously. What is taken seriously are the many drinks they consume.” In the rest of the show, a drunken “taaie” shows off his “skills as reciter” with comical scenes about marriage proposals.¹⁵

In its light entertainment shows, RNW also harked back to the era of the colonial broadcasts by Philips. The most noticeable continuity was the appearance of Eddy Startz on the soldier broadcasts to Indonesia. The popular presenting style of Startz, who worked as a true disc jockey playing popular swing music and in between making all sorts of puns, apparently also resonated with Dutch soldiers. The audio archive of RNW contains a show he made for hospitalized soldiers in 1949. In it, he played hits from the United States and treated his listeners to one of his typical puns: “*pepiceline*” (a contraction of the words pep-pills and penicillin). The records Startz

played were not only nice to listen to, but he also meant to arouse other senses of his listeners. In between two songs, “Smoke! (that cigarette)” by Tex Williams and “When I get too old to dream” by Rose Murphy, Startz made the following announcement:

Alright Tex if you have to have one. Do you want one too, youngsters? And a really good one, you know? Here! [match flares] I smoke one too, yes, with you.

How it is going? Do you want some more *pepiciline*? I cannot give you too much. Doctor’s orders. But a little kiss with your cigarette, how do you think about that? A little kiss, yes, from Rose Murphy. When I get to old too dream, I just gonna have a little kiss. Come on do your stuff, Rose, come on!¹⁶

This sandwich of popular tunes about cigarettes and sex was meant to give the soldiers some ease of mind to give them a break from the “dirty work of empire” (Orwell, 1936).

Conclusion

In this text, I have explored the colonial provenance of Dutch international broadcasting. Already in the 1920s, the idea emerged in the Netherlands that radio could be used as a tool of empire, which led to the Philips’ program aimed at white Dutch colonials in Indonesia to bolster the ties between the colony in Southeast Asia and the “homecountry.” In this programming strategy, there was barely any attention for Indonesians making this a broadcast in which Dutchmen spoke to Dutchmen. Although these broadcasts appear to be neutral as they do not contain a clear political narrative, the radio-makers of the time hoped to ease the minds of their listeners to help them in their work strengthening the colonial state by providing light entertainment. During and directly after the Second World War, the tone of Dutch international broadcasts became more grave in the wake of the occupations of the Netherlands by Germany and Indonesia by Japan. In 1945, radio literally became a lifeline to reconnect with families who had been cut off in the preceding years.

The idea of early colonial broadcasting clearly continued into the early years of Radio Netherlands Wereldomroep. One of the reasons that Henk van den Broek was successful in his lobby for a BBC-style monopoly over international broadcasts was his commitment to use radio to help get Indonesia back into the colonial fold after Sukarno’s declaration of independence. One important task of RNW became to reach out to Dutchmen in Indonesia, who tried to reconquer it for the Dutch empire. An important target group were Dutch soldiers who fought a gruesome guerrilla war in which they employed structural extreme violence. Although several Dutch historians have written about the psychological aspects of this violent

episode, and propaganda that accompanied it, no attention has been given to radio. By discussing the official radio speeches, I have shown that the RNW broadcasts contained frames that fitted the general policy of the Dutch government of obscuring violence by employing a number of euphemisms. Moreover, RNW took over formats from the colonial broadcasts by Philips that were meant to bring relaxation for their listeners, by providing them with “greetings” from home and by bringing light entertainment, embodied by Eddy Startz lively presenting style. With these broadcasting formats for the troops, the early RNW supported the large-scale extreme violence committed by the Dutch military in Indonesia.

Eventually, the efforts of the Dutch government to overturn the Indonesian declaration of independence, and all the violence that it brought about, were futile. In December 1948, the second invasion of the Dutch army in the republican territory, Operation Crow, backfired internationally resulting in protests at the UN and from the United States government. The latter factor was an especially important incentive for the Dutch government to agree to a new round of negotiations, which resulted in the so-called Round Table Conferences during which Dutch and Indonesian leaders met directly. The Dutch agreed to acknowledge Indonesian independence in exchange for a loosely knit political union, which in practice was not very strong and expired within a decade. In the end, Sukarno’s ideal of an independent Indonesian republic prevailed. Despite essentially giving to the other side, the Dutch government tried to give the impression it was in control, which was illustrated on December 27, 1949 when the Dutch staged a ceremony in Amsterdam to, in their words, “hand over the sovereignty” of Indonesia.

A day after this ceremony, Henk Van den Broek, the director of Radio Netherlands Wereldomroep, recorded a speech that was broadcasted to Dutch listeners in Indonesia. In it, he reflected on the event, which would mean that the relation between the Netherlands and Indonesia changed: “Our queen yesterday poignantly remarked about Dutchmen and Indonesians: we now stand next to each other on the same level. Well, if someone becomes an adult one congratulates him heartily with his maturity.” In light of this rite of passage, Van den Broek continued, RNW had to change its tone: “In all what we do we shall continuously guard that we must not try to lecture [*schoolmeesteren*], but that we merely provide a contribution so that the Netherlands and Indonesia together will rise [*omhoog gaan*].”¹⁷ These words had consequences for the organization of RNW, which took the broadcasts for non-Dutch-speaking Indonesians more seriously. Instead of tucking away the Bahasa Indonesia program in the Dutch overseas section, it created an “Eastern” section, where a special editorial team coordinated the Indonesian program. Moreover, RNW made an effort to employ native speakers for these broadcasts.

On paper, at least, it looks like the Wereldomroep “decolonized” in December 1949. It started broadcasting to non-western peoples overseas, trying to connect with them on their own terms. On the other hand, the language of Van den Broek reveals the persistence of certain colonial tropes. His reference to Indonesian adulthood was clearly based on the idea that non-western people were like children. Moreover, the fact that he was explicitly reminding his listeners (and probably himself) that the days of the Dutch “lecturing” to Indonesians were over probably means that this was not a natural to him and those working around him. More research is needed to understand how the dynamics between the broadcasting practices of RNW and the ongoing processes of decolonization played out in the decades that followed.

Notes

1. <https://mediasuite.clariah.nl/> [23-09-2021].
2. <https://mediasuite.clariah.nl/tool/resource-viewer?id=2,101,608,080,068,969,131&cid=daan-catalog-aggr&st=7%20december> [13-09-2021].
3. <https://mediasuite.clariah.nl/tool/resource-viewer?id=2,101,608,080,068,969,131&cid=daan-catalog-aggr&st=7%20december> [13-09-2021].
4. Transcript speech H. van den Broek, 13 October 1945. Institute of Sound and Vision, Hilversum. Collection number13032: programma-archief RNW, doos 1.
“Wij zullen elkander veel te zeggen hebben, veel over al het lief en leed der afgelopen jaren, over ons werken en streven van nu, over onze hoop en idealen voor de toekomst. Dan zal er weer de band zijn, dien we zoo lang en zoo noode hebben gemist, de band tusschen allen die zich Nederlander voelen en weten, die het hunne willen bijdragen om den naam en de taak van Nederland in de wereld te helpen bevestigen en verstevigen.”
5. Transcript family messages, 20 October 1945. Institute of Sound and Vision, Hilversum. Collection number13032: programma-archief RNW, doos 1.
“De verdere familie is in Polen omgekomen.”
6. *Een jaar PCJ, October 1945–October 1946. Uittreksels uit brieven van luisteraars* (Hilversum: Radio Nederland Wereldomroep, z.j.), 4. “Waarom ik U schrijf? Omdat wij de stem van PCJ dankbaar zijn voor de sympathie, die in die stem geuit wordt ten aanzien van Indië, en omdat we door die stem voelen, de zorg en de bezorgdheid van Nederlanders dáár, voor Nederlanders hier!”
7. Logboek RNW broadcasts to Indonesia, 10–04-1949 t/m 27–05-1950. Institute of Sound and Vision, Hilversum. Collectie Wereldomroep, doos 3.
8. Logboek RNW broadcasts to Indonesia, 10–04-1949 t/m 27–05-1950. Institute of Sound and Vision, Hilversum. Collectie Wereldomroep, doos 3.
9. <https://mediasuite.clariah.nl/tool/resource-viewer?id=2,101,608,050,034,206,231&cid=daan-catalog-aggr&bodyClass=noHeader&singleResource=1> [15-09-2021]. “het daadwerkelijk scheppen van de voorwaarden voor recht en vrijheid”.

10. <https://mediasuite.clariah.nl/tool/resourceviewer?id=2,101,608,080,069,609,531&startTime=631&cid=daan-catalog-aggr&bodyClass=noHeader&singleResource=1> [15-09-2021]. “rust te brengen en orde en recht te handhaven”.
11. <https://mediasuite.clariah.nl/tool/resourceviewer?id=2,101,608,050,034,206,231&cid=daan-catalog-aggr&bodyClass=noHeader&singleResource=1> [16-09-2021]. “dikwijls onder uiterst moeilijke omstandigheden met opgewektheid verricht”; “uit het hout te zijn gesneden waaruit goede en plichtgetrouwe soldaten worden gemaakt”.
12. <https://mediasuite.clariah.nl/tool/resourceviewer?id=2,101,608,100,081,323,831&cid=daan-catalog-aggr&bodyClass=noHeader&singleResource=1> [16-09-2021].
13. <https://mediasuite.clariah.nl/tool/resourceviewer?id=2,101,608,090,078,914,631&cid=daan-catalog-aggr&st=disch> [16-09-2021].
14. <https://mediasuite.clariah.nl/tool/resourceviewer?id=2,101,608,090,078,914,731&cid=daan-catalog-aggr#> [16-09-2021]. “Nee, nee, stop maar Henk. [...] Dit hoort er niet bij, Henk, we nemen op vijf seconden na nu”.
15. <https://mediasuite.clariah.nl/tool/resource-viewer?id=2,101,608,080,070,474,931&cid=daan-catalog-aggr&bodyClass=noHeader&singleResource=1> [16-09-2021]. “tentoongesteld als helden der familie. Ondanks stijve boorden en zwarte pakken vatten de wapenbroeders het niet al te zwaar op. Wat wel zwaar opgenomen wordt zijn de vele borrels die zij consumeren”.
16. This audio recording is taken from the digitalized RNW audio archive that is stored on the internal network of the Institute of Sound and Vision in Hilversum. Thanks to Bas Agterberg for providing access. “Alright Tex if you have to have one. Jullie ook een sigaret jongelui? En dan zo’n goede weet je wel? Hier! [match flares] Ik smook er ook een. Ja, met jullie mee. Hoe gaat het? Nog meer pepeciline? Ik mag niet te veel gegeven. Verboden door de dokter. Maar een zontje bij een sigaret, hoe zou je daar over denken? Een zontje ja, van Rose Murphy. When I get to old too dream, I just gonna have a little kiss. Come on you your stuff, Rose, come on!”.
17. This audio recording is taken from the digitalized RNW audio archive that is stored on the internal network of the Institute of Sound and Vision in Hilversum. Thanks to Bas Agterberg for providing access. “Onze koningin heeft het gisteren over Nederlanders en Indonesiërs sprekend kort maar treffend gezegd: we staan nu naast elkander. Welnu wanneer iemand volwassen wordt dan wenst men hem van ganser harte geluk met zijn volmondigheid.” “Maar bij alles zullen wij voortdurend in het oog houden dat wij niet moeten proberen te schoolmeesteren, maar alleen onze bijdrage hebben te leveren opdat Nederland en Indonesië samen de weg omhoog gaan.”

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