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6 'From Heart to Heart'

Colonial Radio and the Dutch Imagined Community in the 1920s

Vincent Kuitenbrouwer

Abstract

This contribution analyses the symbolic meaning of the first short-wave radio connection between the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies, which was established in 1927, as a means to overcome the distance between the colonial centre and periphery. This chapter explores primary source material about colonial radio to reveal the transnational aspects of the Dutch imagined community. Contemporaries marvelled at the wonders of radio technology as they listened to voices from the other side of the world. Such experiences forged a stronger sense of unity between the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies as distance seemed to fall away. Moreover, these first contacts triggered emotions on both sides of the line, feelings that were expressed in different media genres and became part of Dutch popular culture.

Keywords: imagined communities, Dutch East Indies, colonialism, international radio broadcasting

The first half of the twentieth century stands out as a crucial phase in Dutch state-building, in various parts of the world. During this period the Netherlands became a strong national community with the different provinces bound together by a tight infrastructural grid and a range of invented traditions.¹ At the same time the Dutch authorities also tightened their grip on the

1 H. Knippenberg and B. de Pater, *De eenwording van Nederland: Schaalvergroting en integratie sinds 1800* (Nijmegen, 1988); H. te Velde, *Gemeenschapszin en plichtsbefef: liberalism en nationalism in Nederland, 1870-1918* (Groningen, 1992).

overseas dependencies. The colony in the Indonesian archipelago in particular underwent some major transformations following territorial expansion, the creation of new political institutes and the development of (intercontinental) communication lines.² These processes of state-building, in the metropole and the periphery, to a large extent depended on the development of modern technology. The interaction between these two variables, state-building and technology, is central to this contribution, which specially focuses on the development of radio as a medium connecting the Netherlands and the Indies.

One important argument in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* is that print-capitalism, in the form of the newspaper press, played a crucial role in state-building as it 'represents the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation'.³ By emphasizing the power of the media on human society, Anderson to an extent followed the work of Marshall McLuhan, who coined the famous phrase that 'the medium is the message'. McLuhan argued that in order to understand media one should not study the content, but rather the form. Technology, he asserted, 'shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action'.⁴ Over the years this strong emphasis on the 'innate characteristics of media technology' has justly been criticized by many scholars as a form of determinism.⁵ Nonetheless McLuhan's aphorism echoes in this chapter, although in a different way than he probably intended it to. Dutch newspapers in the late 1920s regularly reported on the development of radio technology: this medium literally was part of the message of the national press. I will show that such reflections generated feelings of unity and pride and as a result strengthened the Dutch imagined community.

A second issue is the geography of the Dutch imagined community, which transcended the borders of the Netherlands. In his initial work on community formation, Anderson treated nation-states as the main unit of analysis. In a later volume, *The Spectre of Comparisons*, he argued that national communities in the twentieth century were shaped by an emerging universal 'grammar of representation' and that 'the late colonial environment is an especially apt site for appreciating this development'.⁶ Anderson speaks

2 W. van den Doel, *Zo ver de wereld strekt: De geschiedenis van Nederland overzee vanaf 1800* (Amsterdam, 2011).

3 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London, 1991), 25.

4 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London, 1964), 9.

5 S. Potter, 'Social Histories of the Media in Britain and Ireland', *Media History* 18 (2012), 459-469, here 460-461.

6 B. Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London/New York, 1998), 34.

here of the formation of imagined communities in colonies in Asia and Africa, but the same went for European countries that were colonizers. The notion that empires were crucial for identity formation in the nineteenth and twentieth century is central to a recent trend in scholarship on the British Empire. Whereas traditional literature suggested that imperialism was a one-way process, scholars associated with New Imperial History argue that relations were more complex. They describe a reciprocal process in which the colonial experience affected the societies of both the colonizers in the metropole and the colonized in the periphery.⁷ In the Netherlands, this insight is gradually finding common ground, as researchers probe a 'New Dutch Imperial History'.⁸ This contribution aims to further explore the connections between national and colonial history by asserting that in order to fully grasp the Dutch imagined community in the twentieth century, one must not only study the Netherlands, but also the colonial state in the Indonesian archipelago.

One hotly debated issue surrounding the study of British imperial culture is the question to what extent the colonial experience affected public opinion in the metropole.⁹ This remains an open question in the Netherlands. As Remco Raben points out, no systematic study exists on the impact of the empire on Dutch metropolitan society.¹⁰ This chapter provides a new contribution to this emerging debate by showing that elitist reflections on the importance of colonial radio for the Dutch nation by high-ranking officials and journalists reached a wide audience. Although few people actually had access to the air waves, popular sentiments sprang forth about the radio connection between the Netherlands and the Indies, which resonate in Dutch society until today. By focusing on the colonial 'home-culture',¹¹ this

7 For a historiographical analysis of the New Imperial History, see: A. Lester, 'Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire', *History Compass* 4 (2006), 124-141.

8 For a recent contribution see the special issue: 'A New Dutch Imperial History', M. Bloembergen and V. Kuitenbrouwer (eds), *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 128 (2013). Important earlier contributions include: F. Gouda, *Dutch Culture Overseas: Colonial Practice in the Netherlands Indies, 1900-1942* (Amsterdam, 1995); M. Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst: Indië en Zuid-Afrika in de Nederlandse cultuur omstreeks 1900* (Amsterdam, 1996); S. Legêne, *De bagage van Blomhoffen Van Breugel: Japan, Java, Tripoli en Suriname in de negentiende-eeuwse Nederlandse cultuur van het imperialisme* (Amsterdam, 1998).

9 Compare, for example: B. Porter, 'Further Thoughts on Imperial Absent-Mindedness', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36 (2008), 101-117; and J.M. MacKenzie, "'Comfort and Conviction': A Response to Bernard Porter", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36 (2008), 659-668.

10 R. Raben, 'A New Dutch Imperial History? Preambulations in a Prospective Field', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 128 (2013), 5-30, here 22.

11 'thuiscultuur'. For this term see: S. Legêne, *Spiegelreflex: Culturele sporen van de koloniale ervaring* (Amsterdam, 2010).

contribution conversely only touches on the formation of the Indonesian imagined community in the first half of the twentieth century, a topic that features prominently in the work of Benedict Anderson himself. Several authors have pointed out that radio played an important role in the Indonesian community-formation process as well.¹² On the pages below, however, I will show how colonial radio reinforced the transnational ties between the Netherlands and the Indies in the 1920s, and thus strengthened the Dutch imagined community.

A colonial communication crisis, 1900-1920

During the first half of the twentieth century state-building in the Indonesian archipelago intensified under tutelage of the Dutch colonial regime. Governor-General J.B. van Heutsz (1904-1908) established Dutch control over the so-called 'outer territories' (the islands beyond the traditional colonial stronghold of Java).¹³ Alongside these wars of conquest a modernization process took place that changed the face of society in the archipelago. The official start of this colonial 'project' was the 1901 speech of Queen Wilhelmina, in which she announced the 'ethical policy', an ambitious plan to 'develop' the indigenous population of the Indies according to Western norms of civilization.¹⁴ Moreover, the Dutch presence in the archipelago grew significantly in the twentieth century, from roughly 44,000 people in 1860 to an estimated 208,000 in 1930. Although quantitatively the European presence was obscured by the indigenous population (which counted 66 million people in 1930), this small white elite dominated colonial society in the Indies.¹⁵ In the wake of this process, indigenous groups started to develop a sense of national consciousness, which contributed to the emergence of modern Indonesia.

The colonial project also had an effect in the Netherlands. There the idea took shape that the colony in the East was essential for the wellbeing

12 See several contributions in: *Jaarboek mediageschiedenis: Nederlands-Indië*, vol. 4 (Amsterdam, 1992); R. Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony* (Princeton, 2002), ch. 5.

13 M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst van het moderne imperialisme: Koloniën en buitenlandse politiek 1870-1902* (Amsterdam, 1985).

14 For the notion of a colonial 'project', see: J.A.A. van Doorn, *De laatste eeuw van Indië: Ontwikkeling en ondergang van een koloniaal project* (Amsterdam, 1994), 16; for the most comprehensive study on 'ethical policy' see: E.B. Locher-Scholten, *Ethiek in fragmenten: Vijfstudies over koloniaal denken en doen van Nederlanders in de Indische archipel, 1877-1942* (Leiden, 1981).

15 Van Doorn, *De laatste eeuw*, 22-23.

of the metropole, or, as the saying went: 'Indies lost, calamity born.' People believed that the Indies were the 'cork' that kept the Dutch economy afloat. Although several groups in Dutch society did have significant economic interests in retaining hold over the colony, historians agree that this claim was exaggerated. In fact, revenues from the Indies made up about 14 per cent of the GNP of the Netherlands during the 1920s and 1930s. In addition, some argued that maintaining possession of the Indies lent the Netherlands international prestige. Although overshadowed by the great powers on the European stage, it could still exert some influence on international relations because of its huge colony in Asia. Or, as it was also articulated, without the Indies, the Netherlands would slip to the 'rank of Denmark'.¹⁶

Looking back, one can question the realism of these truisms, but it seems that in the early twentieth century they resonated amongst broad layers of public opinion in the Netherlands. At the time society was divided into four major political-ideological segments, known as 'pillars', representing the Protestant, Catholic, Social-Democratic and Liberal currents. Opinion makers from these various groups differed in their ideas on how to shape colonial policy, but the overall consensus was that for the time being Dutch rule in the archipelago was beneficial for both colonizer and colonized.¹⁷ In this way the Indies became an important symbol of pride in the Netherlands. Together with the monarchy, it provided a marker of national identity that many people could relate to.¹⁸ In other words: the Indies became an important part of the imagined community of the Netherlands.

The notion that the Netherlands and the Indies were invariably linked to each other was not uncontested nor unproblematic, however, and the twentieth century also generated uncertainties for the colonial regime and its supporters. New ideologies such as Communism and political Islam fostered anti-colonial nationalism. Indonesian and Dutch activists set up organizations that published and distributed vocal and scorching critiques, tarnishing the reputation of the Dutch regime in the Indonesian

16 'Indië verloren, rampspoed geboren'; 'kurk'; 'rang van Denemarken'. H. Baudet, 'Nederland en de rang van Denemarken', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 90 (1975), 430-444.

17 Socialists were most ambivalent towards colonialism. Amongst this group there were many supporters of the 'ethical policy' who believed in the advancement and self-determination of the indigenous population of the Indies, but did not think they were ready for independence in the foreseeable future. J. Foray, 'A Unified Empire of Equal Parts: Dutch Commonwealth Schemes of the 1920s-40s', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41:2 (2013), 259-284, here 263.

18 N.C.F. van Sas, 'Fin de siècle als nieuw begin. Nationalisme in Nederland rond 1900', in: N.C.F. van Sas (ed.), *De Metamorfose van Nederland* (Amsterdam, 2004), 577-591; Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*; J.Th.M. Bank and M. van Buuren, *1900: Hoogtij van burgerlijke cultuur* (The Hague, 2000), ch. 2.

archipelago. Moreover, the international status of the Netherlands as a small nation controlling a big empire made it difficult to manage the lines of communication running to and from the Indies. In this sense modern technology was both a blessing and a curse for the colonial regime; on the one hand it enabled the expansion of the Dutch presence in the archipelago, while on the other hand there was a constant fear that internal and external adversaries would use it to destroy the colonial project.

Such ambivalence had existed since the late nineteenth century. The opening of the Suez Canal and the adoption of steam navigation greatly increased the volume and speed of ships sailing between the Netherlands and the Indies. The advent of intercontinental telegraph lines transformed the nature of information exchange, making direct communication possible. In this way, the presence of the Dutch in the archipelago grew significantly. Some pro-colonial authors even boasted that the distance to the Netherlands had evaporated.¹⁹ However, these increased means of communication also caused anxieties for the Dutch regime. One result of steam navigation was that a growing number of Indonesian Muslims were able to make the sacred pilgrimage to Mecca.²⁰ Dutch authorities greatly feared that these *hadjis* would introduce radical ideas of pan-Islamism on their return to the archipelago, inciting anti-colonial sentiments. During the course of the twentieth century Muslim scares continued to haunt officials, leading to far-reaching measures to control the transport of pilgrims.²¹ Moreover, although anti-colonial groups did not use telegraph lines, they constituted an additional problem as the British controlled all the intercontinental cables running from the archipelago. Dutch colonial officials were thus wary of this telegraph connection, as they feared that news would be manipulated in order to serve British interests.²²

Fears of internal and external threats to the colonial order in the Indies climaxed during the First World War. Although the Netherlands remained neutral, and was thus saved from the bloodshed on the European battlefields, the lines of communications with the colony in the East were greatly affected by the conflict. Britain imposed a naval blockade and heavily restricted the telegraph connection with Europe. As a result the Indies became almost

19 See, for example, several contributions to: W.H. Helsdingen and H. Hoogenberk (eds), *Daar wèrd wat groots verricht.... Nederlandsch-Indië in de xxste eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1941).

20 M.B. Muller, 'Pilgrims' Progress: The Business of the Hajj', *Past & Present* 191 (2006), 189-228.

21 W. van den Doel, *Zo ver de wereld strekt: De geschiedenis van Nederland overzee vanaf 1800* (Amsterdam, 2011), 210-211.

22 Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*, 201; K. van Dijk, *The Netherlands Indies and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Leiden, 2007), 13.

completely cut off from the Netherlands by 1916.²³ This situation was a painful reminder to the Dutch that the lines of communication with their prized dependency were vulnerable. During the period that the colony was isolated from the metropole, many parts of the archipelago witnessed large-scale uprisings and anti-colonial organizations grew significantly. An increasing number of people in the Indies were calling for more self-rule, and some even started to argue for complete independence. Lacking a good line of communication with the government in The Hague and startled by wild rumours about the fall-out of the Russian Revolution in Europe, Governor-General J.P. van Limburg-Stirum made promises for democratic reforms in November 1918.²⁴ Although these promises were vague and remained largely unfulfilled, they illuminate the uncertainties that haunted the isolated colonial regime at the time.

The situation around 1920 shows that colonial state-building in the Indonesian archipelago was a toilsome process and that the dominance of the regime had its limits.²⁵ Nonetheless, the interwar years saw renewed efforts of the Dutch to strengthen their position in the Indies. These endeavours sprouted forth from the well-established idea in the Netherlands that the Dutch had a moral task to civilize the peoples of the Indonesian archipelago and that a close relation with the colony in Asia was important for the national wellbeing. In addition, these feelings were spurred by new technological developments that made the world seem to be a lot smaller. In contrast with previous periods, the Dutch pioneered the new media of the interwar years. Their innovative successes boosted national self-confidence and many opinion makers hailed them, proclaiming that they would strengthen the Dutch Empire and, indeed, the position of Netherlands in the world.

'From heart to heart'

Like other major conflicts, the First World War generated many technological developments that, although initially for military purposes, proved to be significant for civilian society. Despite the fact that the Netherlands had

23 Van Dijk, *The Netherlands Indies*, 353-380.

24 B. de Graaff and E. Locher-Scholten, *J.P. Graaf van Limburg Stirum, 1873-1948: Tegendraads landvoogd en diplomaat* (Zwolle, 2007), 207-216

25 See also: M. Bloembergen, *Uit zorg en angst: De geschiedenis van de politie in Nederlands-Indië* (Amsterdam/Leiden, 2009), 361-362.

remained neutral, several Dutch engineers were pioneers in these developments. Anthony Fokker, for example, worked in the German wartime aviation industry, designing several innovative models. In 1919 Fokker returned to the Netherlands and set up a factory near Amsterdam. The airplane builder established close contacts with Royal Dutch Airlines (KLM), which was founded in the same year. With Fokker's state-of-the-art planes the company was successful in its early days.²⁶ Soon KLM started experimenting with long-distance flights to Southeast Asia and in 1924 the first plane arrived in the Indonesian archipelago after an adventurous journey, flying in stages across the Middle East and Asia, from one barren airstrip to another. By 1930 a regular service between Amsterdam and Batavia had been set up, flying once a week, which reached the Indies in five days. The number of travellers was limited in those days, as only a small group of businessmen and officials were able to afford to fly to the Indies. But KLM planes also provided services to a larger portion of the public by carrying mail.²⁷

Wireless radio was another technology, spurred by the First World War, that had great impact on the Dutch colonial lines of communication in the 1920s.²⁸ In the 1900s the Dutch engineer C.J. de Groot started experimenting with the wireless in Java. During the First World War, he spent some time in the Netherlands and completed a PhD thesis in which he argued that it was possible to establish a direct connection between the Netherlands and the Indies in order to bypass British censorship of the telegraph cables to the archipelago. Although the war had ended before he could complete the project, his experiments were so promising that the government in 1919 ordered the construction of two large stations to establish a long-wave radio connection between the Netherlands and the Indies. These stations were built in desolated places to avoid interference: Radio Kootwijk in the Dutch Veluwe national park and Radio Malabar in the highlands near Bandung in Java. The latter, designed by De Groot himself, had a huge antenna spanning two kilometres across a gorge in the middle of the jungle. In May 1923 first contact was established between these stations using Morse code via long-wave radio.

26 H.A. Somberg, 'Fokker, Anthony Herman Gerard (1890-1939)', in: *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland*, accessed at: <http://www.historici.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/BWN/lemmata/bwn1/fokker> on 01-08-2013.

27 Hans Martin, 'Door de lucht', in: W.H. Helsdingen and H. Hoogenberk (eds), *Daar wèrd wat groots verricht.... Nederlandsch-Indië in de xxste eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1941), 21-26.

28 The following three paragraphs are based on: H. Vles, *Hallo Bandoeng. Nederlandse radio-pioniers (1900-1945)* (Zutphen, 2008).

It was relatively easy to cross large distances with long-wave technology, but the connection was notoriously unreliable. Engineers at the Philips Company in Eindhoven therefore experimented with short-wave radio, a complex technology which was nonetheless more stable than long-wave and easier to use as it required far smaller devices. Engineers in the Netherlands successfully tested their new transmitters by exchanging telegraph messages with radio amateurs in the Indies. By 1925 this new technology had already been so developed that the monolithic long-wave antennas near Kootwijk and Bandung had become redundant. Still, these locations remained in use, supplemented with short-wave radio equipment, and became important pinnacles in the colonial radio connection.

On 11 March 1927 a breakthrough came when engineers at the Philips factory played records and tried to transmit the music. To their great surprise they received messages from all across the world that amateurs had heard it loud and clear. This was the first time that sound had been transmitted across such distances, via short wave. Director Anton Philips immediately demanded more experiments with radio broadcasts to the Indies and in the months that followed a stable connection with Bandung was established. On 28 April Philips broadcasted Beethoven's Ninth Symphony ('Ode an die Freude'), played by the Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam, which was clearly received in the Indies. The success of this experiment showed that the radio connection between the Netherlands and its colony in the East was stable enough to start with regular services.

The official inauguration of radio broadcasting from the Netherlands to the Dutch colonies was a royal affair. On 31 May and 1 June 1927 Queen Wilhelmina and Princess Juliana gave live speeches to the inhabitants of the overseas parts of the Dutch Empire from the Philips factory.²⁹ The Queen began her speech to the listeners in the Indies with a 'salutation from heart to heart', expressing her commitment to the 'unity' between the metropole and colony. She continued with a historical overview of the communication lines, arguing that the distance between the Netherlands and the archipelago had shrunk with the advent of radio, which would strengthen the unity even further. The speech ended with an eulogy of the colonial civilizing mission in the Indies and a homage to the Dutch people who had travelled to the archipelago to fulfil this task.³⁰ Princess Juliana,

29 They gave their speeches twice, the first time for listeners in Suriname and the Dutch Caribbean and the second time for listeners in the Indies.

30 'een groet van hart to hart', 'saamhorigheid'. 'De toespraak van H.M. de Koningin', *Het Vaderland*, 2 June 1927.

who had just turned eighteen and was speaking in public for the first time, thought it was a 'nice idea' that she was able to 'speak with you all'. Although she had never visited the colonies, the princess said that the Indies was 'no longer a complete stranger', as she had learned about its constitutional bodies and ethnography at university. She ended by expressing the hope that radio technology would further increase harmony between metropole and colony.³¹

Soon another milestone was reached when it became possible for the general public to have a telephone conversation between the Netherlands and the Indies via the wireless. In 1928 extensive tests were conducted in which officials, journalists and 'normal' members of the public were invited to make short calls (four to six minutes) to people in the Indies for free.³² A regular telephone service was inaugurated on the 50th anniversary of the wedding day of the queen mother, Emma, 7 January 1929. She was granted the honour of making the first official call to the wife of the governor-general in Batavia. The latter congratulated the queen mother on her anniversary on behalf of all the women of the Indies and Emma expressed her warm gratitude.³³ After this short conversation the ministers of Transport and Public Works and Colonial Affairs spoke with the governor-general. The men repeatedly emphasized that radiotelephony, along with radio broadcasting and aviation, would bridge the distance between the Netherlands and the Indies, forming ever-closer ties between the two parts of the Dutch realm.³⁴ The royal inaugurations of 1927 and 1929 both breathed a mix of sentimentality about the ties between the Netherlands and the Indies and optimism about the possibilities of further strengthening the colonial relation with the help of radio technology that was pioneered by Dutch engineers.

In general, the papers aligned with the major 'pillars' were positive about the successful radio broadcast and telephone conversation. But there were also dissonant opinions, particularly in the organs of the political left.³⁵ Many reports on the broadcast of 1 June 1927 announced that the royal

31 'leuk denkbeeld', 'met U allen mag spreken', 'niet meer geheel een vreemde'. 'H.M. de Koningin en Princes Juliana spreken tot de kolonien', *Nieuwe Tilburgse Courant*, 2 June 1927.

32 'Inleiding', in: F. Steijlen and E. Willems (eds), *Met ons alles goed: Brieven en films uit Nederlands-Indië van de familie Kuyck* (Zutphen/Leiden, 2008), 17.

33 'Het telefoongesprek der Koningin-moeder met mevr. De Graeff', *Het Vaderland*, 8 January 1929.

34 'Opening van het telefoon-verkeer met Nederl.-Indië', *Het Vaderland*, 7 January 1929.

35 This assertion is based on key-word searches in Delpher, the newspaper databank of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, for material from 28 May to 3 June 1927, and 7 to 13 January 1929.

speeches had been heard 'word for word' in the Indies, quoting a cable from De Groot from Bandung.³⁶ The Communist newspaper *De Tribune*, known for its anti-colonial stance, mocked these elated reports in a satirical editorial entitled 'Radio Interferences'. The article contained fictive excerpts from the Queen's speech to the colonies in the West, which implied that the broadcast was inaudible at crucial passages.³⁷

The same thing happened in January 1929, when the journalists of the papers of the major 'pillars' who were present in The Hague at the inauguration of the telephone connection described the event as a historical moment, despite the fact that parts of the speech of the governor-general had been impossible to hear. The reporter of the liberal *Algemeen Handelsblad* provided a poetic explanation for these interferences: 'It was as if huge bells tolled, maybe to announce the triumph of the Dutch enterprising spirit and of the Dutch technique through the ether.'³⁸ In contrast, *De Tribune* published a damning editorial. The remark of the governor-general that the Dutch communication lines from now on would be safe from external interference was countered as follows. 'Now they can continue unhindered with the exploitation of brown bodies and the hanging of rebellious elements.'³⁹ Considering the overall reactions in the Dutch press in the interwar years, however, such explicit anti-colonial remarks were exceptional at the time, issued by a relatively small group of leftists.⁴⁰

By publishing the official speeches given at the 1927 and 1929 inaugurations, the newspapers of the major pillars welcomed radio technology as an important reinforcement of the colonial bond between the Netherlands and the Indies, emphasizing the feelings of unity that this connection evoked amongst groups of Dutchmen in both the metropole and colony. The events also contributed to the Dutch imagined community in another way. Several editorials expressed great pride in the achievement of the engineers who beat their colleagues in other European countries in establishing a wireless connection with its overseas dependencies. In fact, the Dutch signal also reached many other places in the world. In June 1927 the British Broadcasting

36 'woord voor woord'. See for example: *Algemeen Handelsblad*, *NRC* and *Het Vaderland*, 2 June 1927.

37 'Radio Storingen', *De Tribune*, 3 June 1927.

38 'Het was alsof geweldige klokken luidden, misschien wel om de zegepraal van den Nederlandschen ondernemingsgeest en van de Nederlandsche techniek door het luchtruim te verkondigen'. *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 8 January 1929.

39 'Nu kan men ongestoord door gaan met het uitzuigen der bruine lichamen en het ophangen van oproerige elementen.' 'Holland-Indië per telefoon', *De Tribune*, 10 January 1929.

40 See also: H. Blom, *De muiterij op de Zeven Provinciën* (Bussum, 1975), 278.

Corporation asked Philips to transmit its broadcasts to far-flung territories in the British Empire, such as South Africa. The fact that the imperial broadcasts were not transmitted from London, but from Eindhoven, led to bouts of chauvinism in the press. As one correspondent from Cape Town reported: 'It [the broadcast] was a great success and it has shown us again miraculously what little Holland is capable of.'⁴¹ As such the experiments of the late 1920s sparked great optimism about the Dutch global communication lines, which seemed stronger than ever, even surpassing British radio. At the time, various authors invoked the spirit of the 'Golden Age' of the seventeenth century, when Dutch ships ruled the waves; in the 1920s 'the voice of the Netherlands rules the world'.⁴²

'Hello Bandung!'

In addition to the pompous reflections of high-ranking members of government and opinion makers on the importance of aviation and radio for the prestige of the Dutch Empire, these technologies affected the daily experiences of many individuals overseas. In the Indies expatriates attached great value to maintaining contact with the family back home and the advent of new media facilitated matters. The KLM mail services were popular and the arrival of planes was publicly announced, allowing people to await letters from their loved ones. In addition to the increased speed of the mail delivery, there was also a notable increase in the amount of correspondence.⁴³ Such documents provide rich sources when studying the daily life of Dutch expatriates in the colony. In recent years an increasing number of collections have been made available through the archives and some pioneering publications give a taste of this material, such as the publication of the letters of Rien Kuyck, the wife of an engineer of the Radio Holland broadcasting station. During the family's stay in the Indies between 1924 and 1930 she wrote a large number of letters to her parents in The Hague. In 2008 a selection from this collection was published, accompanied by a DVD with a compilation of films shot by Rien's husband.

41 'Het geheel was een groot succes en het heeft ons weer wonderlijk bewezen wat little Holland kan doen'. 'Philips in Zuid-Afrika gehoord', *Het Vaderland*, 14 June 1927.

42 'de stem van Nederland beheerscht de wereld'. *Hallo Bandoeng! Hier Den Haag! Herinneringen aan de Eerste radiotelefoongesprekken tusschen Nederland & Nederlandsch-Indië in MCMXXVIII* (The Hague, 1928), 46.

43 'Inleiding': in Steijlen and Willems (eds), *Met ons alles goed*, 13-14.

Through the work of her husband, Rien Kuyck experienced the new colonial media at first hand, which made a great impression on her. In June 1927 she and her husband were present on the premises of Radio Holland in Batavia (Priok) together with high-ranking guests from the colonial administration to listen to the royal speeches that were broadcasted from the Netherlands. She reported how the queen's and the princess' words made a great impression on all those present in the room: 'it was truly moving, all those heads bowing, listening carefully'.⁴⁴ Although this occasion filled Rien with a sense of pride, talking to her family back home really was an emotive experience. In April 1928, the Kuycks were invited to make a free test telephone call to their relatives in The Hague. A few days later Rien described that moment in an ecstatic letter to her parents.

What was it like for you, dears, we were so elated!! The voices were so clearly recognizable. [...] Later we said to one another: We don't really care about *what* was said. The sound of familiar voices was enough for us. The distance disappeared completely, we felt as if we were in The Hague.⁴⁵

On the other end of the line, in the Netherlands, people calling with their loved ones overseas expressed similar feelings. The national telephone company, PTT, which was to operate the service, published an anthology of newspaper articles as a 'lasting testimony' of the 'memorable' period of the test calls in 1928.⁴⁶ The articles generally emphasized how radio technology bound people from the metropole and the colony with, as the title of one article summarized, 'wireless ties'.⁴⁷ One recurring theme in the volume was the technological advancement that had made it all possible; many of the articles mentioned the magical 12,000 kilometres that had been bridged through the ether. Secondly, all of the articles contained vivid descriptions of the emotional scenes at the telephone booths. The authors in the volume sporadically mentioned the economic and political hegemony of Dutch colonial rule in the Indies, for example, by noting a 'down-to-earth' discussion

44 'het was echt ontroerend, al die gebogen hoofden met inspanning luisterende'. Rien Kuyck to family, 3 June 1927, in: Steijlen and Willems (eds), *Met ons alles goed*, 95.

45 'Hoe vonden jullie het toch, lieve mensen, wij waren zo opgetogen!! De stemmen waren zo duidelijk te herkennen. [...] Wij zeiden later allemaal tegen elkaar: het kan ons eigenlijk heelemaal niets schelen *wat* er gezegd werd. Het geluid van de bekende stemmen was ons al genoeg. De afstand viel heelemaal weg, we voelden ons als het ware in Den Haag'. Rien Kuyck to family, 1 May 1928, in: Steijlen and Willems (eds), *Met ons alles goed*, 108.

46 'blijvende getuigenis'. *Hallo Bandoeng!*, 90.

47 'draadlooze banden'. *Ibid.*, 54.

between two businessmen.⁴⁸ They also, however, reported extensively on normal conversations within normal families. All of the journalists noted how callers at first marvelled over the fact that they could hear their loved ones' voices, whom they had missed for such a long time. After the initial emotional shock was over, reporters mentioned, 'they [the people talking on the telephone] don't know what to say, the words keep becoming trivial. [...] How is Tom? – Which Tom? – The dog. – Oh, completely well again. – Is granny there? – No, granny did not come.'⁴⁹

Such quotes give the impression that the telephone connection was being used by normal people for making normal calls. In fact, the telephone service which officially started operating in January 1929 was very expensive: 11 guilders per minute, a substantial sum in those days.⁵⁰ It is therefore unlikely that many people in the Netherlands could afford to make social calls to the Indies after the test period. Nonetheless, the image that was invoked in the 1928 volume of the PTT – of normal families talking to each other via the wireless – was strong in popular culture. In 1929 the entertainer Willy Derby released a song about an old lady calling her son in the Indies, which became a classic croon. Through the telephone the son introduces the old lady to her grandchild, a boy with a 'brown', Indonesian mother. Typically for Dutch croons, the song has a bittersweet end as the old lady perishes on the phone while her coloured grandson bids her farewell in Malay: '*tabe*'.⁵¹

Both the PPT volume from 1928 and Willy Derby's song from 1929 carried the title 'Hello Bandung' (in Dutch: 'Hallo Bandoeng'), which at the time were winged words denoting the colonial radio connection between the Netherlands and the Indies. The phrase referred to the Malabar radio station, the most important wireless communication hub of the Indies in the interwar years, where the signals from the Netherlands were picked up and sent to other stations in the archipelago. The complex, which was built in the middle of a wild jungle, was a powerful symbol of colonial radio and the site instantly became a tourist attraction.⁵² In later decades the location remained a place of memory, which up to today attracts people interested

48 'nuchter-zakelijke'. Ibid., 10.

49 'weten ze niet meer te zeggen, worden de woorden steeds banaal. [...] Hoe gaat het met Tom? – Welke Tom? – De hond. – O, helemaal beter. – Is opoe er ook? – Nee, opoe is niet meegekomen.' Ibid., 30.

50 Steijlen and Willems (eds), *Met ons alles goed*, 17.

51 'bruine'. The song is available on YouTube; accessed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0130cvtfaOU> on 05-8-2013.

52 Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land*, 170.

in the history of radio broadcasting, although Japanese soldiers destroyed the original structures at the end of the Second World War and only ruins remain. In 2011 radio amateurs from Indonesia and the Netherlands launched a website devoted to 'The Malabar Project: A Digital Archeology of the Biggest Historical Transmitter in Indonesia'. The team visited the site of the old station and mapped the fundamentals of the main structures in the highlands near Bandung. In May 2013, people in the Netherlands and Indonesia exchanged historic Morse code telegrams via long-wave radio, to commemorate the 90-year anniversary of the first connection between Malabar and Kootwijk.⁵³

In the Netherlands the main heritage site of the colonial radio is well preserved. The station at Kootwijk was used for naval radio broadcasts until 2000, when the complex was handed over to the government. The site has been put on the national monument's list and is open to the public. The iconic main building, which has been described by historians of architecture as a 'cathedral' and compared with the Taj Mahal, stands out in the desolate landscape of the Veluwe national park.⁵⁴ Aside from incidental events and exhibitions, the site does not have a structural function yet. In 2009 the national Forestry Commission (*Staatsbosbeheer*) published a report about the redevelopment of Radio Kootwijk, a project that will be finished in 2015. There is a great deal of continuity with previous representations of the location, which is illustrated by the title of the report that contains the old phrase (in colonial spelling) '*Hallo Bandoeng!...*'.⁵⁵ In a shortlist of 'core terms' the history of the site is mentioned as a 'source of inspiration'. The plan does contain references to 'connections between east and west', but the word 'colonial' is conspicuously absent.⁵⁶ Nonetheless the authors expect that future visitors will experience the same 'poignancy and emotions' as the people who pioneered the radio connection between the Netherlands and the Indies in the 1920s.⁵⁷ Apparently, the winged words 'Hello Bandung' still resonate in the Netherlands and invoke a sentimental picture of colonial radio that contributes to the present Dutch imagined community.

53 Accessed at: <http://radiomalabar.wordpress.com> on 05-08-2013.

54 R. Dettingmeijer, W. Reinink and J. Roding, 'Hallo Bandoeng. Een kathedraal van beton op de Veluwe', *Wonen-TA/BK* 2 (1979), 7-23, 8.

55 '*Hallo Bandoeng!...*' '*Hier Radio Kootwijk!*' *Visie en voorstellen van Staatsbosbeheer voor de herontwikkeling van Radio Kootwijk* (The Hague, 2009).

56 'kernbegrippen', 'inspiratiebron', 'verbindingen tussen oost en west'. *Ibid.*, 10-11.

57 'ontroering en emoties'. *Ibid.*, 7.

Conclusion

In the twentieth century, the development of technology was intertwined with state formation in the Dutch Empire, both in the Netherlands and its colony in Southeast Asia. Modern infrastructure facilitated the expansion of the Dutch colonial state in the Indonesian archipelago. This process was contested and colonial officials feared that internal and external enemies would use the same technology to harm their regime in the Indies. During the First World War, when the Netherlands was isolated from the colony by the British and Indonesian nationalism emerged, these fears in many ways climaxed. These worries fostered renewed efforts to strengthen the ties between the metropole and the colony by developing new technologies. In the 1920s, Dutch engineers pioneered the fields of aviation and radio, and both technologies had a significant impact on the colonial communication lines, enabling a more voluminous and a faster exchange of information. This development strengthened the bonds of the Dutch Empire – a fact that, despite several dissident voices, was celebrated by many opinion makers in the Netherlands.

These commentaries also show that colonial communication lines affected metropolitan society in the Netherlands. The idea that the colony in the East was important for the national well-being was widely prevalent in public opinion – that at the time was dominated by the newspapers of the four main ‘pillars’. The official inaugurations of the wireless connections in 1927 (radio broadcasting) and 1929 (telephone) were dressed as historical events with the royal house, a potent national symbol, taking centre stage. At these occasions high officials delivered speeches in which they emphasized how modern technology had nullified the great distance between the metropole and the colony, contributing to the unity of the various parts of the Dutch Empire. The majority of the newspapers copied these pompous reflections. The national pride was heightened even further by the fact that the Netherlands was outdoing its colonial rivals in radio technology. In the late 1920s it was as if Holland ruled the air waves.

Such newspaper articles, in which the medium radio was the message, show that the development of modern radio technology strengthened the Dutch imagined community not only by connecting people in different parts of the world, but also by celebrating this achievement as a feat that bolstered the international prestige of the Netherlands. Moreover, the praise for colonial radio was not simply an elitist pastime. Although the access to radio telephony was limited because of the high tariffs, a popular image emerged during the test period in 1928 when members of the general

public were invited to talk to their loved ones overseas for free. The reports on these experiments focused on the calls of normal families, who were overwhelmed with emotion when they heard familiar voices from afar. Such sentiments were captured in the popular phrase 'Hello Bandung'. Until today this one-liner continues to pop up occasionally in public discourse in the Netherlands, and it is central to the recently launched plan to redevelop the heritage site of radio history at Kootwijk. The colonial air waves still reverberate in the present-day Dutch imagined community.

About the author

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