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THE BATTLE FOR NEUTRALITY

The Listening Service of the Dutch Government in Exile During the Second World War

Vincent Kuitenbrouwer

Following the German invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940, a Dutch government in exile was set up in London. One of the most important activities of these exiles was to make propaganda against the Nazi's and throughout the war they operated Radio Oranje (Radio Orange), a wireless station that broadcasted to the Netherlands using BBC-transmitters. Another part of the Dutch broadcasting outfit in England was a 'listening service' that made daily reports about Dutch-language radio broadcasts from Hilversum by the Nazi regime. This article draws from a complete, and previously unused, set of these monitoring reports to analyse the Dutch propaganda war in the ether. The source material reveals that notions of Dutch neutrality were central to the radio broadcasts at both sides of the North Sea. In addition, the reports show how the London broadcasters singled out and targeted specific Nazi propagandists whom they thought to be the most dangerous.

KEYWORDS radio monitoring; Second World War; The Netherlands; propaganda; Radio Oranje; Max Blokzijl

Introduction

In November 1945 an announcer of the Dutch Service of the BBC wrote a letter to the head of the London-based 'listening service' ('luisterdienst') of the Dutch government in exile, which was closing down its radio-monitoring operations after the end of the Second World War. The BBC-presenter thanked the Dutch monitors for the reports, including full transcripts, of broadcasts from Nazi-occupied Netherlands they compiled the previous years. 'I myself have been able to find numerous gems of German propaganda which have served me with munition for my own talks.'¹ This letter suggests that the Dutch listening service played a significant role in the propaganda battles between the Allies and Axis-powers in the ether during the Second World War, particularly those concerning the theatres of war located in the Netherlands and its main overseas colony, the Dutch East Indies. Despite this contemporary note of praise, the history of Dutch wartime radio-monitoring has not been studied by scholars up until now.

Indeed, the whole history of Dutch-language radio-broadcasting during the Second World War has received relatively little attention, certainly compared to the huge body of scholarly work that has appeared on other aspects of the history of the Netherlands during

the conflict. The bedrock of this historiography is a monumental fourteen-volume series by the influential founding director of the Dutch Institute for War and Genocide Studies NIOD, Loe de Jong, which was published between 1969 and 1994.² Throughout the volumes, attention is given to the role of media in occupied Netherlands, mainly the written press but also radio. It is important to note here that during the Second World War De Jong was one of the main editors of *Radio Oranje*, a daily radio-programme made by the Dutch information service RVD in London. This experience has shaped his academic work after the war, quite literally: in one of the sections on Dutch Nazi-radio broadcasting in his volumes, he extensively quotes his own wartime publications on this topic.³ In the course of the 1970s and 1980s, two other monographs appeared on radio-broadcasting in Nazi-occupied Netherlands, in which De Jong's shadow looms large.⁴

In 2009, several years after the death of De Jong, Onno Sinke published the only existing monograph on the complete history of *Radio Oranje*.⁵ In his study Sinke made use of all the then available primary material on the topic: in addition to the (fragmentary) archive of the Dutch government in exile, he for the first time systematically researched the complete set of transcripts of *Radio Oranje* broadcasts. This research allowed him to write a compelling institutional history of the station in which he argues that the way the organisation was managed determined the tone and content of the broadcasts. The existing institutional histories of stations that broadcasted in Dutch are important as they have provided much information on the Dutch-language broadcasting policies of both the Allies and the Nazi's in the Second World War. The focus on internal factors, however, also knows its limits as it provides a one-sided perspective on propaganda, as the outcome of an institutional decision-making process. This raises the question to what extent broadcasters, in this case those of *Radio Oranje*, were influenced by the propaganda of their adversaries.

This article explores this external dynamic by using a primary source collection that only became available recently: the complete set of the RVD 'listening reports' that is kept in the NIOD library in Amsterdam since 2009 and that has not yet been analysed by historians up until now. This collection contains a series of daily monitoring reports running from June 1940 to November 1945 with about 20,000 individual entries (both summaries and transcripts) on Dutch-language radio broadcasts. The monitors listened to various stations, including those of allies in the Dutch East Indies (until March 1942) and Boston. The vast majority of reports, however, were on Axis broadcasts with particular attention going to the programme of the main Dutch radio-station in Hilversum. This article analyses the way listening reports were used by Dutch radio-broadcasters in London to set out their communication-strategies. The first section provides a sketch of the historical and institutional context in which the monitoring service came into being. The second section discusses the content of the reports in light of the Dutch-language propaganda war in the ether. Particular focus is given to the monitors' close attention for the Nazi-broadcaster Max Blokzijl, which is the most noticeable feature of these documents.

In both sections, the concept of neutrality is of central importance. In Dutch historiography, neutrality is often described as a logical principle in foreign policy of this small country. In fact, the Second World War ended a century-long period in Dutch history where the nation stayed aloof from conflicts between the great powers.⁶ This geopolitical principle had an impact on Dutch media that, particularly in the First World War and the

interwar years, were restricted by the government on sensitive international issues.⁷ At first glance the discontinuity in May 1940 seems apparent: the invasion of the Netherlands by Nazi-Germany forced Dutch opinion makers to take sides—either supporting the Axis-powers or the Allies—which led to the establishment of institutions that made propaganda. This article's critical analysis of primary sources, both monitoring reports and sources about *Radio Oranje* broadcasts goes beyond this institutional perspective and takes into account the content of the broadcasts. It suggests that in this respect there were important continuities too: pundits on both sides tried to convince the Dutch public that they represented the nation's tradition of nuance and neutrality, denouncing the other side as treacherous.⁸ The monitoring reports of the RVD, read in conjunction with other primary and secondary sources, help us to unravel the interactions of Allied and Nazi propagandists in during this battle for neutrality.

Dutch Radio Broadcasting From Wartime London

Dutch wartime radio broadcasting from London came into being in a complex geopolitical context, which was the result of the invasion of the Netherlands by Nazi-Germany on 10 May 1940. Within a few days, it was clear that the Dutch army was no match for the *Wehrmacht* and nearly the whole government, including the majority of Cabinet ministers and members of the royal family, boarded ships for England and set up a government in exile in London. This meant that Hitler had the opportunity to replace the top of the political system in the Netherlands and within weeks installed a *Reichskommissar* of Austrian descent as head of government, who (without a functional Parliament) directed the remaining civil servants, aided by members of Dutch Nazi Party NSB and German liaisons at the departments.⁹ Both the government in exile, which had not formally surrendered, and the Nazi-regime claimed sovereignty over the Dutch realm as it existed before the May-invasion, including overseas colonies. After the occupation of the Netherlands, the Dutch colonial authorities in the East and West Indies declared loyalty to the Queen and her ministers in London. This situation, which cut up the Dutch realm in different segments, had a great effect on wartime policies of Dutch actors.

In the months after May 1940, the policy of neutrality was abandoned by the Dutch government in exile and by the end of the Summer it had sided with the Allies in their struggle against the Axis-forces, with the explicit goal to end the occupation of the Netherlands.¹⁰ In many ways, this was an extraordinary situation for the people involved as it was the first time that the Dutch government formally entered a major war between European countries since 1815. These great uncertainties were reflected in the chaotic way the government in exile in London came into being. When the Dutch cabinet ministers and the Queen arrived in London, the Dutch expat-community there counted about 6000 souls already and they were joined by approximately 1600 other refugees from the Netherlands in the months that followed.¹¹ These evacuations were not planned and as a result the Dutch community in London was a haphazard group of individuals with different backgrounds. Initially, Dutch official representatives stayed in Grosvenor House hotel. The lobby of this establishment became a meeting place for expatriates, refugees and officials to exchange information about the situation in the Netherlands. In a feverish atmosphere

they made plans about how to combat Nazi-Germany and started to organise themselves.¹²

A few months later, the Dutch government in exile and its organisations were accommodated in Stratton House with the Queen residing in the adjacent Arlington House. At these locations, decisions were made and executed by the members of the Dutch wartime community in London. There was no democratic control over this rump-administration, which in practice only consisted of an executive branch, as there was no form of Parliamentary representation nor a substantial independent judiciary. To comply with the Dutch constitution, the government ruled by royal decree, a monarchical privilege that is usually preserved for special occasions but in the Second World War was used on a regular basis.¹³ Broadly speaking, the Dutch government in exile had two goals during the Second World War. First, to mobilise the assets that were left under its control so that the combat against Axis forces could be continued—in addition to the people and material in the colonies these were the commercial fleet and military forces (mainly Navy) that had escaped the German army.¹⁴ In a later phase of the conflict, the government started to make plans for the reconstruction of the Netherlands and its empire after the war.¹⁵

The situation prompted the Dutch government in exile to think globally as it was not present in the territory it said to govern and coordinated assets around the world. Therefore international media-networks were essential for its dealings and the official information service RVD (*Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst*), which resided under the Minister of Foreign Affairs, played an important role in wartime policy-making. Its predecessor had been established in 1934, under a different name, but the director did not come to London in 1940. Instead the head of the Information Section of the League of Nations, the Dutch diplomat Adriaan Pelt, was summoned from Geneva to London directly after the invasion to build up what was in practice a completely new organisation.¹⁶ One of Pelt's priorities in the weeks after his arrival was to set up an international radio broadcasting service as was noted by the controller of the BBC European Services, C.B. Clark, who was startled by these attempts.¹⁷ His initial reluctance was undoubtedly prompted by the fact that the BBC had just started a Dutch Service on 10 April 1940.

Pelt, however, argued that the Dutch government in exile was far better equipped to counter Nazi broadcasts from Hilversum, where the nation's main wireless stations were located.¹⁸ Already a few days after the occupation of the Netherlands, a domestic pro-Nazi radio-programme was aired after German forces had secured the radio-studio's.¹⁹ In addition, Dutch-language Nazi broadcasts reached the Dutch East Indies, from the long-distance radio-station at Zeesen near Berlin and, from late June onwards, from the Philips transmitters near Hilversum, which had been sabotaged but could be repaired fairly quickly.²⁰ In the chaotic melee at Grosvenor House hotel, Pelt recruited a group of young journalists to help him set up a radio unit to counter these Nazi broadcasts. Two of the most pro-active of the volunteers in London were Meyer Sluysen and Loe de Jong, two journalists of Jewish descent with a social-democratic background who had fled Amsterdam and arrived on the same ship in England in May 1940. Particularly Sluysen, who previously had worked for the radio broadcasting corporation VARA, thought it of great importance to become active in the ether.²¹

The main goal of Dutch radio-broadcasters in London was to combat Nazi-propaganda. Historians therefore have focussed on their activities to reach the public in the

occupied Netherlands in order to give them information about the situation on the fighting front and to wage psychological warfare by giving moral support to those resisting the occupation, while denouncing those supporting the Nazi-regime.²² However, the people involved in the Dutch radio unit, Sluysen in particular, also tried to gather information about the situation in the Netherlands and distribute it to people in London who used it, in combination with other sources, to make and execute wartime plans.²³ This activity touches a controversial issue in historiography as several historians have argued that the Dutch community in London, including the people working for the RVD, did not show enough interest in several important events that took place in the occupied Netherlands, most notably the large-scale deportation of Jewish people to extermination camps in 1942–1943. Others have dismissed this view, by stressing that the Dutch government in exile prioritised defeating Nazi-Germany and liberating the Netherlands which prevented them from worrying about the fate of specific victim-groups.²⁴ It is noticeable that the listening reports of the RVD contain little about the fate of the Dutch Jewry, although a number of anti-semitic broadcasts was transcribed. This can be explained by the fact that the Nazi's barely mentioned their persecution-policies in public.²⁵

The initial proposal for a Dutch listening service came from Sluysen, who offered the idea to Pelt in a letter dated 26 May 1940, barely two weeks after he had arrived in London. He wrote that the Socialist publishing house he had been working for had set up a monitoring service in 1935, when the Nazi's expelled its correspondent from Berlin. By carefully selecting news-broadcasts and juxtaposing them to other sources, such as United Press and Italian broadcasts, journalists in the Netherlands had been able to get a 'skeleton of reports that [...] pretty much reflected the true situation' in Germany. Using the same method they later reported on Nazi invasions, such as the one in Norway in April 1940. In addition, Sluysen and his colleagues in Amsterdam had regularly tuned in to German amusement shows and background broadcasts in order to analyse the propaganda strategies of the Nazi's. Sluysen continued to report to Pelt that he had been listening to the Hilversum stations at the London guest house he was staying and, although he had an old receiving set and he sat in quite a noisy environment, he had picked up relevant information about the situation in the Netherlands.²⁶

Although there are no surviving documents, it seems that Pelt instantly enabled Sluysen to set up a listening service, with the first report being dated on 30 May 1940.²⁷ At the time, Pelt urgently needed material on Dutch-language broadcasts by the Nazi's as he wanted to persuade the British authorities to make available to him the means to execute his plan for a daily Dutch-language radio-broadcast.²⁸ The first reports were focussed on broadcasts to the Dutch East Indies from Zeesen in which the Nazi's argued that the occupation of the Netherlands had been legitimate and that the relations between the colony and the 'mother country' could continue as usual.²⁹ Moreover, these broadcasts portrayed the British Empire as an evil form of imperialism and a historical threat to the Dutch people.³⁰ Using this information, Pelt successfully argued that the Dutch government in London needed its own studio-facilities and 'free time' on BBC transmitters in order to counter these Nazi-narratives. Although BBC-officials were against this request, the British Ministry of Information pushed it through.³¹ As a result, *Radio Oranje* (Radio Orange) started broadcasting on 28 July 1940, and for more than five years provided a fifteen-minute broadcast after the daily news programme of the BBC Dutch service.

From the start of the international radio-broadcasting activities of the RVD onwards monitoring was an inherent part of the operation and daily listening reports appeared up until the very end of the war.³² The fragmentary documents that exist on the organisation of this monitoring service suggest that it was quite small, with three teams of one monitor and one secretary each, working in shifts to select and summarise or transcribe, in Dutch, relevant recordings of broadcasts onto stencils.³³ One surviving memorandum from 1943 mentions that at that moment in time copies were distributed to the Dutch royal family, all departments of the Dutch government London, the various press-organs of the RVD, Dutch army-commanders and diplomats, and the monitoring services of some Allied countries, including that of BBC.³⁴ A representative of the BBC Monitoring Service indicated that the Dutch reports were a useful supplement to his own service, which as a rule did not produce transcripts in the original language of the broadcasts.³⁵ Initially, there was also a list with private individuals and institutions, in various countries, that received the reports because of a professional or personal interest in developments in the Netherlands. At one point, Pelt wrote an advice to cancel the latter list, arguing that the people on it could better subscribe to other RVD-publications in order to be informed.³⁶

The latter consideration probably had to do with the fact that the listening reports largely contained summaries and transcripts of Nazi-broadcasts, usually without editorial comments. Therefore the interpretation of the information was largely left to the readers. In the early Summer of 1940 this caused misunderstandings. For example, the editors of a Dutch-language periodical in South Africa, while supporting the Allies, directly quoted from transcripts of Nazi-broadcasts, without giving any comments on the source.³⁷ In order to prevent such mishaps the reports from then onwards contained a disclaimer pointing out that they 'are mainly based on German sources and often are dictated by German propaganda considerations'.³⁸ In addition, each item in the reports was accompanied by a reference to the broadcasting station and (often) time of transmission. Therefore, the listening reports of the RVD are best to be seen as a raw data set, mainly to be used by officials of the Dutch government in exile and their allies in their efforts to combat Nazism and to end the occupation of the Netherlands. As such, these documents were an important asset in the propaganda war in the ether between Dutch broadcasters in London and Nazi-broadcasters in Hilversum, which will be the focal point in the next section.

Monitoring Max Blokzijl

Looking at the content of the listening reports, the majority of the items were short summaries of broadcasts (on average a dozen or so per report) accompanied by one or two long verbatim transcripts, counting several pages of dense typescript per day. The short summaries often contained reports on news and lifestyle broadcasts, briefly mentioning the topics in a matter-of-factly fashion. Especially at the beginning of the series, these items contained details of everyday life, such as an overview of the new regulations for keeping pets.³⁹ These items probably were meant to give the Dutch exiles in London a picture of the situation in the Netherlands. The majority of the transcripts, however, focussed on military news and political opinions that were aired via the Nazi-radio stations. This suggests that the reports were used by the broadcasters of *Radio Oranje* and the BBC

to assess how the Nazi's tried to influence Dutch public opinion, which they could use to tweak their own broadcasts. Noticeably, the reports show that certain broadcasts were closely monitored over long periods of time, revealing that the Dutch broadcasters in exile considered these the most dangerous forms of Nazi propaganda.

The programme-element that was covered most extensively by far were the talks of Max Blokzijl. Before the Second World War he was a well-known journalist who, after gaining fame with adventurous travelling reports in the 1900s and eyewitness accounts of the German trenches during the First World War, settled in Berlin as correspondent of the prestigious newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* in 1918.⁴⁰ After January 1933, he was charmed by Nazism, admiring the autocratic leadership-style of Adolf Hitler and the reforms that he initiated. In 1935 Blokzijl secretly became member of the Dutch Nazi-Party NSB and, although he continued to write balanced commentaries for *Algemeen Handelsblad*, started to publish pro-Nazi pieces in other Dutch periodicals under a penname. In the autumn of 1940 Blokzijl, revealing his NSB-membership, returned to the Netherlands on the instructions of the Ministry of Propaganda in Berlin, and became a high-ranking official at the Dutch Ministry for Information and Arts (*Voorlichting en Kunsten*). Initially, he was involved in the Nazification of the newspaper-press, but in February 1941 he made his successful debut on the wireless, with a series in which he gave a positive eyewitness account of the Hitler regime. From the very moment, he entered the ether the RVD listening service paid close attention to Blokzijl's radio activities.⁴¹

The monitors' interest in him grew in May of that year when he started to give two radio-talks a week (on Monday- and Thursday-evenings), in which he commented on a wide variety of topics ranging from geopolitics to family-matters. As a rule, these 15-minute talks were transcribed in full by the Dutch monitors in England (atmospheric conditions allowing), right up until the end of German occupation of the Netherlands.⁴² The listening reports confirm René Kok's analysis that Blokzijl, in a sophisticated and engaging style, portrayed Nazism as a 'new world order' and tried to mobilise support for it amongst Dutch citizens. In order to achieve this, Blokzijl divided Dutch public opinion in different camps: the 'pro's' (a small heroic avant-garde that worked hard to make the 'new world order' a success) and the 'anti's' (a group of people that blindly clung on to the old political system dragging its heels on everything). In between was his main target-audience: the 'nothing-at-all's' (*helemaal-niksers*) whom he tried to convert to Nazism.⁴³ In order to substantiate his views on Dutch public opinion, Blokzijl often read out excerpts from letters he said to have received.⁴⁴ He mainly focussed on letters from 'anti's' who denounced, and even threatened, him. Blokzijl used graphic quotes to portray himself as an underdog and to underline the urgency of his pleas for the 'new world order'.

At times Blokzijl took this argument a step further and argued that the 'anti's' were incited by broadcasts from London. In such talks, he showed that he was keenly aware of the fact that he was closely followed by his counterparts in London and he explicitly referred to their broadcasts even though it was forbidden to listen to them. At times he was provocative for example by ridiculing the weekly cabaret-show of *Radio Oranje*, in which he often featured, as 'childish sabotage'.⁴⁵ The fact that this phrase was marked with a pen in the listening report I found in the archive, indicates that such taunts, during the first year of Blokzijl's broadcasts, worked as a red rag on a bull for the people at *Radio Oranje*. As a result, they singled him out, on air and in writing, as the most

dangerous Nazi-propagandist in the Netherlands. Loe de Jong wrote a blistering essay on 'the sweet whistling of Max Blokzijl' in 1942. Dissecting a transcript of a talk addressed to the nation's youth De Jong argued that Blokzijl was different from other NSB-broadcasters, who 'blathered' in a 'hysterical' manner. In contrast, Blokzijl had a 'calm radio-voice', making his words palatable for many Dutch listeners. In addition, his texts were eloquent, striking a balanced tone—'he is always civilised'.⁴⁶ De Jong concluded that this appearance should not obscure that, underneath, Blokzijl was 'one of the most dangerous and cursed [*vloekwaardigste*] enemies of the Dutch spirit'.⁴⁷

De Jong's analysis of Dutch radio-preferences can be connected to the idea that the people in the Netherlands, as inhabitants of a small country, were prone to neutrality—reflecting the geopolitical status before the war. This sense of national identity was the fundament of the legitimation of the Dutch government in exile for taking the sides of the Allies against Nazism—which in itself was a breach with Dutch neutrality. In this narrative, which was aired via *Radio Oranje* from its early months onwards, the sovereignty of the Netherlands had, without provocation, been brutalised by Nazi-Germany which was driven by a repugnant lust for power.⁴⁸ *Radio Oranje* vehemently rejected claims made by authorities in Berlin, and repeated in pro-Nazi broadcasts in the Netherlands, that the Dutch government had colluded with the British and French against Germany. Broadcasters in London denounced such arguments as a 'smokescreen' to obscure the 'injustice that hit our people'.⁴⁹ On basis of this sense of violated neutrality, the government in exile claimed to be the only legitimate representative of the Dutch people, and to be entitled to manage the country's overseas interests in order restore the independence of the homeland, with all means it considered necessary.⁵⁰

On his part, Blokzijl repeatedly contested this narrative in his radio talks and therefore the legitimacy of the government in exile. He argued that the 'emigrant committee in London', as he liked to call it, consisted of a small group of elitist politicians and leftist intellectuals who already before the war had lost touch with the general population in the Netherlands.⁵¹ The relation had worsened since they had fled the country, which he denounced as a cowardly act on itself, and became completely disconnected from the realities of everyday life of the Dutch. To make things worse, Blokzijl insisted, the exiled government in London had lost its neutral position by openly taking the side of the Allies in their struggle against Nazism. This stance, he argued, made the members of this 'fake government' (*schijnregering*) fully depended on British support as a result of which they blindly danced to the tunes played by Winston Churchill, who had complete control over them.⁵² A few days after one these taunts, a *Radio Oranje* broadcast attacked the 'oracles of Hilversum', including Blokzijl, 'who speak to us with poisonous language, with the language of madness'.⁵³

The sting of Blokzijl's attacks on the government in exile reached a zenith in the months after the start of the war in the Pacific, in December 1941, which caused a crisis for the Dutch overseas empire. After the attack on Pearl Harbor Dutch authorities in London and Batavia promptly declared war on Japan. In a proclamation Queen Wilhelmina compared Japanese aggression in the Pacific with Germany's *Blitzkrieg* of 1940. 'We have learned!'⁵⁴ A couple of days later Blokzijl argued that this decision imperilled the Dutch colony in Southeast Asia as it would legitimise a Japanese invasion. He blamed the situation on the Dutch ministers in London, who had gullibly been driven into war with Japan by

Roosevelt and Churchill, and who 'continue to pretend to govern [*regeerinkje spelen*] and in addition spoil the rest, after they had failed the first part of their tasks in The Hague'.⁵⁵

During the Japanese conquest of the Indonesian archipelago (January–March 1942), the blame-game continued. The Dutch authorities in London accused the NSB-leadership of having allowed the Germans to 'sell' the Indonesian archipelago to Japan to provoke the attack on Pearl Harbor.⁵⁶ Blokzijl countered this claim by repeating his accusation that the Dutch authorities in the Indies should have never listened to the directive from the exiled government in London to join the Allied cause because that decision would irrevocably lead to the loss of the prized colony. At one point he even argued that if the Nazi's had been in charge over the Dutch East Indies, the colony would have been saved as they would have stayed out of the conflict between Japan and the United States.⁵⁷ In this particular case, which can be seen as the apex of his propaganda-strategy, Blokzijl managed to frame the Nazi's as champions of small state neutrality. In a reaction, Sluysers accused Blokzijl of 'covering up the most nasty case of high treason in history'.⁵⁸

After the Japanese conquest of the Dutch East Indies, the battle for neutrality between Blokzijl and *Radio Oranje* came to an end. With the changing war fortunes in the course of 1942–1943 Blokzijl increasingly struggled to uphold his nuanced tone,⁵⁹ which was duly noted in London. In March 1943 the RVD monitors wrote how he embraced Joseph Goebbels's 'total war' speech, which made it more difficult for him to reach out to the man in the middle.⁶⁰ Several months later the Nazi-regime in the Netherlands itself dealt a devastating blow to Blokzijl's propaganda efforts by ordering the confiscation all radio-receiving sets, except those of NSB-members. In a talk commenting on this measure Blokzijl blamed the broadcasters of *Radio Oranje* for causing the measure. The tone of this taunt was bitter and contained explicit anti-semitic elements when he denounced '[their] typical Jewish instigations'.⁶¹ Such provocations, however, had less effect on the London broadcasters than before, because they realised that Blokzijl was now mainly preaching to the choir. In 1944 Loe de Jong noted how the confiscation of radio-sets showed 'how the enemy acknowledged that he has lost the battle against the Dutch people, also on the spiritual frontline [*geestelijke front*]'.⁶²

Despite the declining significance of Blokzijl's broadcasts, the RVD listening service continued to fully transcribe them, twice a week. Indeed, if there was something out of order, this was meticulously noted as happened in the days after 5 September 1944, also known as 'Mad Tuesday' (*Dolle Dinsdag*), when false rumours that the Allied forces had crossed the Rhine near Arnhem triggered a panic amongst NSB-members, a great number of whom fled to Germany. On 6 September the RVD-monitors noted that the Hilversum stations only played gramophone records, implying that Nazi radio-broadcasters might have left their posts there.⁶³ The next day, however, the report contained a transcript of a live talk by Blokzijl in which he denounced 'the hurricane of rumours' about the Allied victory at the Rhine. In a rare editorial note, the monitors commented that 'the talk is shorter than usual' and 'there are inconsistencies in this talk', implying that he might have been under stress.⁶⁴ These remarks indicate the function of the transcripts was changing in the final phase of the war: in addition to providing material for *Radio Oranje* broadcasts, they became an instrument to track down enemy propagandists like Max Blokzijl.

In the months that followed the monitors continued to keep a complete record of Blokzijl's radio-activities and noted that he resumed his usual schedule of talks via the

ether and in addition gave short daily updates about the battle scenes on Dutch soil via a wired radio-distribution network.⁶⁵ When the Allied forces encroached on Hilversum in April 1945, wireless radio-broadcasting there came to a halt, including Blokzijl's prolific series, which as a result disappeared from the listening reports. By the end of the month, however, Blokzijl reappeared in the ether, and the monitoring reports, via a station called 'Fortress Holland' (*Vesting Holland*) operating from The Hague. Despite the bad reception, the RVD-monitors, in cooperation with the BBC, were able to verify his voice after several days of intensive tracking and analysis.⁶⁶ Just after the formal surrender of the Dutch forces in the Netherlands, on 5 May 1945, Blokzijl aired his last talk and four days later he was arrested by Allied troops at the site of the Nazi-transmitter where he had remained.⁶⁷

His arrest signalled the final, dramatic stage in the downfall of Max Blokzijl.⁶⁸ To his own surprise, he was named as one of the main Nazi-collaborators and was tried during the first round of post-war trials in the Netherlands. During his case-hearing in September 1945, which only lasted half a day, the prosecutor echoed the views of the *Radio Oranje* broadcasters by arguing that the propaganda of Blokzijl had been 'a thousand times worse' than the 'silly brawling' of others on the Nazi-radio because he had used his thorough knowledge of 'the feelings of our people' to undermine the belief in the Allied cause.⁶⁹ With those words, the prosecutor copied the analysis of De Jong from 1942 and he also referred to an alleged preference of the Dutch public for neutrality and nuance. The court completely followed the prosecutor's case and, again to his own great and horrifying surprise, Blokzijl was condemned to death. Despite several pleas for mercy the sentence was upheld by the high court and the Queen. Blokzijl was amongst the first group of Dutch Nazi's to be executed after the end of the Second World War, on 16 March 1946.

Conclusion

The execution of Max Blokzijl sealed the victory of the people involved in radio-broadcasting efforts from London in the Dutch-language propaganda war in the ether during the Second World War. From the May-days of 1940 onwards international radio-broadcasting had been an important part of the efforts of the government in exile to end the Nazi-occupation of the Netherlands. The precarious and complex geopolitical situation had forced the government to abandon its policy of neutrality and start a propaganda offensive against the Axis powers. The RVD 'listening reports' were of great importance in this effort as they provided the people at *Radio Oranje* with important information on the tactics of Nazi-broadcasters which they used to counter them. At this 'spiritual front-line' the London radio-makers singled out Blokzijl as their greatest adversary after he started broadcasting in the Spring of 1941. Even though his influence waned in the latter part of the war, they continued to meticulously monitor Blokzijl's activities in the ether, which in May 1945 led to his capture at the site of his last stronghold. If anything, the listening reports reveal the grim determination of the RVD-officials to make Blokzijl pay for his role in the propaganda war.

The reason why Blokzijl was considered to be such a menace was the fact that he, like no other Nazi-pundit, undermined the legitimacy of the Dutch government in exile in his sophisticated radio-talks. The Nazi-broadcaster regularly presented himself as a victim of

propaganda from London and ridiculed the Dutch leaders there as a spineless 'emigrant committee' that was a puppet of its British hosts. With such comments Blokzijl referred to the concept of neutrality, arguing that the Dutch government exile in London had squandered this core principle of Dutch foreign policy. Dutch broadcasters in London were highly agitated by these taunts, which undermined the core-narrative of *Radio Oranje* that Dutch neutrality had been brutalised by Nazi-Germany without provocation. They, on their part, used the monitoring reports to gather munition for their message that Blokzijl was a traitor, as happened explicitly during the Japanese conquest of the Dutch East Indies in 1942. By juxtaposing monitoring reports and *Radio Oranje* broadcasts this article has shown that in Dutch wartime propaganda notions of neutrality were contested during the Second World War. In this battle radio-monitoring was a crucial factor.

Archival Resources

BBC Written Archive Centre, Reading, Great Britain
 Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, The Netherlands
 NIOD Library, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. Nationaal Archief, Den Haag (NL-HaNA), 2.05.80, inv. nr. 5812. H.B. Fortuin (BBC) to head Luisterdienst, 26 November 1946.
2. When Loe de Jong was director the institute was known under the acronym RIOD.
3. Jong, *Het Koninkrijk V*, 329–30. De Jong's wartime publication will be discussed in a later section of this article.
4. Dick Verkijk gives explicit thanks to De Jong in his foreword for the support he received in his research. René Kok, who wrote his book after De Jong retired as director of the NIOD, critically engages with his work. Cf. Verkijk, *Radio Hilversum*, 15; Kok, *Max Blokzijl*, 78–9.
5. Onno Sinke notes that De Jong only paid scanty attention to *Radio Oranje* in his series. Sinke, *Verzet*, 16. No literature exists on the BBC Dutch service, which broadcasted a daily news service.
6. For different views on the motives behind of the Dutch policy of neutrality cf. Voorhoeve, *Peace and Hellema, Dutch*.
7. See Tames, *Oorlog; Vree, De Nederlandse; Wijfjes, Radio*.
8. This revision ties in with the main argument of: Erlandsson, *Window*.
9. See Jong, *Het Koninkrijk V*, 66–71.
10. In May 1940 Prime Minister De Geer believed that Nazi Germany would win the war and hoped for a conditional peace which prevented him from fully siding with the British. In August 1940 Queen Wilhelmina replaced De Geer with the P.S. Gerbrandy, under whose leadership the cabinet gave all-out support to the Allied war effort. Jong, *Het Koninkrijk IX*, 83–93; Fasseur, *Eigen*, 187–209.

11. Jong, *Het Koninkrijk IX*, 5.
12. See Sluysen, ... , en daar, 9–14.
13. Jong, *Het Koninkrijk IX*, 14–15.
14. Jong, *Het Koninkrijk IX*, 101.
15. Beyens, *Overgangspolitiek*, 69–76.
16. Sinke, *Verzet*, 26–27.
17. BBC Written Archive Centre (WAC) Reading. E2/12/1, memorandum C.B. Clark, 4 June 1940.
18. BBC WAC, E2/12/1, memorandum (signature not readable) of meeting with A. Pelt and P.S. Gerbrandy, 6 June 1940.
19. Verkijk, *Radio*, 53–60; Haslach, *Netherlands*, 42.
20. Haslach, *Netherlands*, 40–1.
21. Sinke, *Verzet*, 15.
22. *Ibid.*, 41–2.
23. *Ibid.*, 61 and 67. Sinke mentions these activities in passing.
24. Cf. Zee, *Om erger* and Fasseur, *Wilhelmina*, 136–49. See also: Sinke, *Verzet*, 99–103.
25. Boom, *Wij weten niets*, 219–23.
26. NL-HaNA, 2.05.80, inv. nr. 6222. Letter M. Sluysen to A. Pelt, 26 May 1940.
27. NIOD Library, PER 1135: RVD luisterrapporten. Report dated 30 May 1940.
28. BBC WAC, E2/12/1, memorandum (not signed clearly) of meeting with A. Pelt and P.S. Gerbrandy, 6 June 1940.
29. See, for example: NIOD Library, PER 1135: RVD luisterrapporten. no 204, not dated [late June 1940].
30. See, for example: NIOD Library Amsterdam, PER 1135: RVD luisterrapporten. no 322, not dated [early July 1940].
31. BBC WAC. E2/12/1, memorandums (signature not readable), 20 and 26 June 1940; Sinke, *Verzet*, 30–5; Fasseur, *Eigen meester*, 182.
32. Representatives of the RVD in London continued making monitoring reports up until 7 November 1945, listening to *Radio Herrijzend Netherland* (Radio of Rising Netherlands) a station of the Dutch government in exile that had been broadcasting from liberated parts of the Netherlands since the autumn of 1944.
33. NL-HaNA, 2.05.80, inv. nr. 6222. Memorandum, 19 May 1941.
34. NL-HaNA, 2.05.80, inv. nr. 6222. Memorandum, 19 January 1943.
35. BBC WAC, E1/830, 'Minutes of Dutch programme meeting', 13 August 1941, no 277. See also: Broek, *Hier*, 195–6.
36. NL-HaNA, 2.05.80, inv. nr. 2368. Memorandum A. Pelt, no date. The sources do not reveal if this idea was implemented.
37. NL-HaNA, 2.05.80, inv. nr. 2368. Memorandum A. Pelt, 12 August 1940.
38. The disclaimer was written in June 1940 and although the wordings were altered at several occasions (for example, 'German' was replaced by 'enemy'), it contained the same basic message up until the end of hostilities. NIOD Library, PER 1135: RVD luisterrapporten. First version of the disclaimer, no serial number, not dated.
39. NIOD Library, PER 1135: RVD luisterrapporten. no 230, not dated [late June 1940].
40. Kok, *Max Blokzijl* provides a detailed biography on which this paragraph is based.
41. His first appearance was mentioned in: NIOD Library Amsterdam, PER 1135: RVD luisterrapporten, no 2794, 2 February 1941.

42. Also the BBC monitors noted the start of these series: BBC WAC, Summary of World Broadcasts, no. 664, 13 May 1941, 1M (3 Holland), iv-v. Shortened transcripts and summaries of Blokzijl's talks, in English, regularly appeared in the BBC daily digest of foreign broadcasts. It is likely that these texts were translations of the Dutch monitoring reports as they are compatible.
43. Kok, *Max Blokzijl*, 75.
44. Blokzijl claimed that he received 80,000 letters over the four years he broadcasted. Kok concludes that this claim is too high. Kok, *Max Blokzijl*, 112–4.
45. NIOD Library, PER 1135: RVD luisterrapporten, no 4942, 29 June 1941.
46. Jong, *Je maintiendrai II*, 241–2.
47. *Ibid.*, 253.
48. The most coherent version of this argument was published in English by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kleffens, *The Rape of the Netherlands*. This pamphlet was translated into Dutch in 1941.
49. NIOD Library PER 1134: Radio Oranje, Loe de Jong, 'Beantwoording van het Amsterdamsche ANP', 26 October 1940.
50. See for example: NIOD Library PER 1134: Radio Oranje, P.J. Gerbrandy, 'De toekomst van Nederland', 9 October 1940.
51. NIOD Library, PER 0290: RVD luisterrapporten, no 6834, not dated.
52. NIOD Library, PER 0290: RVD luisterrapporten, no 7230, 1 December 1941.
53. NIOD Library, PER 1134: Radio Oranje, A.K. van Riemsdijk, 'Orakelen van Hilversum', 7 December 1941.
54. NIOD Library, PER 1134: Radio Oranje, Queen Wilhelmina, 'proclamatie', 8 December 1941.
55. NIOD Library, PER 0290: RVD luisterrapporten, no 7405, not dated [mid-December 1941].
56. NIOD Library, PER 1134: Radio Oranje, M. Sluysen, 'Een vraag die beantwoord moet worden', 23 February 1942.
57. NIOD Library, PER 0290: RVD luisterrapporten, no 8092, 16 February 1942.
58. NIOD Library, PER 1134: Radio Oranje, M. Sluysen, 'Indie campagne no 3', 25 February 1942.
59. See Kok, *Max Blokzijl*, 98–105.
60. NIOD Library, PER 0290: RVD luisterrapporten. 'Weekoverzicht van de Luisterdienst, 25 februari t/m 4 maart 1943'. During the latter months of 1942 and the first ones of 1943 the monitors wrote weekly reflections.
61. NIOD Library, PER 0290: RVD luisterrapporten, no 2564A, 10 June 1943. Blokzijl occasionally referred to the broadcasters of *Radio Oranje* as 'radio-Jews', but he rarely denounced them in this way.
62. Jong, *Je maintiendrai III*, 227. After June 1943 Blokzijl was barely mentioned on *Radio Oranje*. Kok, *Max Blokzijl*, 108.
63. NIOD Library, PER 0290: RVD luisterrapporten, no 7600A, 6 September 1944.
64. NIOD Library, PER 0290: RVD luisterrapporten, no 7611A, 7 September 1944.
65. NIOD Library, PER 0290: RVD luisterrapporten, no 8693A, not dated.
66. NIOD Library, PER 0290: RVD luisterrapporten, no 9307A, 1 May 1945.
67. Kok, *Max Blokzijl*, 127.
68. *Ibid.*, chapter 11.
69. *Processen. No 1. Max Blokzijl* (Amsterdam z.j.) 30.

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