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Negotiating neutrality.

Intellectuals, belligerent propaganda and Dutch identities in the Netherlands during the First World War¹

Neutrality under pressure

The Netherlands remained neutral during the Great War. That did not mean that neutrality was a monolithic concept. It received various interpretations. Official neutrality, expressed in the Dutch non-involvement in the war, went hand in hand with inhabitants picking sides. Many intellectuals left strict neutrality behind and were convinced that they had to take up a stand. Yet, the Dutch intermediate position complicated the decision-making process. Next to their economic, scientific and linguistic relation with Germany, they felt economically related to Great Britain, linguistically to Belgium and culturally to France. In The Netherlands, both in political-military, economic and cultural debates on neutrality, the key question consisted of the exact relationship to Germany, which was their most important economic partner. This focus on Germany crystallized in the names for the two main positions next to the neutral and the pacifist position, namely ‘pro-’ and ‘anti-German’. Along these borderlines, the Dutch society was deeply divided by the end of 1915².

Neutrality was neither a static but rather an evolving concept. From 1916 on, Dutch neutrality needed to be reinterpreted, as it was severely challenged by a rise of nationalism, as was the case in other neutral countries³. As Ismee Tames shows in her study on Dutch debates on neutrality, influential Dutch intellectuals were alarmed about the survival of the ‘own national character’ in times of increasing foreign pressure. They became more and more dissatisfied with the interpretation of the neutral nation as the defender of international law. They demanded attention for what they described as ‘national self-interest’ and ‘national independence’⁴. Yet, different opinions circulated on how national autonomy could be safeguarded: was it still a matter of neutrality or would it be more beneficial to support the Allies? Or Germany?

The influential professor in law and editor of the weekly *De Amsterdammer* Joost Adriaan van Hamel was an important voice of this outburst of nationalism. In 1916 he advised the ‘spineless’ Dutch government to stop defending the ‘empty’ idea of international law and to focus on ‘national self-defence’. He was driven by two observations, namely the naval war in which Dutch ships were time and again attacked by Germany and Great Britain and the growing Dutch

¹ Research for this article is conducted within the Hera-project ‘Cultural Exchange in times of Global Conflict: Colonials, Neutrals and Belligerents during the First World War’ at Utrecht University, The Netherlands. I would like to thank Geert Buelens, Hubert van den Berg and Pieter Huistra for their most helpful comments.

² Abbenhuis, Maartje, *The Art of Staying Neutral: The Netherlands in the First World War, 1914-1918*, Amsterdam, 2006, 17-39; Tames, Ismee. ‘Oorlog voor onze gedachten’. *Oorlog, neutraliteit en identiteit in het Nederlandse publieke debat, 1914-1918*, Hilversum, 2006, 58-65; Moeyes, Paul, *Buiten Schot. Nederland tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog 1914-1918*, Amsterdam, 2001; On various interpretations of neutrality in diverse nations, see Hertog, Johan den and Samuël Kruizinga, (eds.), *Caught in the Middle: Neutrals, Neutrality and the First World War*. Studies of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation, 3, Amsterdam, 2011 and Lettevall, Rebecka and Geert Somsen (eds.), *Neutrality in Twentieth-Century Europe: Intersections of Science, Culture, and Politics after the First World War*. Routledge Studies in Cultural History 18, New York, 2012.

³ F.e. Elsig, Alexandre, ‘Propagande allemande et renouveau patriotique: l'enjeu médiatique des Feuilles suisses du dimanche (1915-1918)’, *Relations internationales* 2013/1, 153, 57-69.

⁴ Tames, ‘Oorlog Voor Onze Gedachten’, 157-182.

awareness of the pan-Germanic Mitteleuropa-plan, which he considered as the largest threat for Dutch independence. The preservation of the nation not only required, he argued, the improvement of the ‘weak’ Dutch patriotism, but also the conviction that only the Allies, defined by Van Hamel as persecutors of democracy and freedom, would guarantee the Dutch independence. In 1916 he founded a society with the telling name ‘Vaderlandsche Club’ [‘Patriotic Club’] in order to promote this form of nationalism which was clearly fuelled by a fierce anti-German thinking⁵. Van Hamel’s plea for orienting the Dutch nation towards a belligerent country as a matter of ‘national self-interest’ was exemplary for the growing uneasiness with neutrality. This was not only a Dutch matter, neutrality was globally losing its initial power. Many neutrals were turning into war participants and as the bloodshed continued, belligerents tended to equate the neutrals with ‘weak profiteers’⁶. Stimulated by these shifting national and foreign opinions about neutrality, Dutch intellectuals felt urged to rethink the character and the orientation of the nation and the exact relationship between the ‘Dutch self’ and ‘foreign influences’.

During these debates on national identity, Dutch intellectuals also had to make up their minds about the increased attention for race and language as elements of cohesion, as Van Hamel’s fear for pan-Germanic plans illustrates. Through the nineteenth century the existence of distinct races had become self-evident for many intellectuals all over the world, the Dutch were no exception. In their often blurry definitions of race, language and biology were closely connected⁷. Yet, armed with this ethnic knowledge, they differed in opinion on the idea if nations with the same race and language should be united, as was defended in the German plan for Mitteleuropa. A racialized world view also underpinned the cultural interpretation of the war as a clash between German and Latin culture. In their propaganda, all belligerents not only used this idea to mobilize their home fronts against the enemy who was represented as degenerate and racially inferior, but also to put neutral intellectuals under pressure⁸. So, pondering on the value of race, nation and language, Dutch intellectuals felt caught in the middle. As Dutch-speakers, they seemed to belong to the Germanic family. Yet, was this racial and linguistic affinity reconcilable with national sovereignty? And how could they relate to France from whom they racially differed?

As these debates show, the reframing of the Dutch neutral identity was not an exclusive national matter, it was structurally influenced by the belligerent nations. These transnational interactions between belligerents and Dutch intellectuals are especially visible in the world of belligerent cultural propaganda. From the embassies in The Hague, both French, German and British officials – in close collaboration with engaged Dutch intellectuals – developed cultural propaganda activities in which ideas on the character and the orientation of the Dutch nation

⁵ Tames, ‘Oorlog voor Onze Gedachten’, 151-167.

⁶ Kruizinga, Samuël, ‘Neutrality’, in: Winter, Jay (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, 542–48. Cambridge, 2013. <http://universitypublishingonline.org/ref/id/histories/CHO9780511675676A033>.

⁷ Leerseen, Joep, *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History*, Amsterdam, 2006, 204-226 ; Hroch, Miroslav, *European Nations: Explaining Their Formation*, London, 2015, 59-75.

⁸ Audoin-Rouzeau, Stéphane, and Annette Becker, *14-18, Retrouver La Guerre*, Paris, 2000, 194-214 ; Sturfelt, Lina, ‘The call of the blood : Scandinavia and the First World War as a clash of races’, Ahlund, Claes, *Scandinavia in the First World War: Studies in the War Experience of the Northern Neutrals*. Lund, 2012, 199-224 ; Tames, ‘Oorlog Voor Onze Gedachten’, 177-189.

and on a possible shared identity were negotiated⁹. In this article, I focus on the collaboration between Dutch writers, artists and academics on the one side and French or German officials on the other side within the framework of a French and German cultural propaganda which received a more structural character in 1916. From this transnational perspective, I show how and why Dutch intellectuals felt attracted to France or Germany and how German and French officials responded to the rise of Dutch nationalism. By comparing German and French cultural propaganda activities, I examine how belligerents and neutrals negotiated, constructed and spread diverse Dutch cultural identities¹⁰.

‘Nederland-Frankrijk’

In the winter of 1916, the Dutch cultural society ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’ organized its first major event, an exhibition of French impressionism. During the opening in Amsterdam, Dutch visitors not only gazed at French masters, but also expressed their love for two nations, singing the *Wilhelmus* followed by *La Marseillaise*¹¹. In times of war, this was not a ‘fait-divers’ but a clear political statement. One of the society’s founders, the Dutch professor in Romanic philology, Jean-Jacques Salverda de Grave, summarized the mission of the society as follows: ‘Guaranteeing to France its entitled place in the education of our scientists and the formation of our artists is a deed of national self-defence’¹². As a Romanist, his commitment to French culture was not only literary motivated, it also sprang from a concern for the well-being of the Dutch nation.

Salverda de Grave presented the indulgence of French culture as an instrument to detach the Dutch from Germany. He considered a too powerful German cultural influence as the end of Dutch autonomy. ‘In order to remain ourselves’, he stressed, ‘we have to resist a unilateral foreign influence. As Germany threatens to dominate us in the domain of the spirit, it is necessary for French science and art to become more widely known than so far’¹³. He did not fear German influence in The Netherlands per se, but rather its preponderant effect combined with a growing absence of French culture. From the eighteenth century on, Dutch culture had been largely influenced by French arts and language. Yet, from the turn of the twentieth century,

⁹ I am preparing a monograph on Dutch public intellectuals during the First World War, the contacts with the belligerent propaganda services will be one of the threads. See for belligerent cultural propaganda in other occupied and neutral territories: Roshwald, Aviel and Richard Sites, *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment and Propaganda, 1914-1918*, Cambridge, 1999.

¹⁰ So far, mainly German and British propaganda have been investigated for the Netherlands, while France has been left aside. The propaganda is mainly examined from the perspective of the belligerents and not from the side of Dutch intellectuals, except partly for Tames. Tames, ‘Oorlog voor onze gedachten’; Eversdijk, Nicole, *Kultur als politisches Werbemittel: ein Beitrag zur deutschen kultur- und pressepolitischen Arbeit in den Niederlanden während des Ersten Weltkrieges*, Münster, 2010; Van den Berg, Hubert, ‘The autonomous arts as black propaganda. On a secretive chapter in German ‘Foreign cultural politics’ in The Netherlands and other neighbouring countries during the First World War’, Dorleijn, G.J., and Grüttemeier, R. (eds.), *The Autonomy of Literature at the Fins de Siècles (1900 and 2000): A Critical Assessment*, Groningen Studies in Cultural Change, 32, Leuven, 2007, 71-119. One important exception is Montant on the French propaganda in neutral countries, including The Netherlands, Montant, Jean-Claude, *La Propagande extérieure de la France pendant la première Guerre mondiale: l'exemple de quelques neutres européens*, Lille 3, 1989.

¹¹ ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 21.01.1917.

¹² ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’, *De Telegraaf*, 07.01.1917, 2; Sanders, Matthijs, ‘«Vive La France et La Hollande Amies!» The Netherlands-France Society between 1916 and 1919. The Construction of a Repertoire’, *Arcadia: Zeitschrift Für Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft*, 2/2009, 317–35.

¹³ Ibid.

Dutch intellectuals also oriented themselves towards Germany and Great Britain¹⁴. Salverda de Grave considered the reintroduction of French culture as a solution to rebalance foreign influences on the Dutch culture. He promoted a specific internationally-oriented patriotism, in which Dutch-French cultural exchanges would ensure the persistence of the Dutch ‘national character’.

With its focus on ‘national self-defence’ and its fear of German dominance, the discourse of ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’ fitted into the rise of an anti-German nationalism, as voiced by Van Hamel. The French envoy in The Hague Henri Allizé and his colleague Labbé showed a lively interest for these signs of an increasing Dutch allegiance to autonomy, as it largely concurred with their ideal image of Holland. Since the beginning of the war, French officials appeared in their reports to be possessed by the idea – although partially inaccurately – that large sections of the Dutch population, driven by economic motives or fear for German military power, were pro-German¹⁵. These alarming impressions were strengthened by a feeling of a linguistic and cultural gap which was interpreted as a possible barrier for French-Dutch rapprochement. ‘En dehors de Mesdag, de Jozef Israëls, (...) que connaît-on chez nous de la peinture moderne hollandaise?’, a French official sighed, ‘Il y a eu là une maladresse d’ignorance dont nous pâtissons aujourd’hui. Leurs acteurs, accueillis en Allemagne, nous sont inconnus à cause de leur langue’¹⁶.

Yet, in 1915 and 1916, the French became more and more conscious of the fact that these Germanic-speaking Dutch intellectuals persistently stressed the differences between the Germans and the Dutch, which opened up more alluring perspectives for the French cause. ‘Tous [Les Hollandais] ont pour ainsi dire le sentiment très net d’être différents des Allemands (...)’, a French official argued, ‘Ils entendent former une nation, une race distinctes’¹⁷. Van Hamel’s activities strengthened these French observations. Closely monitoring the ‘Vaderlandsche Club’, Labbé stressed the similarity in their ambitions in a report of 22 July 1916: ‘Nous désirons détacher ce pays de l’influence allemande. Tout ce qui tend à remonter le courant de soumission et de crainte fataliste visa-vis (sic) de l’Allemagne, à proclamer la nécessité du sacrifice à la patrie, à rehausser l’idéal d’indépendance, sert notre politique. Le principal et le plus dût (sic) allié de la propagande française est l’intérêt national néerlandais’¹⁸. As the French officials in The Hague focused on stimulating the Dutch feeling of autonomy towards Germany, Labbé was eager to support these Dutch patriotic activities. After all, for France and Great-Britain, it was crucial to keep The Netherlands neutral and independent, as they feared the German control over Northwestern European harbors¹⁹.

These Dutch patriots were highly interesting but, as Labbé added, also tough propaganda partners. A public French interference would obviously compromise the Dutch message of

¹⁴ Buul, Anne van, *In vreemde grond geworteld: Prerafaëlitisme in de Nederlandse literatuur en beeldende kunst (1855-1910)*, Hilversum, 2014, 33-36.

¹⁵ Letters of Labbé to French Minister of Foreign Affairs, 7.09.1914, 27.09.1914, 9.10.1914, A-Guerre14-18, Pays-Bas, 602, Archives de la Ministère des Affaires Étrangères de la France(AMAE)/Paris ; Kraaijestein and Schulten, ‘Frans-Nederlandse betrekkingen 1914-1922’, Kraaijestein and Schulten, *Wankel Evenwicht*, 233-239.

¹⁶ ‘La neutralité hollandaise’, 16.03.1916, Fonds Maison de la Presse (MP), 14, Belgique-Pays-Bas, AMAE/Paris, 24.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁸ Rapport de A.L. Labbé, 22.06.1916, 4.08.1916, Poste Amsterdam (Am), 33PO/1, nr. 54, AMAE/Nantes.

¹⁹ A neutral Holland with a relative freedom of press also played a vital role in the Allied intelligence operations. Rapport ‘Organisation de la propagande française aux Pays-Bas, s.d.’, nr. 13, Papiers Berthelot, MP, AMAE/Paris, p.4 ; Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 25-30 ; Montant, *La Propagande extérieure*, 1248-1256.

independence. He recommended a discrete approach, which was fully applied in the establishment of ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’. For the outside world, Salverda de Grave maintained that ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’ was a purely cultural and Dutch initiative without any political motivations²⁰. Yet, this was not the case. As the archives of the French propaganda services show, the presence of only Dutch members masks that, behind the scenes, ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’ enjoyed French support. In April 1916 ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’ was founded during secret meetings between the French propaganda officials Maurice Gandolphe and Allizé and anti-German Dutch intellectuals as Salverda de Grave and the professor in history Gerhard Kernkamp. The creation of ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’ was not an isolated phenomenon, it was part of a larger French propaganda plan to increase French cultural influence in neutral nations, as the rise of bicultural societies in Italy and Sweden illustrates²¹. The public disconnection between culture and politics was another French strategy. Cultural rapprochement was assumed to be only successful if its propagandistic origins were hidden. Allizé encouraged his Dutch friends to abstain from anti-German political statements, in order to also attract moderate sympathizers²². Moreover, the cultural activities of ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’ were targeted at a Dutch, but also at a French audience, where this Francophile version of Holland was used to debunk the tenacious rumors about an ever-lasting pro-German Dutch attitude²³.

It is remarkable that Allizé and Gandolphe confidently founded a publicly pro-French society, as propaganda often had a more silent character. In this case, they felt encouraged by the request of an increasing number of eminent Dutch intellectuals to found a cultural association. The society enabled them to organise those Dutch intellectuals who supported France, privately or in official French service²⁴. And there were many of them. The French cause – and not the German nor the British one – mobilized the largest number of Dutch intellectuals through the war, including renowned writers as Frederik van Eeden, Johan de Meester, Dirk Coster, Henri Borel and Jan Greshoff, the painters Philippe Zilcken and Jan Toorop and Louis Raemaekers, the in allied countries most beloved Dutch intellectual due to his anti-German cartoons. Next to the mentioned philologists and historians, Van Hamel and other influential professors in law as Van Vollenhoven and Struycken joined ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’²⁵.

These Dutch intellectuals felt attracted to France for various reasons. The society gathered, not surprisingly, mostly patriots as Van Hamel and Salverda de Grave, of liberal and conservative nature, next to a few internationalists as Van Eeden. Many older writers as Van Eeden and

²⁰ ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’, in: *De Telegraaf*, 07.01.1917, 2 ; Salverda de Grave, Jean Jacques, ‘Waarom Het Genootschap “Nederland-Frankrijk” is opgericht’, *De Gids*, 81/1917, 354-357.

²¹ In his account of ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’, by omitting the French propaganda archives, Sanders has missed the French financial, logistic and moral support. Letter from Maurice Gandolphe to Henry Allizé, 24.04.1916, nr. 306 Propagande, Poste La Haye (LH), AMAE/Nantes ; Rapport de Maurice Gandolphe, 12.05.1916, nr. 13, Papiers Berthelot, MP, AMAE/Paris ; Montant, *La Propagande extérieure*, 1334-1339 ; Sanders, ‘Vive La France’.

²² Letter from Henri Allizé to Cabinet du Ministre, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 30.04.1916, 17.08.1916, nr. 306, LH, AMAE/Nantes.

²³ *Ibid.* ; Henry Asselin, ‘La Hollande et nous’, *Le Figaro*, 31.10.1916, 305, 1.

²⁴ Rapport de Gandolphe, 12.05.1916, nr. 13, Papiers Berthelot, MP, AMAE/Paris.

²⁵ Borel led a news department at the French propaganda services in The Hague. ‘Dossier Borel’, nr. 308, LH, AMAE/Nantes ; Lobbes, Tessa, ‘Designing a peaceful world in a time of conflict. The Dutch writer Frederik van Eeden and his mission as an internationalist during the First World War’, *Utopia: The Avant-garde, Modernism and (Im)possible Life*, European Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies, vol.4. (in press) ; Ranitz, Ariane, *Louis Raemaekers: “met pen en potlood als wapen”. Politiek tekenaar van wereldfaam in de Eerste Wereldoorlog*, Roermond, 2014 ; ‘Nederland-Frankrijk, ledenlijst’, 1.07.1917, nr.306, LH, AMAE/Nantes.

younger ones as Greshoff and Coster had a lively passion for French nineteenth-century literature, while some of them also before the war had developed good relations with German colleagues²⁶. Yet, the main motivation seems to be principal. In 1914, shocked by the German invasion of Belgium, Van Eeden and many others had joined the Allies²⁷. An anti-German attitude led most Dutch intellectuals to France and not to Great Britain. With the Boer War fresh in their minds and being confronted with British economic measures, many Dutch intellectuals did not cherish warm feelings for Great Britain, while they interpreted France as a far less threatening superpower²⁸. A Dutch-British society was never established, while ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’ expanded quickly. By July 1917, it gathered more than 800 members and ten local sections. This demonstrates the rising Dutch support for an anti-German nationalism, which corresponds with the idea that Dutch intellectuals throughout the war increasingly considered Germany as the largest threat to Dutch independency²⁹.

~~‘Deutsche Holländische Goethebund’~~

Confronted with the rise of ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’, the German envoy in The Hague, Richard von Kühlmann immediately put an older plan back on the table: the foundation of a German counterpart, the ‘Deutsche-Holländische Goethebund’. In a letter to the Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg on the 11th of May 1916, von Kühlmann stressed the importance of foreign cultural politics and threatened that Germany might fall behind if cultural societies remained absent. ‘Ein solcher allgemeiner deutscher Verein müsste, um dauernd wirken zu können’, von Kühlmann argued, ‘die künstlerische und kulturelle Zusammengehörigkeit fördern und betonen und könnte damit auf die Dauer ein sehr wichtiges Instrument der deutschen Auslandspolitik werden’³⁰. Von Kühlmann added that this idea of ‘cultural togetherness’ should be especially stimulated in ‘den kulturell Deutschland nahestehenden Randstaaten, Holland, Dänemark und Schweden’³¹. Yet, only a few weeks later, he decided in agreement with Fritz Wichert, who led the German propaganda service in The Hague, to postpone the establishment of a German-Dutch society until after the war. In the end, it was founded in 1919. Yet, in 1916 Von Kühlmann argued that he was unable to gather enough prominent Dutch intellectuals. It seemed more beneficial for the German cause to develop a more secret form of cultural propaganda³².

The German officials’ choice for a mainly covert cultural policy was the result of two observations. First, just as his French colleagues, Wichert observed a rising Dutch allegiance to national independence. ‘Gerade ein Volk wie das holländische mit seinem stark ausgeprägten Nationalcharakter, seinem nicht zu bändigenden Unabhängigkeitsdrang und der tief

²⁶ Kemperink, Maria, *Het verloren paradijs: de Nederlandse literatuur en cultuur van het fin de siècle*. Amsterdam, 2001; Fontijn, Jan, *Trots Verbrijzeld. Het Leven van Frederik van Eeden Vanaf 1901*, Amsterdam, 1996, 340-361.

²⁷ Lobbes, ‘Designing a peaceful world’.

²⁸ Letter of Boucabeille to French Minister of Foreign Affairs, 4.11.1917, nr. 306, LH, AMAE/Nantes ; Montant, *La Propagande extérieure*, 1330-1333 ; Tames, ‘Oorlog zonder gedachten’, 65-70.

²⁹ ‘Nederland-Frankrijk, ledenlijst’, 1.07.1917, nr.306, LH, AMAE/Nantes ; Tames, ‘Oorlog voor onze gedachten’, 256, 260-262.

³⁰ Letter of von Kühlmann to von Bethmann Hollweg, 11.05.1916, Politische Abteilung Auswärtiges Amt Berlin (PAAA), R8324.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Letter of von Kühlmann to von Bethmann Hollweg, 24.05.1916, PAAA, R8324 ; On the Dutch-German society, Tames, Ismee, ‘De Nederlandsch-Duitsche Vereeniging en het verlangen naar ware cultuur’, Boterman, Frederik Willem and Vogel, Maria (eds.), *Nederland en Duitsland in het interbellum: wisselwerking en contacten: van politiek tot literatuur*, Hilversum, 2003, 53-67.

eingewurzeltten völkischen Eigenart', Wichert argued in May 1916, 'würde, vollkommen angegliedert, wahrscheinlich eher Kräfte verschlingen als Kräfte bringen'³³. He illustrated the Dutch sensitivity for autonomy by referring to moderate Great-Netherlandish thinkers who defended the idea of a 'Stärkung des reinen Holländertums'³⁴. These Dutch intellectuals were sensitive for the idea that Germanic-speaking people as the Belgian Flemings, the Dutch, the Afrikaners and the Germans were linguistically and racially related, but they were most vigilant for any foreign dominance, whether it was French, English or German. From the turn of the century, they especially supported the cultural demands of Flemings living in a predominantly francophone Belgium³⁵.

So, whereas the Dutch focus on independence – whether of anti-German nature or 'self-oriented' – produced joy in the French camp, it troubled the German officials. After all, the German officials not only aspired to render Dutch intellectuals anti-English and anti-French, their main aim was to prepare the Dutch for a closer collaboration within a German Mitteleuropa, based on economic dependency and the idea of racial and cultural unity. The exact configuration of this collaboration, whether it would include the annexation of The Netherlands or not, varied but it was clear that Germany aimed for expanding its influence in Holland. A pro-German Holland would also be of great use in case of defeat³⁶. In contrast to their French colleagues, Wichert and von Kühlmann also strongly believed that Germany, on a cultural and racial level, was the most 'natural' Dutch ally. 'Aus dem Wesen des holländischen Stammes (...) sollte man indessen eigentlich annehmen können', Wichert argued, 'dass diese Volk schon einen grossen Grad von Entartung erreicht haben müsste, wenn es sich leichter verwelschen als verdeutschen liesse'³⁷. Most confidently, Wichert considered the Romanization of Holland as a next to impossible scenario, as that was opposed to the Dutch 'racial nature'. Armed with these ethnic opinions, the German officials attached great importance to cultural propaganda.

A second observation considered the fact that the German cause attracted, in this context of Dutch alertness for German expansionism, a smaller number of Dutch intellectuals than 'Nederland-Frankrijk'. German officials gained public support from a minority of anti-democratic, far-right and radical Great-Netherlandish thinkers. Among them, the poet, journalist and sociologist Frederik Carel Gerretson was most well-known and influential. His ideas on the prevalence of racial togetherness over the Dutch state only found acceptance with a radical minority of Great-Netherlandish intellectuals who also joined the German *Flamenpolitik*, in which German officials and Dutch intellectuals jointly tried to detach the Flemings from the Belgian state by meeting their linguistic grievances³⁸. The German cause was more popular among right-wing Dutch scientists than among writers, in line with the Dutch scientific orientation to Germany. Among them were the art historians Willem Vogelsang and Abraham Bredius and the professor in constitutional law Jan Hendrik Valckenier Kips. By 1916 most of them were known

³³ Report of Wichert attached to Letter of von Kühlmann to von Bethmann Hollweg, 28.05.1916, R8324, PAAA, 9.

³⁴ Ibid., 3.

³⁵ Te Velde, Hendrik, *Gemeenschapszin en plichtsbeseef: liberalisme en nationalisme in Nederland, 1870-1918*, 's-Gravenhage, 1992, 223-227, 248-254 ; Wils, Lode, *Onverfranst, Onverduist? Flamenpolitik, Activisme, Frontbeweging*, Kalmthout, 2014,

³⁶ Frey, Marc, *Der Erste Weltkrieg Und Die Niederlande: Ein Neutrales Land Im Politischen Und Wirtschaftlichen Kalkül Der Kriegsgegner*, Berlin, 1998 ; Tames, 'Oorlog voor onze gedachten', 168-180.

³⁷ Report of Wichert attached to Letter of von Kühlmann to von Bethmann Hollweg, 28.05.1916, R8324, PAAA, 13.

³⁸ Ibid., 1-3 ; Correspondance between Gerretson and Rudolf Alexander Schröder, A/Schröder-Niederlande, HS1999.0012, Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, 1916-1918 ; Wils, *Onverfranst, Onverduist?*, 41-58, 131-162.

as radical pro-Germans who overtly advocated a far-reaching Dutch-German collaboration. Their participation in the 'Deutsche-Holländische Goethebund' would immediately have discredited the society³⁹.

In response to the Dutch suspicion for the 'true' German intentions, the German officials felt obliged to adjust the propaganda. As an 'apolitical' instrument, cultural propaganda could be of great use, although it still ran the danger of being interpreted as cultural imperialism. Wichert tried to intercept these reproaches by warning his colleagues for 'Germanisation' as the basis of German cultural politics in The Netherlands. 'Zudem handelt es sich für uns doch gar nicht um 'Verdeutschung' sondern lediglich um Stärkung jener völkischen Eigenschaften', Wichert warned, 'welche die Holländer mit uns gemein haben'⁴⁰. His colleague Cremer, the consul of Amsterdam, seconded this opinion by stating that radical pan-Germanic plans harmed the German cause in The Netherlands. Von Kühlmann and Wichert also complained about the agitating statements of Valckenier Kips in the pro-German Dutch journal *De Toekomst* which was founded in 1915. During one of his anti-German hunts, Van Hamel revealed the secret German financing of this journal, which had created consternation in the Dutch press⁴¹. These repeated setbacks encouraged Wichert and his colleagues to explore more cautious and covert forms of cultural propaganda instead of a frontal and public counterattack.

The exemplary role of the French 'esprit' and the attractiveness of reciprocal German-Dutch cultural exchange

Through their cultural projects, belligerent officials and Dutch intellectuals spread ideas on the Dutch national character and on the possibility of shared characteristics. The activities of 'Nederland-Frankrijk', framed as 'saisons françaises', illustrate the French efforts in this field. The French activities mostly consisted of one-way-traffic. Allizé primarily supported an unilateral export of French culture to The Netherlands by reducing taxes on the Dutch import of French literature, financing the French Opera in The Hague, translating French textbooks and transporting French art⁴². They were far less eager to bring Dutch culture to Paris. This one-sided approach seems partly to be the result of mentioned French feeling of a cultural barrier. But it also reflects the focus of the French propaganda on the Dutch detachment from Germany via an influx of French culture.

The members of 'Nederland-Frankrijk' cherished diverse ideas on the relation between French and Dutch culture. Van Hamel and Kernkamp stressed the sharing of political ideals, such as national sovereignty and democracy⁴³. Many others as Salverda de Grave and Greshoff yearned

³⁹ Tames, *Oorlog voor onze gedachten*, 69-71 ; Report of Wichert attached to Letter of von Kühlmann to von Bethmann Hollweg, 28.05.1916, R8324, PAAA, 1-3.

⁴⁰ Report Wichert attached to Letter of von Kühlmann to von Bethmann Hollweg, 28.05.1916, R8324, PAAA, 1-3.

⁴¹ Consul Cremer, 'Monatsbericht XVIII ', 31.03.1916, Zentralstelle für Auslandsdienst (ZfA), 932, band 1, Bundesarchiv Berlin (BA) ; Letter von Von Kühlmann to von Bethmann Hollweg, 17.12.1915, R122708, PAAA ; Tames, *Oorlog voor onze gedachten*, 62-65, 70-74.

⁴² Letter from Salverda de Grave to Allizé, to Asselin, 4.03.1917, 15.07.1917, LH, nr.306, AMAE/Nantes ; Salverda de Grave, Jean Jacques a.o., *Le Livre Français En Hollande: Nederland-Frankrijk. Genootschap Voor Wetenschap, Letteren En Kunst*. Parijs, 1917 ; Letter from Zilcken to Gandolphe, 23.08.1916, LH, nr 306 AMAE/Nantes ; Gandolphe, 'Note pour Monsieur Berthelot. Exposition d'art français en Hollande', 23.10.1916, MP, Papiers Berthelot, 12, AMAE/Paris.

⁴³ Tames, *Oorlog voor onze gedachten*, 169-178.

for a deeper alliance. They interpreted the war as a clash of civilizations and eagerly choose French 'Esprit' over German 'Kultur'. Even more, they tried, despite their assumed linguistic and racial difference, to attach the Dutch to the Latin family. This desire possibly took those French officials who had already classified the Dutch as Germanic by surprise. 'Nederland-Frankrijk'-member Westendorp addressed this desire directly to the French: 'They have to know that although we speak a language of Germanic origin, our art and our hearts are imbued with Latin sympathies'⁴⁴. He observed his Germanic origin as an undeniable given, but that did not obstruct him from being mentally oriented to Latin culture.

While the Dutch-German alliance was often situated in the domain of 'blood' and kinship, the pro-French intellectuals connected the French and the Dutch in the spiritual domain of mentalities. In his essay 'Hollandais et Français', Salverda de Grave defended 'l'esprit française', arguing that the Dutch were more related to the French than to the Germans. He situated common French and Dutch character traits in 'love for the nation', 'respect for the individual' and 'struggle for democracy'⁴⁵. So, patriotism and sovereignty were not represented as 'just' a political ideal, but as typically French and Dutch. Historical examples supported the construction of a shared identity. Zilcken and Salverda de Grave aroused memories of earlier cultural encounters, referring to the flight of the French Huguenots to The Netherlands, to Dutch authors writing in French such as the eighteenth century writer Justus van Effen and to the contacts between the 'École de Barbizon' and the 'Haagse School'⁴⁶.

In these Dutch circles, the predilection for the French 'esprit' was fuelled by a great admiration for the French nationalistic culture of Maurice Barrès, Charles Maurras and the right-wing party *Action Française*. This was especially visible in the series *French Art* created by Pieter Valkhoff – a Dutch scholar in Romanic languages and co-founder of 'Nederland-Frankrijk' – in which Dutch writers as Greshoff discussed French literature and art⁴⁷. Greshoff's *Latijnsche Lente* [*Latin Spring*] (1918) was exemplary for the fascination of conservative Dutch intellectuals for what they indicated as the French regeneration and the revitalizing power of the war. Over the past twenty years, France was transformed, Greshoff argued, from a decadent society after the defeat of 1870 into a ultra-nationalistic community founded on the values of the 'century-old' Latin spirit⁴⁸. He applauded the generation of Barrès for turning their head towards 'bloodless' socialism and symbolism and for becoming those vital, 'manly' individuals who were willing 'to sacrifice their lives for the holy existence of the patriotic community' in Verdun⁴⁹.

Greshoff's portrayal of French culture, in which cultural classicism and right-wing nationalism were united, also included criticism on the Dutch spirit, which he described as weak and

⁴⁴ 'Nederland-Frankrijk', *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 21.01.1917.

⁴⁵ Salverda de Grave, 'Hollandais et Français', *La Revue de Hollande*, 1, 1916, 829-853.

⁴⁶ Valkhoff, Piet, *L'influence de la littérature française dans les Pays-Bas*, Leiden, 1918, 5-8. ; Comité 'Nederland-Frankrijk', *Tentoonstelling van schilderijen, beeldhouwwerken, medailles te Utrecht*, 1917, 9-10.

⁴⁷ Letter from Valkhoff to Henry Asselin, 25.08.1916, nr. 306, LH, AMAE/Nantes ; Valkhoff, Piet, *De Franse geest in Frankrijks letterkunde*. Fransche Kunst, 1, Leiden, 1917.

⁴⁸ See f.e. Johannes van Tielrooy, *Maurice Barrès*, Fransche Kunst, 6, Leiden, 1918.

⁴⁹ Greshoff, Jan, *Latijnsche Lente. Opstellen en aanteekeningen*. Fransche Kunst, 5, Leiden, 1918, 12, 89-91, 197-208. In 1915, financially and professionally motivated, Greshoff worked as a literary agent secretly for German propaganda. Yet, his ideological views led him to the French side which he defended most publicly. Van den Berg, Hubert, 'Een 'Holländische Reihe' die er nooit kwam. Anton Kippenberg en de Nederlandse literatuur tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog', *Zacht Lanjijd*, 13, 2014, 3, 258-285.

provincial, almost feminine. If the Dutch aspired ‘true patriotism’, he argued, they had to be imbued with the French ‘esprit’ and reject the ‘young’ and ‘materialistic’ German culture. As neutrality obstructed the Dutch from direct contact with this ‘Latin spring’, Greshoff advised his compatriots to absorb French art at the ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’-exhibitions and to read Barrès and the French war poets⁵⁰. Allizé and his colleagues gave ample room to the circulation of these images of France, which empowered them to be the guide and the protector of the Dutch nation against Germany. They stimulated this Dutch enthusiasm for French patriotism by sending members of ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’ piles of French war poetry for review⁵¹. The Dutch image of a strong and manly France was not only used to strengthen Dutch patriotism and to denounce German ‘Kultur’. It also largely supported the French struggle with the obstinate stereotypes on the decadence of the French race, which was a key-element in the German propaganda⁵². In their reports on ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’, French officials praised the cultural propaganda particularly for ‘restaurer notre façade française’ en ‘l’affirmation de notre vitalité’⁵³.

Although French officials initially had a ‘apolitical’ cultural program in mind, the activities of ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’ turned out to be quite political and publicly anti-German. German officials felt far more restricted by the Dutch fear for German expansionism. Next to the continuation of funding pro-German, explicitly politically-loaded Dutch journals in which Gerretson was missioned to carefully influence right-wing circles, the German officials also explored more apolitical strategies which could be useful for targeting neutral and anti-German circles⁵⁴. Their devotion to the promotion of reciprocal cultural exchanges was one of these strategies⁵⁵.

In sharp contrast to their French colleagues, Wichert and von Kühlmann’s cultural policy was based on mutual exchange. They not only sent German culture to Amsterdam, they also transported Dutch culture to Germany. While reflecting in May 1916 on future propaganda plans, Wichert enthusiastically referred to the ‘Gebiet des Kulturaustausches’⁵⁶. The German longing for mutual exchange was based on a genuine interest of many German officials for Dutch arts – von Kühlmann, Wichert and others had a significant network in Dutch cultural life – but it was at the same time also a strategy of ‘cultural seduction’. In November 1917, the German official Franz Dülberg clarified the importance of importing Dutch theatre to Germany in order to ‘so den Holländern gezeigt würde, dass man sich hier [Germany] für das literarische Schaffen des kleinen Landes interessiert’⁵⁷. In order to tie close cultural bounds, the Dutch had to be convinced of the German interest for a small nation’s literature. German officials wanted to prevent by all means that the Dutch perceived the German activities as ‘eine deutsche geistige Invasion’. Therefore, the promotion of Dutch theatre in Germany – covering its propagandistic

⁵⁰ Greshoff, *Latijnsche Lente*, 110-142.

⁵¹ Letter from Johan de Meester to Henri Asselin, 7.08.1916, LH, nr. 306, AMAE/Nantes.

⁵² Hanna, Martha, *The Mobilization of Intellect: French Scholars and Writers during the Great War*. Cambridge Mass, 1996, 78-106, 166-176.

⁵³ Gandolphe, ‘Projet d’Exposition française en Hollande’, s.d., 4-5, MP, Berthelot, nr.12, AMAE/Paris ; Henry Asselin, ‘La Hollande et nous’, *Le Figaro*, 31.10.1916, 305, 1.

⁵⁴ Correspondence between Wichert and Gerretson, 567, Persoonlijk archief Gerretson, 2.21.246, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag.

⁵⁵ Another strategy is visible in the transnational circulation of modern, expressionist art, see Van den Berg, Van den Berg, *The Autonomous Arts*, 102-111.

⁵⁶ Report Wichert attached to Letter of von Kühlmann to von Bethmann Hollweg, 28.05.1916, R8324, PAAA, 1-4.

⁵⁷ Letter from Franz Dülberg to Herr Generalintendant, 26.11.1917, ZfA, R901/71164, BA.

origins – had to counterbalance the performance of German theatre in The Netherlands. A similar policy was developed in the field of art in 1917 and science in 1918⁵⁸.

It was no coincidence that Wichert and Dülberg focused on theatre. Before the war, Dutch playwrights as Herman Heijermans were strongly oriented on Germany, where their plays were translated and performed⁵⁹. The German theatre policy became quite successful, as the two eminent Dutch playwrights of that time, Heijermans and Marcellus Emants assisted Dülberg, a dramatist himself. Dülberg monitored in November 1917 the German translation and performance of Emants' 'Door de Praatjes' in Weimar⁶⁰. In June 1918, Heijermans travelled secretly to Berlin 'zwecks Besuchs von deutschen Vorstellungen in Deutschland, um sie in Holland aufzuführen'⁶¹. So, Dutch playwrights were not only invited to perform in Germany, they were also missioned to Germany in order to bring back suitable German productions. Dülberg's collaboration with Emants and Heijermans was also motivated by his preference for modern, realistic theatre and by the fact that the Dutch audience adored this genre⁶².

The German interest in Dutch culture was a powerful instrument. First, it appealed to the professional and financial desires of Dutch intellectuals, as it gave them access to an enormous German language community. The Great-Netherlandish thinker Emants might be also ideologically motivated, but for the socialist Heijermans, especially financial and professional motives seem to be involved. He was more successful in Berlin than at home and the German propaganda could relieve his constant financial needs during the war⁶³. Secondly, the policy of mutual exchange also had an 'apolitical' appearance, as it seemed to be the product of a purely cultural German interest. In their publications on Dutch writers and artists, German officials also consciously tried to avoid sensitive political, linguistic and racial questions⁶⁴. Thirdly, this propaganda generated, as Van den Bergh argues, a useful image of Germany as an internationally-oriented promotor of modern art and intercultural exchange by which the stereotype of German 'barbarism' and 'imperialism' was fought, as well as the German government's reputation to repudiate modern art⁶⁵. It is no coincidence that German officials targeted this policy also to overtly anti-German Dutch intellectuals. After all, the German officials precisely offered them the professional opportunities which were lacking in the unilateral French cultural propaganda. As a result of this cultural politics, German officials slowly increased their influence in the world of Dutch theatre, expressionist art, music and science⁶⁶.

⁵⁸ The German official Brinckmann used the term 'Geistige Invasion' to stress the importance of mutual exchange in the field of science. Report of Brinckmann on 'Akadämische Vorträge in Holland und Deutschland' attached to the letter of Friedrich Rosen to Hertling, 8.01.1918, ZfA, R901/71888, BA ; Van den Berg, *The Autonomous Arts*, 96-102 ; Letter from Maltrau to Reichskanzler, Herr Grafen von Hertling, 20.06.1918, ZfA, R901/71164.

⁵⁹ Goedkoop, Hans, *Geluk: het leven van Herman Heijermans*, Amsterdam, 1996, 250-306.

⁶⁰ Letter from Franz Dülberg to Herr Generalintendant, 26.11.1917, ZfA, R901/71164, BA.

⁶¹ 'Ausreisegesuch des Theaterdirektors Hermann Heyermans (sic)', 12.06.1918, ZfA, R901/71233, BA.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ So far, the exact relationship between Emants and the German propaganda services is unclear. About his role in the radical pro-German 'Dutch-Flemish' society, see Letter from Rosen to Michaelis, 15.10.1917, R122719, PAAA. , aan Michaelis ; Goedkoop, *Geluk*, 306-350.

⁶⁴ F.e. Dülberg, Franz, 'Holländische Dichter und Kunstgelehrte', *Die Woche*, 19, 1917, 969-972.

⁶⁵ Van den Berg, *The Autonomous Arts*, 96-102.

⁶⁶ On the role of the Dutch expressionist painter Jacoba van Heemskerck and the by the Germans funded Berlin avant-garde art gallery *Der Sturm*, see Van den Berg, Hubert, "... Wir müssen mit und durch Deutschland in unserer Kunst weiterkommen". Jacoba van Heemskerck Und Das Geheimdienstliche 'Nachrichtenbüro 'Der Sturm'',

Conclusion

After the first war years, belligerent nations were confronted with a rise of patriotism in several neutral nations. As a response, both France and Germany adapted their cultural propaganda to this new context. While officials in London, Paris and Berlin developed general propaganda strategies for all neutrals, these were also adjusted to local sensitivities. As this article shows, the factors of race and language played a large role in the design of cultural propaganda, in which diverse nations, races and cultures were involved. Further research should reveal on which aspects the German focus on mutual exchange in ‘den kulturell Deutschland nahestehenden Randstaaten’ as The Netherlands and Scandinavia differed from their approach in bilingual Switzerland or how the French cultural policy in ‘Germanic’ Sweden differed from the one in ‘Romanic’ Spain.

In their jointly constructed cultural propaganda activities, Dutch intellectuals and belligerent officials – armed with diverse motivations – negotiated and reshaped the Dutch neutral identity, spreading it via art exhibitions, literary reviews, book stores and theatrical performances. The belligerent influencing, monitoring, infiltration, support and financing of seemingly ‘neutral’ and ‘impartial’ Dutch patriotic initiatives as ‘Nederland-Frankrijk’ reveals the distinction between the outside world and the world behind the scenes. After all, the plea for ‘national self-interest’ was for many Dutch intellectuals connected to picking sides.

As the Dutch call for ‘national vigilance’ was often of an anti-German nature, French officials were eager to stimulate the desired political and cultural Dutch detachment from Germany, by unilaterally exporting French culture to The Netherlands. In practice, rather unexpectedly, a considerable group of Dutch intellectuals wanted to be part of the ‘Latin family’, by constructing a and mental French-Dutch identity based on a shared love for patriotism and French culture. At the beginning of the war, German officials considered the Dutch-German racial and linguistic togetherness as their trump card. To a certain extent, that plan fizzled out, as they were confronted with a rising Dutch suspicion for pan-Germanic expansionist politics. Next to other strategies in which a cultural and racial belonging was explicitly promoted, the German officials also tried to transgress these sensitive political and racial issues by exploring an internationally-oriented policy of intercultural exchange. Via this strategy, a different Dutch-German alliance was constructed based on mutual cultural interest and on a shared love for modern art, which was an important instrument to appeal to the professional desires of Dutch intellectuals.

Jöusting, P. and Fähnders, W., “Laboratorium Vielseitigkeit”. Zur Literatur Der Weimarer Republik: Festschrift Für Helga Karrenbrock. Bielefeld, 2005, 67-87.