

# Dutch Radio News

## From Public Polarization to Public Service

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The media landscape and the place of radio within it is subject to constant remediation: new forms of media continually challenge the old making them focus more on their inherent qualities; in the case of radio this is ‘the power of audible, non-visual content to induce imagination and the possibilities for immediate connection to live music and news for all possible preferences’, as well as its social function of ‘creating and cultivating identities’ (Kuitenbrouwer, Luscombe and Wijffes 2019: 3). Concerns about the quality and accuracy of journalism and audience tastes in news stories are nothing new, but with increasing use of unregulated social media that use algorithms that promote particular stories and opinions, keeping people in information bubbles and enabling fast dispersal of disinformation and conspiracy theories, journalism’s essential contribution to democracy by reporting factual information and informing citizens is evermore crucial. Although the weekly reach of radio has dropped by approximately 6 per cent in the last eight years, still around 85 per cent of the Dutch population (aged ten and over) listens to radio sometime during the week, and listeners are tuning in increasingly via the Internet or DAB+. Podcasting is becoming increasingly popular too with nearly half the Dutch population indicating they listen to podcasts, of whom a quarter tune into podcasts about news and politics (Markteffect 2021; RAB). It is not just broadcasters but also Dutch newspapers who appear to be investing heavily in podcasts (Mediamonitor 2021: 23).

The story of radio news and current affairs in the last 100 years in many countries is characterized by tensions: radio versus the printed press; radio versus television and versus social media; and public versus commercial broadcasting. This chapter will focus on the Dutch story which, in addition to the above tensions, is also one of the public broadcasting organizations pitted against each other and one of programming that changed from being targeted at the specific socio-economic and religious audiences that made up Dutch society (known as ‘pillars’) – programming that was more often than not censored by government

– to programming that slowly became more objective, critical and inclusive. Technological developments, changes in the culture of journalism and growing interest from listeners for news and analysis about national and international events led to an increasing share of airtime for news and current affairs. Some stories mentioned in the broadcasting organizations' radio guides and annual reports or that caused controversy in the past 100 years are used to help explain the role that radio in the Netherlands played and continues to play in creating an informed citizenry.

## The start of radio news and information: 1919–33

The first regular wireless radio programmes in the Netherlands (and arguably the first in the world) started on 6 November 1919 when Hanso Idzerda began his 'Soirees Musicale' from his studio in The Hague (Wijffes 2019: 49). The beginning of radio as mass media coincided with the start of what Jo Bardoel and Huub Wijffes have termed the 'political–societal' phases of Dutch journalism, the second of a total of four phases (Bardoel and Wijffes 2015: 14). In Idzerda's musical broadcasts there was neither much room nor much need for the spoken word, although the radio pioneer did answer his listeners' questions, mostly about ways to improve reception. On Sunday afternoons, in addition to the concerts, Idzerda broadcast talks in English which were paid for by the *Daily Mail*, as the broadcaster had many listeners across the North Sea. These came to an end in February 1923 because Idzerda's broadcasting licence did not permit speech-based radio. In September 1924 Idzerda went bankrupt; he stopped broadcasting altogether in 1935 (Boer 1969: 31, 78–80).

Idzerda was not the only one who broadcast information. In 1920 the society for stock trading in Amsterdam installed a transmitter to send financial information to subscribers throughout the country (Wijffes 2019). On 21 February 1922 press agency Vaz Dias used that transmitter to send news to its newspaper customers: this was the first radio news agency in the world (Hemels 2013). Mozes Vas Dias (1881–1963) had started a press agency in 1904 and had offices in Amsterdam and Brussels and correspondents in New York, London and Paris. The press agency's most important scoop was undoubtedly the news of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, which signified the start of the First World War. Vaz Dias was the creator of the so-called 'trainletter' whereby a messenger boy took news copy to the first train of the day after which envelopes containing the copy were distributed by train to places all over the Netherlands. The service which continued to exist until the 1960s was referred to as the 'bare feet express' as the messenger boy who delivered the first copy had often not had time to put on his socks (Meijer 2004).

When Vaz Dias started his 'wireless telephone news service' for customers in 1922, he also introduced a time signal, i.e. the sound of a gong at 10.15 am and 4.30 pm official Amsterdam time, for people to set their clocks to (Hemels 2013; Meijer 2004; Taylor 2004). Initially Vaz Dias used code to broadcast messages via the radio to his newspaper

customers and only those subscribers who had the code could understand the message. When the code proved too easy to decipher, Vaz Dias resorted to a different system: everybody could listen to the announcements but only subscribers were allowed to publish them. Occasionally the press agency sent a secret memo to its customers warning them that a false radio message would be going out. When the false message was published, Vaz Dias could catch the perpetrator and send them a bill. In 1925 Vaz Dias signed a contract with the HDO (Hilversumsche Draadloze Omroep: Hilversum's Wireless Broadcaster) to provide radio news bulletins for the public at home. From 1 October that year listeners could hear the news at 8 pm and 10 pm, only after the evening papers had appeared, as newspaper owners were concerned they would lose readers if they had heard the news on the radio any earlier. The radio news bulletins were also preceded by the warning: 'publication of all these announcements in whatever form is prohibited' (Hemels 2013). The first news reader was Ies Goudekot, a man with a 'sonorous voice [...] who read the news in a very prominent manner' (Persbureau Vaz Dias 1965). There is no record of what the first radio news bulletins sounded like or which stories were covered, but the front page of the evening edition of the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* newspaper of 1 October 1925 has a royal visit to the province of Limburg, the price of milk, and wage agreements in the metal industry.

Besides the news bulletins, the radio also broadcast weather forecasts and police messages. The latter, which went on air at noon and at 7 pm, were intended for police officers and the announcer spoke extra slowly so that they could copy down the details. The HDO was not happy about these messages as they were of little use to ordinary listeners but felt it had no option but to broadcast because the Minister of Justice very much valued the 'Spoken Policepaper' (*HDO Jaarverslag* 13039: 10).

From its start in 1923 the secular, 'independent' HDO (as of 1927 the AVRO) had included radio talks and informative programmes aimed at specific audiences in its output. In 1924 the Christian (Protestant) broadcast association, the NCRV, rented airtime, soon followed by the Catholic KRO, the Socialist VARA and the liberal-Protestant VPRO. So by then all the various groups, or 'pillars', in society had their own radio evenings where they could inform, educate and entertain their listeners (although not too much entertainment for the religious ones!). Each broadcasting association had its own listener guide in which it published technical information, question and answer columns and photos of musicians, singers and speakers. The combination of radio broadcasts and radio guides was in essence a form of cross-medial output based on target audience marketing, decades before the concept of 'cross-media' was coined. Listeners were asked to become paying members of the broadcasting associations and pay for a radio guide subscription. In addition, the broadcasters staged publicity tours, fundraising drives and sold merchandise (Wijffes 2019: 71).

Three quarters of the associations' broadcasting time was devoted to music, except in the case of the VPRO that dedicated nearly 88 per cent to speech (Wijffes 1985: 33). The best way for the public broadcasters to show their cultural, political, social and religious identities to their own group of listeners was through the church services, educational and children's programming, and through the kind of speakers and topics they chose to cover (Wijffes 2012: 81). Nevertheless, as radio was a mass medium the

‘identity’ broadcasters – while happy to attract listeners from other pillars – worried that ‘their’ grassroots listeners might sample output from outside their ‘pillar’. Dutch society at this time was also characterized by rather conservative values and prudish attitudes and the Dutch government wanted to ensure that the broadcasts were not in their eyes indecent or a threat to public order and national security. It therefore created The Radio Broadcast Control Committee (*Radio Omroep Controle Commissie*) which had to approve all programmes before they were allowed on air and also checked whether there was any commercial advertising. The socialist broadcaster VARA was especially hard hit by government censorship: of the approximate 1,000 broadcasts partially or wholly banned by the government during the period 1930 to 1940, 70 per cent involved VARA programmes (Historie Radio 1930–39; Wijfjes 1988). In censoring programmes the government evidently did not think that freedom of speech was an important element of democracy.

## Growth of news and current affairs on the radio: 1933 to 1959

Partly because of the strict government controls on controversial topics in the first half of the 1930s, news on radio mainly involved trivial domestic stories, in particular those items that the broadcasting associations thought would be relevant to their target audiences. Indeed, there was not much on radio of what we would now deem newsworthy important events, or ‘current affairs’. For example, the KRO stated in its 1933 annual report that it devoted a mere 0.7 per cent of airtime to topics that were current (Rodenburg 1984: 6). However, in the following years, news and current affairs became increasingly important as outside broadcasting vehicles and lighter recording equipment became available. In 1934 the AVRO was the first broadcaster to introduce a special weekly current affairs programme: the *Radiojournaal*, with reporters recording interviews and descriptions of what they saw. In 1935 the AVRO’s reporting vehicle covered 60,000 kilometres; a year later this had nearly doubled (Wijfjes 2012: 84). The broadcasting associations considered news reporting a means to attract more paying members. In an internal memo following the arrival of the *Pelikaan* airplane at Schiphol Amsterdam airport on 30 December 1933, KRO programme producer H. Schaffers wrote:

Reports more than any other type of broadcast are of interest to Dutch listeners [...] people who are fundamentally opposed to [the Catholic] KRO had to acknowledge that this report showed correct judgment of what interested listeners. The interest and sympathy of [our] own people is hereby encouraged and those who doubt us are often won over.

(Wijfjes 2012: 7)

The arrival of the *Pelikaan*, ‘the great airbird’, that had completed its journey from the Dutch Indies in a record-breaking four days, was in fact considered such an important national event for all listeners, whatever their denomination, that the Dutch government had given

the KRO permission to broadcast after midnight if necessary, something that was normally forbidden (*Katholieke Radiogids*, 6 January 1934, as cited in Rodenburg 1984: 89).

As international tensions increased in the mid-1930s, so did the interest in foreign news and current affairs. The radio news bulletins, however, were still limited to twice daily in the evenings due to continuing concerns from the written press about unfair competition. Radio current affairs programmes also competed with the press. In 1934 press agency Vaz Dias complained to the ministry about a KRO report on the funeral of Queen Emma:

The habit of the broadcasting associations to send out eyewitness and verbal accounts of all kinds of events and to bring the news as extensively as possible to the public well before daily newspapers can do so must have a detrimental effect on the work of the press agencies and newspapers.

(Rodenburg 1984: 11)

Another bone of contention between the written press and broadcasters was that the papers did not appreciate the radio guides competing with them for advertising, while the broadcasters in their turn were highly critical of the way newspapers published radio listings.

Vaz Dias was taken over in 1935 by the *Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau* (ANP), which had been founded the previous year by the Association of Dutch newspapers (Koedijk 1996: 13). After a series of difficult negotiations the ANP started distribution of news copy and broadcasting radio bulletins on 1 July 1935. The AVRO assured its listeners that the voices and the style, which after all were very popular, would remain the same (*De dag waarop*). It took another fifteen months before the ANP and the broadcasting organizations signed a formal agreement, requiring the help of the Dutch Home Secretary to make it happen (Koedijk 1996: 14). It was agreed that the broadcasters could make special content and style requests if they felt it was necessary to appeal to their supporter base. In practice this meant that news bulletins often differed per station (Koedijk 1996: 15; Wijffes 2012: 85). The public's hunger for more international news was only met with more radio news bulletins after the German invasion of Poland in 1939, when the number of bulletins increased from two to four a day (Wijffes 2012: 85; VARA *Jaarverslag* 1939: 46).

Then in May 1940 the Nazis invaded the Netherlands. The ANP and the broadcasting associations became closely regulated earning the ANP the nickname 'Adolf's Newest Parrot'. In March 1941 the individual broadcasting associations were disbanded and remaining staff (Jewish personnel had been sacked previously) and equipment were appropriated by the newly established *Rijkstudio De Nederlandsche Omroep* ('National Radio') which filled its programming with Nazi propaganda, the most famous of which were the talks by journalist Max Blokzijl. His radio talks were deemed to have been so influential in sowing doubts among the Dutch population that he was convicted of collaboration and executed in March 1946. The German occupation force also introduced a listening fee. Much of the 'national' programming failed to attract listeners, however, and many chose to listen instead to the BBC Dutch Service and *Radio Oranje* ('Radio Orange'), a station under the auspices of the Dutch government in exile in London.

Radio Orange which started on 28 July 1940 was, however, not seen as particularly trustworthy. The Dutch government in exile, particularly Prime Minister De Geer, was still so attached to its pre-war policy of neutrality that it worried about too heavily criticizing the Germans and being seen as a puppet of the British government (Blankenstein 1999: 257; Sinke 2009: 29). Because it was difficult to obtain accurate information from occupied territory and because all broadcasts had to be checked in advance by the Dutch ministers in exile, as well as ensuring BBC directives were not contravened, major news developments were often late, incomplete or missing entirely (van den Broek 1947; Sinke 2009). Nevertheless, Paul Koedijk asserts that despite the criticism about the quality of the broadcasts, the popularity of Radio Orange contributed to the 'position of radio as a news medium' (Koedijk 1998: 63).

Radio Orange's service improved when it merged in October 1942 with the *Brandaris*, a radio station for Dutch seamen that had been formed the previous year in cooperation with the BBC. However, as Sinke (2009: 85) and van den Broek (1947: 172) describe, it remained complicated to balance the desire to shore up the morale of the Dutch with broadcasting facts that could harm the Allies' cause and give the enemies a strategic advantage. Following the liberation of the south of the Netherlands in the autumn of 1944, the station *Radio Herrijzend Nederland* ('Radio Reborn Netherlands') started broadcasting from the Philips factory in Eindhoven to the Dutch population in parts of the country still occupied.

At the end of the war several parties argued there should not be a return to the pre-war system of 'pillarized' broadcasting. Although the former individual Dutch broadcasting associations still severely disliked each other, they got together to coordinate their opposition to plans for a new national system. They got their way when the newly elected government gave them back their full autonomy in 1946, although it did ask them to cooperate closely on broadcasting facilities and on so-called programmes of national interest in an organization called the Dutch Radio Union or NRU (Omroep in de Tweede). The ANP was keen to reassume responsibility for all the news bulletins, not least because of the growing worldwide importance of radio and increased interest in news. Surveys in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany showed that listeners felt news was the most important part of radio programming. Coverage of current affairs also continued to be popular, although naturally done in such a way as befitted the audiences' worldview and cultural tastes, this was after all a time that was classified as 'restrained modernization'. Measured purely in terms of minutes broadcast daily, news broadcasts would not be considered among the most prominent types of radio programmes, but in terms of listenership they definitely were. Audience research from 1953 suggested that the news bulletins had the highest ratings: 1.365 million, equivalent to 31 per cent of the population at home (*Radio en vrijetijdsbesteding* 1954: 33; Witteboon 1954). Listening figures peaked during the bulletins of 8 am, 1 pm and 6 pm and the appetite for news was particularly prominent during times of international tension, which given events of the time such as the Cold War, the Korean War and Indonesian War of Independence were more frequent than not.

Radio journalism became increasingly professional, aided by technological developments and increased budgets. The broadcasting associations employed a growing number of

national and international correspondents. Even the Christian broadcasting association NCRV that had long resisted covering a broader range of subjects acknowledged they now had to include foreign reporting: 'Whether we want it or not, more and more of our broadcasts will also need to be internationally oriented. The danger of being caught up in humanist, more of less socialist waters, is real. Everything points to the fact that we will have to make ourselves understood as Christians everywhere in the world' (NCRV *Jaarverslag* 1948: 4–5). Most of the new correspondents were men as the broadcasters felt that the role of an adventurous reporter was one better suited to men than women. Men such as Jan de Troye for the VARA, newspaper journalist, photographer, children's author and former Japanese war prisoner, Alfred van Sprang for the NCRV, and Paul de Waart, considered by the KRO to be trusted to 'pay particular attention to Catholic events' (KRO *Jaarverslag* 1950: 71). Although the KRO appointed Mia Smelt to make field recordings, as a reporter she was only assigned to tasks such as reporting on the clothes that the royal family wore during the coronation of Queen Juliana in 1948 (Mia Smelt n.d.). In this stereotypical view of gender the Dutch radio was no different from its counterparts in other countries (Skoog and Badenoch 2020). In its 1946 annual report, the KRO said its correspondents needed to be 'craftsmen' (Rodenburg 1984: 18), while the AVRO argued that good radio reporters needed to be able to tell a 'juicy story' and be able to manage their emotions if something unexpected happened while out on the job (AVRO *Radiobode* 1953: 3).

One of the most profound radio news events of the Netherlands in this period was the flood of 1953, the largest natural disaster of the second half of the twentieth century. Many miles of poorly maintained dykes in the provinces of Zeeland and Zuid-Holland broke during the storm and spring tide of 31 January 1953, killing 1,835 people. Tens of thousands of animals died, 100,000 people needed rescuing and 45,000 buildings were damaged or destroyed. The previous evening's weather forecast had mentioned that there would be a heavy storm but nothing more serious had been predicted (Slager 1999: 373). The news of the dyke failures was first announced during the following morning 8 am ANP radio news bulletin; there were no newspapers on Sunday. The extent of the disaster was not at all clear and communication with the areas affected was difficult, if not impossible for days. The ANP bulletins became the conduit for all kinds of official announcements from government agencies and private citizens. The chief editor of the ANP, D. J. Lambooy, said later the agency had simply done its public duty: 'by allowing itself to be used for other communication besides purely journalistic, [the ANP] broke the Postal Law and formal radio agreements, but in such a way that we not only did not get prosecuted but that we fulfilled our task [...]: the press exists to help people' (Toespraak D. J. Lambooy 1953). The Dutch Postal and Telegraph Service (PTT) also noted that much was owed to the radio amateurs who had used 'Channel 3700' to pass on messages from councils, the army, navy, government agencies and the Red Cross (*Kanaal 3700* 1954).

The radio broadcasts in those first few days after the great floods became legendary for the reporters' dramatic tone in which they tried to keep their emotions under control, such as that by Jan van Troye on 5 February: 'deserted, desolate, in the rain, the farms appear above the grey water that covers all of the islands of Duiveland and Schouwen. And when we witness this, we ask ourselves: how will this ever work out?' (cited in

Noyons 2002: 51). It took the radio correspondents' eyewitness reports to make clear how perilous and unprecedented the disaster was in the flood-hit areas, as if war battles had been fought, as correspondent Arie Kleywegt described: 'A frontline [...] behind the green dyke there was no more island, the dyke had become a mirage, a façade, nothing more, [...] calm, babbling water' (Woord, VPRO 2015). The reports from the disaster area showed the power of storytelling on the radio and also proved that the separate broadcasting associations, the ANP and other parties could set aside their conflicts when really necessary to create a sense of national community. The broadcasters gave up their airtime to the ANP which during the first week of February 1953 filled fifty-five-and-a-half hours of airtime in comparison to its normal sixteen. Newspapers and broadcasting organizations praised the ANP for keeping their bulletins 'warm [...], sober and calm', which was very different from the criticism levelled in the British press at the BBC (Engelse bladen; broadcast of flood warnings). All the praise received by the ANP radio service led ANP's chief editor to write somewhat peevishly to the *Telegraaf* newspaper to point out that the success of the reports was not only down to its radio service, but that reporters, editors, photographers, translators, stenographers, telephone, telex and wireless operators from the whole agency also deserved to share in the credit (Lof voor het ANP).

It took many years before critical questions were asked why the winter storm of 1953 had caused such devastation and why the media and politicians showed little long-term interest in those who had survived. It was already known before the Second World War that the dykes were in need of repairs and the government had been in no hurry to tackle further damage caused by the war (van der Ham 2003). Journalist and radio producer Kees Slager blames journalists' mentality at the time for failing to ask policy makers pertinent questions: 'a gentleman wearing a hat, that he doffs to those in authority' (Slager 1999: 374). However good the commentary at the time, radio cannot be absolved of its lack of decisiveness. The Dutch Met Office, the KNMI, failed to persuade the radio authorities to broadcast very high water warnings before midnight on Saturday 31 January, nor to stay on air in the crucial early hours of Sunday morning. The ANP radio news service, alerted to high flood water by a local mayor at 5 am, wanted to broadcast an extra bulletin but those who had to give the technical staff their approval to do so could not be reached (Slager 1999: 379).

The success of the cooperation between the public broadcasters and between them and the ANP, acting in the national interest rather than for individual 'pillars' only, as witnessed during the 1953 disaster, was not long-lived. The chief editor of the ANP, Sal Witteboom, compared the ANP news bulletins with those of the BBC Home Service and lamented that while the ANP included more foreign news stories, BBC news was 'more alluring' and that Dutch news lacked depth and breadth because of the 'pillarization' of society: 'If a large national organisation here, say of employers, workers or entrepreneurs, or say in the religious or social domain, speaks out, then usually that is a group that represents a quarter or a fifth of such people', he complained, whereas '[i]n England an organisation that represents the whole country can then be heard' (Enige Vergelijking 1962).



## Rivalries

Until 1960 radio was a medium enjoyed by the whole family, but as television gradually took over that role, radio increasingly became something people listened to on their own. In 1962, the year of the worst railway disaster in Dutch history (eighty people were killed) and the year of Queen Wilhelmina's death, the NCRV said in its annual report after broadcasting 3,000 hours of radio compared to 200 hours of television that radio and television were 'moving towards a state of interaction where both forms of powerful mass-media communication were equally important'. The broadcaster even argued that people who were among the first groups of television viewers had now 'rediscovered the radio as a source of entertainment, musical enjoyment and relaxation in the broadest sense of the word' (NCRV Jaarverslag 1962: 35). If radio and television in the early 1960s did compete for audiences, that tended to affect the evening radio programmes and not the morning ones nor the news bulletins. In fact, the number of ANP radio news bulletins increased steadily from seven per day in 1957, to ten in 1964, and forty-five per day in 1978 (ANP). Current affairs programmes also increased the number of topics they covered, for example the KRO programme *Echo* tripled its number of items between 1954 and 1960 (Rodenburg 1984: 31).

With news and current affairs available on radio several times a day, and if necessary through news flashes (for example the assassination of John F. Kennedy in November 1963 which was on the radio already three minutes after the agency copy came in), radio was much faster than television which only had one news broadcast a day (Koedijk 1998: 72). Audience research of 1968 showed that the average Dutch person watched two hours of television and listened to two-and-three-quarter hours of radio a day, with news bulletins accounting for spikes in listening (*Jaarboek KLO/NOS*, 1968: 23). Special events like the American presidential elections during the night of 5 November 1968 and the moon landing in the night of 20 July 1969 attracted large numbers of listeners, with surveys reporting that many audience members had both the television images and the radio reports on at the same time. By 1970 audience research reported that the 6 pm radio news bulletin had lost listeners because people preferred to tune into the TV news at 7 and 8 pm: 'Radio is seen by the public as Cinderella, next to the prettier sister that is television. This more favourable image of TV is undoubtedly also why the public indicates somewhat more often that television is the most reliable news medium rather than the radio' (*Jaarboek KLO/NOS* 1969/70: 43). People did, however, praise the speed at which radio news and special reports could get to them, up to forty-five minutes before the television could (*Jaarboek KLO/NOS* 1968: 24, 34; *Jaarboek KLO/NOS* 1969/70: 46). Radio reporters armed with portable Nagra recording equipment could race around the country and increasingly contribute from abroad. A 1971 analysis of the current affairs programmes of the four large broadcasting associations showed the AVRO had the most programmes, the KRO broadcast quite lengthy items and three times as many national subjects compared to international and the VARA predominantly covered social and environmental issues. Of the foreign coverage, the NCRV focused on Western Europe, the KRO on other western countries, the VARA on

developing nations (then called ‘the third world’) and the AVRO was the only broadcaster to pay any significant attention to Eastern Europe (*Jaarboek KLO/NOS* 1971/72: 22–3).

From the 1960s onwards radio journalism, in line with what was occurring in the Dutch journalism profession at the time, became somewhat more critical (Bardeel and Wijfjes 2015). This was about time too: although the government censorship system as it operated in the 1930s had been formally abolished in 1947, the broadcasters had continued to operate a system of internal self-censorship, which entailed deference to those in authority (Wijfjes 2012: 83). For example, in 1957 the ANP had still argued: ‘there should be no contradictions with other powers that seek the greater good, but there should be trust and mutual understanding while each undertake their responsibilities’ (cited in: Koedijk 1998: 68). The news provider said this meant that its radio news was ‘neutral’, but as, for example, the lack of questioning over government actions in the Indonesian War of Independence (1945–9) shows, in practice it meant that the news dutifully followed the government line. Public discussions about Dutch military action in its former colony were virtually absent at the time and criticism only really become acceptable following a controversial 1969 television interview in the VARA programme *Achter het Nieuws* (‘Behind the News’) with former soldier Joop Hueting who had witnessed what he called war crimes (Hoffenaar 1987: 175; Kapteyn 1980: 14; Prenger 2014).

To stay ahead of the competition from newspapers, radio current affairs programmes in the mid-1960s shifted their focus from immediate news stories to more explanation and analysis of the news and were broadcast more often (Rodenburg 1984: 32); for example the *AVRO RadioJournaal* in 1965 added an edition at 1 pm and 6 pm to its usual 10.30 pm slot (*AVRO Jaarverslag* 1965: 57). Listeners showed great appetite for such programmes as witnessed by the nearly 13 per cent share in listening for the radio column *De Toestand in de Wereld* (‘The Situation in the World’), presented by G. B. J. Hilterman, a journalist who would become one of the icons of news analysis on radio. In addition to competition from television from the mid-1960s, radio news and current affairs on the public radio channels also faced a new challenge from commercial radio station Veronica. The pirate station that broadcast popular music (rarely heard on the public broadcasters) from a ship off the Dutch coast decided to relay ANP radio news copy without permission. Chief news editor Sal Witteboon tried to prove that Veronica was stealing news by adding a fake story about a fire in a chicken farm in the imaginary village Withuizen to the news bulletin of 13 January 1966. Veronica broadcast the exact same message two hours later. Witteboon had his evidence but was severely reprimanded by the ANP management that did not condone distribution of fake news: ‘fictitious stories, however innocent they might be, have no place in the news services of the national news agency’, they insisted (Baggerman and Hemels 1985: 95).

Under the 1967 Media Law, the Dutch Radio Union, NRU, and its TV counterpart, the NTS, merged into one *Nederlandse Omroep Stichting*, or NOS (the Dutch Broadcasting Trust). The NOS was keen to take over radio news bulletins from the ANP press agency which led to significant tensions between the two organizations (ANP Radionieuwsdienst). Disagreement remained until June 1974 when it was finally agreed that the bulletins would be announced with ‘Radio news service *provided by* the ANP’ instead of ‘Radio news service

from the ANP' (ANP Radionieuwsdienst). The truce between the parties was broken in 1994 when the NOS decided that it would definitely provide the radio bulletins itself after ANP made a deal with the commercial radio channel Sky News (Radionieuwsdienst niet meer).

Besides the frosty relationship between the NOS and the ANP, the rivalry between the separate broadcasting associations continued throughout the years and there was also little warmth between them and the NOS. The associations were not amused when the non-religious, non-political TROS, primarily interested in broadcasting entertainment, was admitted to the public broadcasting system in 1967 as its growth in membership meant they lost airtime to the new upstart (NRU collection). In 1971 during the State visit by Queen Juliana to Indonesia there was a big falling-out between the national NOS and several 'pillar' broadcasters. Because of the visit's national importance, the NOS was charged with organizing all the broadcasts: twelve-and-a-half hours of radio and fourteen hours of television (NRU collection). The visit involved the first direct television connection by satellite between Indonesia and the Netherlands and live radio broadcasts from reporters who sent their observations while driving through Jakarta and Bandung (NOS persbericht n.d.). The operation also saw the first instance of bi-medial working, with correspondents from the various broadcasters filing for both radio and television. Although this was out of necessity rather than desire, there were otherwise not enough correspondents to cover radio; according to the NOS both forms of media saw the new way of working as very promising for the future (De NOS in Indonesië).

Large quantities of technical equipment needed to be shipped to Indonesia resulting in overall costs of some 700,000 guilders, causing outrage in many Dutch newspapers. The KRO and NCRV were livid that the NOS used the associations' allotted air time to not only broadcast reports but also documentaries, prompting the NCRV to criticize the NOS during one of its radio current affairs programmes (NCRV en KRO willen; *Hier en Nu*). The NOS, however, insisted it was not the associations' air time but rather 'floating air time' which the NOS could choose to give to the broadcasters or to use itself.

The rivalry between the broadcasters and even among editorial teams of the same broadcaster is also evident from a letter by the Head of Current Affairs at NOS radio, Kees Buurman to his superiors, following the news reporting of hostage takings in Beilen and Amsterdam in 1975: 'Seldom have I encountered such an uncoordinated mess [...] a stain on the whole of broadcasting [...] stupidity, jealousy and a complete lack of craftsmanship [...] such a poor display of radio journalism and so far beneath the ability of everyone, that I feel ashamed to have been involved' (Buurman 1975). Two years later, during the sieges of a primary school in Bovensmilde and a train in De Punt (which were first reported during the 10.30 am radio news bulletin of 23 May 1977), cooperation between the various radio parties was better. The hostage takers were trying to force the Dutch government to back their calls for an independent republic of South Molucca and demanded the release of a number of prisoners. Those who had attacked the school gave themselves up after three weeks; the train siege was ended when marines were sent in and two passengers and six hostage takers were killed. According to audience research, the news events that year resulted in 2 per cent more listeners (KLO-NOS 1977).

In 1976 the NOS started with the first daily current affairs programme *Met het Oog op Morgen* ('With an Eye on Tomorrow'), broadcast each evening at 11 pm. The AVRO complained that this NOS programme, together with the introduction of what was known as 'colours assigned to radio channels' (i.e. each radio channel in Hilversum would have different types of offerings) made it impossible for the AVRO to continue with its evening current affairs programme (*AVRO Jaarverslag* 1980: 38). 'Pillarization' was becoming less prominent in society and consequently support for very different current affairs programmes waned; the designation of Radio 1 as the 'news channel' in 1991 meant the end of the divisions in radio journalism altogether (Wijffes 2005: 10). As competition from television channels including 24/7 outlets like CNN, from regional public radio stations and from teletext grew, it was seen as essential to have just one clear news and current affairs national public radio station. At the same time, the public broadcasting system was facing increasing cuts in public funding. In 1998 the commercial Business News Radio (BNR) started in an attempt to lure listeners from public Radio 1, and while it currently still operates, its listenership has never reached much more than half a million.

## A new century, a new type of radio news and current affairs?

The twenty-first century has already witnessed many newsworthy events where radio news played a crucial role in getting information to people quickly and factually, for example the explosion of a fireworks factory in Enschede on 13 May 2000 in which 23 people died and 947 were injured, the attacks on the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001, wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, and the downing of plane MH17 over Ukraine in 2014. The assassination of Dutch populist politician Pim Fortuyn on 6 May 2002 was a prime example of news broken first by the radio. Fortuyn was shot as he was leaving public music station Radio 3 FM in Hilversum where he had just been interviewed. The shooting was announced with a newsflash on Radio 1, followed by a telephone interview with a 3 FM disc jockey whose colleague had seen the shooting take place. The assassination shocked the nation and many blamed public broadcasters for what they saw as unfair treatment of the politician and his right-wing populist views. At the NOS this led to much soul searching on whether their news was objective enough (*NOS Jaarverslag* 2002: 4).

In the first two decades of this century traditional radio news has faced new competition from news on Internet and social media (even if much of the 'news' on those two forms of media display would not fit traditional definitions of news, let alone news in the public interest). But the Internet and social media have also afforded radio journalism more opportunities to promote and rediscover its informational role. Cross-medial working, such as that pioneered by the NCRV in 2000 when its journalist Heidi Iepema reported on Rwanda for radio while also keeping an internet diary, providing photographs and writing an article for the printed NCRV magazine, is now common fare for broadcast journalists.

News consumers now have myriad ways of accessing and sharing content, but traditional radio with its traditional news bulletins and current affairs programmes remains popular and continues to fulfil an important social role. Millions enjoy listening to the radio every day; the most listened-to Dutch radio station according to audience research in December 2021 was NPO Radio 2, a pop music station aimed primarily at thirty-five- to fifty-five-year olds that achieved an overall market share of 16.6 per cent and weekly reach of 19.0 per cent (RAB 2021). The share of listening to news and current affairs public broadcaster NPO Radio 1 has seen a steady decline in the past two years and currently stands at a market share of 6.9 per cent overall and a weekly share of 14.5 per cent (RAB 2021). The market share of regional public broadcasters that are a major provider of news and information speech-based programmes (6.9 per cent in December 2021) has also fallen. However, it should be taken into account that, as Olij argues, listening to radio is often not recognized as news consumption because the radio is used as a secondary activity while for example driving a car (2016: 40). Moreover, people who may have tuned in to radio to hear for example a sports commentary or music will also pick up some news from the bulletins or headlines. Although the average age of radio (and tv) audiences is increasing, for example the average age of an NPO Radio 1 listener increased from sixty in 2014 to sixty-four in 2020 (NOS Jaarverslag 2020: 10), the Dutch population as a whole is ageing too. Media analysts believe radio listening in 2020 was more negatively affected by national lockdowns as part of measures to deal with COVID-19 than use of other media, most likely because people were not listening on their way to work or school. It does not mean that people are not interested in news or in audio. Indeed, research suggests interest in news remains pretty stable, 94 per cent of the Dutch population as a whole said in 2020 that they were somewhat or very interested in news and although older age groups tend to show more interest than young people, among the latter it is still 87 per cent (Mediamonitor 2020: 11). Thirty-six per cent of the Dutch population use radio news bulletins and programmes as a news source; 39 per cent use social media, 61 per cent use television (Mediamonitor 2020: 14).

Podcasts related to news and current affairs which started in 2018 are attracting ever more listeners. Commercial broadcaster BNR was the first with its programme called 'Newsroom' on 8 January 2018, followed by 'De Dag' from public broadcaster NPO Radio 1 three weeks later. The newspaper NRC's programme *NRC Vandaag* began on 28 April 2019 (NOS podcast viert). All took their inspiration from the *New York Times*' news podcast *The Daily* which started on 1 February 2017 (even if this was by no means the American newspaper's first foray into audio: in the 1940s it had a radio programme called 'What's on your Mind?') broadcast over WQXR (see for example Downes 1947: X9). Audience research shows more than half the Dutch regularly listen to podcasts, with the most popular genres being humour (29 per cent), news and current affairs (28 per cent) and science (18 per cent) (NOS podcast viert). Whether listeners, media professionals and scholars consider podcasting to be radio or not (Chan-Olmsted and Wang 2020), the enthusiasm for news podcasts does show that people are interested in current affairs told, explained or discussed in audio form.

There is still a significant place for news events and stories reaching people via radio. Radio news has always been fast and cheap to deliver, and if it stays reliable, whether provided by public broadcasters or by commercial news agencies that have journalistic codes of practice, can act as a counterweight to the enormous amounts of disinformation, hyperbolic language, filter bubbles and polarization of opinions created by the Internet and social media as well as provide balance to image-driven coverage of stories on Internet or television. Recognizing the importance of local journalism to democracy in the Netherlands, the Dutch government recently announced that it would fund projects aimed at strengthening cooperation between community radio, regional public service broadcasters and the national public service news provider NOS. Up to sixty journalists throughout the country will be appointed who will obtain news and skills training at the regional broadcasters to work with the unpaid volunteers that make up community radio stations in order to unearth more stories that are relevant to national and local audiences and in particular to report on local politics (Start Project 2021). There are very few local papers in the Netherlands that have enough resources to keep local government accountable, a particular problem since in recent years local governments have acquired more tasks from central government, e.g. care of the elderly and youth services. As the managing director of the regional public broadcaster Omroep Zeeland, Monique Schoonen, says: ‘Especially in areas where news provision is under pressure and the community stations hardly play a role in the provision of daily news it is vital to strengthen local journalism’ (2021: 4). Much of the extra news provision will find its way onto radio, although as befits the age of convergence, the items are also expected to be broadcast on television and there will be extra investment in online and social media. While welcoming the extra funds and manpower, the regional broadcasters worry about the temporary nature of the scheme and warn that if local journalism and democracy for all citizens is to be a reality, then there must be more structural government funding for public broadcasters (Stuurgroep 2020). During its first hundred years, radio news in the Netherlands moved from being in a system polarized by programme makers’ and listeners’ religious and socio-cultural backgrounds and subject to significant government interference to a system of impartial service aimed at the whole of the public beyond ‘pillars’. In its next hundred years, faced by a society increasingly polarized and subject to significant threats to democracy from content on tech platforms, it must find ways to maintain its relevance and preserve its public role.

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