‘The World is Her Home’: The Role of Women Volunteers in Dutch Civil Defence in the 1950s and 1960s

Dick van Lente

The Dutch civil defence organisation Bescherming Bevolking (Protection of the Population), or BB, was launched, with great reluctance, by the Dutch government in 1952.¹ The first postwar governments estimated that the Soviet Union had been damaged too much during the Second World War to risk an attack on Western Europe. Communism was seen as mainly a domestic threat, which had to be countered by investing in a strong economy and comfortable living conditions for the whole population rather than wasting money on weapons. The Czech coup of 1948, the Berlin crisis of 1948–1949, the announcement in September 1949 that the Soviets had a nuclear weapon and the Korean War in 1950 changed the situation. The American government expected Soviet aggression in Western Europe, sent over more troops and demanded that the Europeans increase their military budgets. The Dutch government

D. van Lente (✉)

Department of History, Erasmus University, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
e-mail: vanlente@eshcc.eur.nl

complied. The new civil defence organisation was considered part of that defensive effort: it had to demonstrate the population's readiness to face an attack from the East. That, at least, was the theory. In practice, the BB elicited very little enthusiasm among politicians, officials and the wider public.

Like civil defence organisations elsewhere, the BB relied largely on volunteers, in addition to a small professional staff. Recruiting efforts were directed mainly at men, who would be trained in firefighting and rescue operations, while women were welcomed in the Division for Care and Comfort, which would help victims. As the number of volunteers remained far below expectations, the recruiting campaign was extended in 1955. The slogan of this campaign, 'the third man', testified to the male orientation of the BB. It indicated that one-third of the vacancies still had to be filled, but also, and more strikingly, that the organisation had simply by-passed the female half of the population.

When recruitments remained low, the BB realised its mistake, and in 1956, it began to target Dutch women. For this purpose, it sought the help of *Nederlandse Federatie voor Vrouwelijke Vrijwillige Hulpverlening* (the Dutch Federation of Women's Voluntary Organisations, FVVH). The FVVH agreed to organise courses on individual self-protection, but insisted on doing this independently of, although in coordination with, the BB. It quickly recruited and trained a large group of women instructors, and in the next decade organised hundreds of instruction meetings throughout the country. In the meantime, the BB languished: it had difficulty recruiting volunteers and keeping them involved. In the late 1960s, it practically faded from public view. This steady decline contrasted markedly with the gusto with which women volunteers undertook their job, and their relative success.

This contrast between a stumbling men's organisation and a thriving women's organisation, both working to prepare the Dutch population for nuclear war, is the topic of this chapter. Why did the women succeed where the men failed? The answer to this question, this chapter contends, is to be found in the way the women volunteers understood their role in society, and how they put this into practice. They were at the forefront of a feminist wave that rose after the Second World War, a movement that was situated between the more well-known first and second feminist waves of the *fin-de-siècle* and the late 1960s, respectively (Schwegman and Withuis 1993: 570). They were inspired by the early feminists, who considered the right to vote, acquired in 1919, as their entrance ticket

to public debate, which would finally allow women to contribute to the improvement of society. The new realities of warfare, which since the First World War included aerial bombardment, gave women a new and urgent task. Military violence would no longer be limited to the frontlines, where men did the fighting, but would include homes, women and children. Therefore, in addition to feeding and clothing their families, women now had to protect them, a role which could extend from creating improvised air-raid shelters to getting involved in the peace movement and international politics. During the Second World War, many women played a crucial role in protecting and feeding their families, as well as providing shelter to people hiding from the occupying forces. This created a sense of collective strength and pride, and the conviction that they had an important role to play in postwar Dutch society. But postwar society turned out to be at least as patriarchal as it had been before the war, and the BB was an eminent example of a male-dominated institution. While needing the help of the women volunteers, the BB resented their independence and success. This conflict between the official imaginary of civil defence, incorporated in the patriarchal BB and the women volunteers enacting a new vision of the role of women in the nuclear age is the topic of this chapter (Jasanoff 2015a: 4).

The next section sketches the rise and decline of the BB. Section three discusses the debate about the role of women in society during the 1950s and 1960s. These two sections set the stage for the story of the voluntary organisations' efforts to teach women how to deal with the effects of nuclear war. The final section will evaluate to what extent and in which ways the women's voluntary organisations succeeded in enacting a new imaginary of gender roles for the nuclear age, and how these activities were received.

RISE AND DECLINE OF THE BESCHERMING BEVOLKING

The Dutch civil defence organisation Bescherming Bevolking was created during a period of widespread fear of nuclear war. Anxiety levels rose after crises such as the Prague coup (February 1948) and the Berlin blockade (1948–1949), then lessened during the 1950s (Table 6.1).

The polls did not ask about the fear of *nuclear* war and its consequences, but judging by contemporaneous articles in newspapers and popular magazines, this was clearly implied. A popular illustrated magazine, *Panorama*, wrote in November 1946 that the next war would likely

Table 6.1 Polling on the perceived likelihood of war

<i>Percentage of people polled who say yes to the questions below</i>		
	<i>Will there be another world war?</i>	<i>Will there be another world war within ten years?</i>
1945	50	32
December		
1946	63	39
December		
1948	71	52
September		
1949	55	27
June		
1950	60	41
September		
1953	31	11
June (?)		
1957	40	18
Sept		
1962	43	20
15 Oct		
1962	37	19
29 Oct		

Sources Nederlands Instituut voor de Publieke Opinie (NIPO), report nos. 444–447 (13 September 1950); report no. 624 (26 June 1953); and report no. 915 (5 November 1962); Van der Boom (2000: 26–28)²

be one without armies, fought by remotely controlled weapons, including atom bombs, assuming the Americans would not be able to keep their nuclear monopoly. Once started, the conflict would automatically escalate, destroying all American and European cities within 24 hours.³ Dutch newspapers paid a lot of attention to the book *No place to hide* by the American army doctor David Bradley, which was published in the autumn of 1948. Bradley had attended the tests at Bikini Atoll in 1946 and concluded that protection against ionising radiation released by atomic bombs was practically impossible.⁴ Widespread fear of nuclear war, in addition to pressure from the USA as mentioned above, also helps to explain the creation of the BB. One MP spoke of an ‘SOS of the Dutch people’. The budget, 8 million guilders, to be spent over the next four years, was widely criticised as being much too limited—an ‘ostrich policy’ as another MP described it (Van der Boom 2000: 36, 115).

During the 1950s, as the nuclear confrontation became an established fact of life, fears were offset by increasing standards of living, and they seem to have abated somewhat. But recurring crises (over the Suez Canal and Berlin, for example) reminded people that nuclear war might break out any time. In 1955, NATO held a large exercise in West Germany, called *Carte Blanche*, which simulated a nuclear surprise attack on Western Europe and tested the response of NATO forces. It involved mock attacks with 335 atom bombs from both sides, mainly on West Germany, but also on a few Dutch targets. Dutch newspapers reported the horrors of this imagined war: West Germany would be devastated, and at least half of its population would be instantly killed. It would be a short and horrible war, a 'mutual suicide', as even the chief of staff of the NATO air forces, Peter Wykeham-Barnes, said. He added: 'Talk of winning such a war is madness', and there would be '[n]o victors, only a few survivors'.⁵ It is therefore not surprising that in 1958 the government spoke of a 'latent mood of panic' in the Dutch population (Van der Boom 2000: 150, 221). Another survey, in 1959, showed that people associated nuclear war with 'everything broken, dead, or lost' (Leenders 2001: 150).⁶

The basic mission of the BB was to convince the Dutch population that such pessimism was unwarranted, and that it could, and should, protect itself against aerial attack. This was presented as a civilian task. The name *Bescherming Bevolking* (BB) or 'protection of the population' avoided the word 'defence' because of its military connotation, which planners and PR people knew the Dutch population disliked. For the same reason, the BB was the responsibility of the Minister of Domestic Affairs, not the Minister of Defence. The basic elements of the organisation were local units of volunteers, a scheme called 'organised self-protection'. Citizens were to create shelters in their own homes (see Fig. 6.1).

Those who lived in high-rise apartment buildings should construct a shelter together, preferably in the basement, with some subsidy from the government. In peacetime, these shelters could be used for storage or as parking for bikes. For those caught in a public space at the time of an attack, public shelters would be built at busy junctures in cities. None of these shelters would be able to withstand the heat and shock of a close nuclear explosion, but several miles away from ground zero they would be able to save lives. This basic structure remained in place until the dissolution of the BB in 1986.

Fig. 6.1 Civil defence: The patriarchal view of the BB

Notice how the husband, as helpless as his wife and children, seems to protect them with his left arm, which extends to the stairways. No hint here of the mother as the protector, the idea behind the women's/women voluntary efforts. The image is strikingly similar to the advertisements featuring families analysed in Goffman (1976: 37–39) and the description of the American situation in McEnaney (2010) (From the booklet *Toelichting op de wenken voor de bescherming van uw gezin en uzelf* [s.l., September 1961], p. 5. Source National Archives, The Hague. Archive of Organisatie Bescherming Bevolking, bloc 1960–1969, box 73)

No serious protection against air raids had existed in the Netherlands up to this point. During the 1930s, the government had made a half-hearted attempt to create a mostly voluntary organisation that would fight fires and dig trenches where the population could take shelter during an aerial attack, but people had never taken this seriously, and the government's advice to citizens for individual self-protection was largely ignored—a response that would later be repeated with the BB (Van der Boom 2000: 31–32; Bosma 2012: 76–91).

The BB estimated it would need 200,000 volunteers.⁷ The government started a big propaganda campaign in the spring of 1952, with short films, radio talks and pamphlets. It was aimed mainly at men, although women were eligible for the Social Care Service, that was to provide victims with food and comfort, 'work for which a woman's hand was created' (Van der Boom 2000: 51). BB recruiters reported that it was often women who persuaded their husbands to join the organisation. It was also much easier to find women to join the Social Care Service than it was to find men for the other units (Huetting 1995: 104, 107–108; Van der Boom 2000: 51, 63, 67, 69, 134). The overall result of the campaign was disappointing: only 123,000 people signed up. Recruitment therefore continued after 1953, with similar, if not worse results: volunteers had already begun leaving the organisation. This led to the attempt to recruit more women, which will be discussed below. Another way to solve the volunteer problem was to enlist young conscripts. This met with fierce opposition, but at least from the mid-1960s, the ranks were almost filled.

In 1955, the Minister of Domestic Affairs announced what experts had known for years and the population had feared for almost a decade: in the case of a war, the Netherlands would suffer several nuclear attacks, on Rotterdam, Amsterdam, The Hague (seat of the government) and several other strategic spots. The BB was reorganised to deal with this not-so-new threat. Regularly, the government announced that more shelters would be built, but actual building was often postponed or silently called off.⁸ In 1968, the Minister of Domestic Affairs reported to Parliament that at that time shelters with fallout protection were available, or under construction, for 66,200 persons; the total population at that time amounted to 12 million.⁹ From the late 1950s, an increasing number of experts and politicians expressed their scepticism about the organisation (Van der Boom 2000: 261–270). Prominent Dutch scientists argued that the government grossly underrated the effects of a nuclear attack. The BB's pretence of protection only served to prepare the Dutch population for a nuclear war, they said. The only sensible way to prevent such a war was to completely abolish nuclear weapons.¹⁰

In the summer of 1961, tensions around Berlin increased, and a nuclear war scare gripped the Western world. The Dutch government, like governments in other West European countries, responded by having a pamphlet delivered to each home, entitled 'Suggestions for protecting your family and yourself'.¹¹ It explained what to do in the event of a nuclear attack. The main advice was to seek shelter at home or the nearest

place available. Suggestions were given for creating a home shelter, what to keep in stock there and how to provide first aid. Three weeks later, an illustrated, 30-page brochure with further explanations was distributed. It emphasised protection against fallout, perhaps because that was more attainable than protection against the shock, heat and immediate radiation of a nuclear explosion (Weart 1988: 258). The overarching theme of this campaign and the booklet was to counter the widespread ‘defeatism’, the deep pessimism, that had taken root during the 1950s, and to convince the population that self-protection made sense: fatalism, the BB argued, allowed panic to take over and opportunities for survival to be wasted (Van der Boom 2000: 208; on ‘panic management’, see also the chapter by Björnsson in this volume).

The pamphlet and the brochure were not well received. According to a survey held shortly after the campaign, a little over half of the respondents said they had read them, but of those who had, only half could say what fallout was, and an even larger proportion had no idea what to do to protect themselves. A survey held in 1968 showed that hardly anyone had created a shelter at home—not even BB people and politicians (Van der Boom 2000: 232; Valkenburgh 1964: 231)—and municipalities had almost completely neglected their duties in this respect. One example is the small town of Barendregt, close to Rotterdam. The civil servant answering the questionnaire reported that the new municipal office had a shelter facility for the local government. He did not know how many people had a shelter at home, but he supposed there were very few. He announced that Barendregt was preparing further measures. But in 1972, the town reported that for about 12,000 of the 13,000 inhabitants there was no shelter. In short, Barendregt’s citizens were not interested in the topic at all, and neither was their municipal government.¹² This was typical of the Netherlands. The mayor of Amsterdam at first even declined to carry out the survey, because he found it meaningless (Van der Boom 2000: 248; Leenders 2001: 227–235).

Some people were angry. They said the BB suggested that a nuclear war could be fought and survived.¹³ A well-known young writer, Harry Mulisch, wrote a savage satire, which was published a few weeks after the BB’s brochure: ‘Suggestions for protecting your family and yourself on Judgment Day’. It alternated horror scenes from the biblical Book of Revelations with suggestions from the BB, including sandbags and ice cubes (Mulisch 1961). Most other reactions published in newspapers were scathing or angry. After this PR disaster, the BB kept a low profile,

and in the 1970s, many people wondered if it still existed at all. Opinion polls showed that the number of people expecting nuclear war decreased rapidly during the second half of the 1960s.¹⁴

Why was the organisation so unpopular? First, neither the central government nor municipal governments believed in civil defence. The budget was kept low and the organisation was set up half-heartedly. During the first few years, BB volunteers had to wear unimpressive overalls as a uniform, local leadership was often weak, courses were uninspiring, and exercises were not taken seriously. Leading figures were often retired army officers who regarded their job as a kind of sinecure. Mayors and councillors commonly showed a complete lack of interest. The BB increasingly became a laughingstock, and its volunteers were ashamed to be seen by their neighbours wearing their uniforms or doing their exercises (see Fig. 6.2).¹⁵

One result of this lack of funding and leadership was continuous under-performance. The delays in shelter building illustrate this. Most people were unaware of the location of shelters (Van der Boom 2000: 158–159). In practical tasks, the BB also cut a bad figure. When the organisation was called on to assist during emergencies—at a railroad disaster in 1962, at an accident at a chemical plant in 1972 and on a few other occasions—its performance was considered worthless (Leenders 2001: 230–231).

DUTCH WOMEN IN THE COLD WAR: SOCIAL POSITION, IDEALS AND VOLUNTARY WORK

While the BB became increasingly unpopular, women volunteers set up their own, vigorous campaign to instruct women in self-protection. What motivated them? And how did they deal with the BB? In order to understand this, we have to consider the postwar debate about the role of women in society.

The Second World War shook Dutch society to its roots, including the relations between men and women (De Liagre Böhl 1987; Van Liempt 2009: 265–314, 366–416; Schwegman and Withuis 1993: 568–570). The illegitimacy of the occupying German authorities during the war encouraged illegal activity. This included hiding, and feeding, some 25,000 Jews, and 300,000 non-Jews, a very risky business in which women played a key role. Towards the end of the war, when food and fuel became scarce, pilfering and prostitution spread. After liberation,

Fig. 6.2 BB ridiculed

Self-mockery in the BB magazine *De Paladijn* 1964, no. 10. Notice how marginal women are

300,000 men who had been deported to Germany to work in the factories returned home. Many others had escaped deportation by going into hiding. Women therefore had taken up the task of feeding and holding together their families. When liberation came, many young women had brief affairs with Canadian soldiers, which led to a spike in illegitimate births, divorces and cases of venereal disease a year later. The public humiliation of young women who had been too friendly with German men (*moffenmeiden*) can easily be interpreted as revenge for this affront to Dutch male pride (Judt 2005: 42–43). In other words, the war had not only made women heroines but also put them morally at risk. It had inspired a collective self-confidence in women while diminishing the standing of men.

Small wonder that genuine moral panic broke out among politicians and church leaders after the euphoria of liberation had waned. They believed the country had to restore not only its buildings, harbours and bridges, but even more so its decency and orderly habits. As a journal for mental health put it: 'The sense of mine and thine, and respect for the authority of the government have been severely weakened, pent up aggression has not yet found constructive outlets, and the absence of fathers and the sexual misbehaviour of mothers have created unacceptable situations' (Mol and Van Lieshout 1987: 80). The response to this state of moral emergency was the creation of a range of institutions for social work and therapy which focused on re-establishing traditional family relations. The motto was: 'Restoring the family will restore the nation' (*Gezinsherstel brengt Volksherstel*) (De Liagre Böhl 1987: 28). This was not difficult: it entailed the restoration of the organisational networks created before the war that were dominated by the protestant and Roman Catholic churches which embraced a patriarchal view of society.

This restoration clearly succeeded.¹⁶ Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, most young women married and had children. Divorce was unusual until the late 1960s. Very few women, a much lower percentage than elsewhere in Europe, worked outside the home, in spite of the shortage of labour. Even in 1965, 83% of the respondents in a survey rejected the idea of mothers of schoolchildren working away from home. But there were changes too. The legal position of women began to improve from the late 1940s. For example, both parents acquired equal authority over their children (1947), married women were given the same rights as their husbands to their common possessions (1957), women no longer automatically lost their job upon marriage, and equal pay for equal

work was introduced (1957). Many of these rules were routinely evaded, but clearly, the position of women was no longer fixed—it was debated, changes were proposed and sometimes adopted, and even if not fully implemented, they were ‘in the air’ (Brinkgreve and Korzec 1978: 97–99; Schwegman and Withuis 1993: 575). And many women believed the war had proven that their role in society was essential.

Profound and lasting changes in attitudes started only in the late 1960s, brought about by economic growth, the introduction of the contraceptive pill, and the second feminist wave (Brinkgreve and Korzec 1978: 115, 126–127; Pott-Buter and Tijdens 1998: 139–141; Schwegman and Withuis 1993: 579–581). Women became more highly educated and more eager to pursue a career. Motherhood was no longer idealised; women were now expected to ‘develop themselves’ beyond the family. The number of children per family started to decline and divorces increased (Van Setten 1987: 25–26; Brinkgreve and Korzec 1978: 114).

The high tide of women’s participation in civil defence therefore occurred during the period before the second feminist wave, when a restored patriarchal order collided with a new sense of responsibility and competence among many women. Although feminism is often thought to have almost disappeared during this period, the role of women in society was actually a big topic of debate. Simone de Beauvoir’s *Le deuxième sexe* (1949) and Margaret Mead’s *Male and female* (1950) were only the most famous of several books on this topic that appeared during these years.¹⁷ In this section, I will sketch the ideas of four widely read Dutch authors and one lesser known one. While different in many ways, they shared key assumptions and concepts about women in society, ideas that also informed the activities of the volunteer organisations and which we can compare with the imaginary of the BB.

My first witness is Martina Tjeenk Willink (1905–1992), a lawyer and the only female member (for the Social Democratic Party) of the senate. At a meeting of the Union of Women’s Volunteers in 1948, she gave a speech on ‘Woman in leading positions’.¹⁸ The recent war and the current nuclear threat, she says, show that our culture is in deep trouble. This is caused by three potentially valuable tendencies which have run amok: individualism has isolated humans from their deep connections with the world, rationalism has blocked from view the spiritual values hidden in the mysteries of life, and technology, developed to serve us, has enslaved us (she mentions the atom bomb and the assembly line to illustrate this).

All three, according to her, are products of 'centuries of male dominance'. To prevent disaster, we should foster qualities that are 'generally human', but that are more strongly developed in women: connectedness with life, which seeks to bind rather than divide, and which is engendered by our motherhood—whether or not we become mothers ourselves—and a balance of thought and feeling: 'the mind should respect the wisdom of the heart, as the heart should learn the discipline of the mind'. In her reasoning, that is why women should serve 'the human family', the world in which they want to see their children grow up. In her assessment, the recent war has widened women's sense of social responsibility and given them confidence in their capabilities. These are gains that have to be developed further, both for our personal development and for society.

A few years later, the physician-philosopher Frederik Buytendijk (1887–1974) published his influential study *De vrouw* (*Woman*, 1951), framed as a reply to De Beauvoir's book, which he called the *most important* work on the subject (his emphasis) (Buytendijk 1969: 25). *De vrouw* was reprinted 16 times until the late 1960s. Like De Beauvoir, Buytendijk argued within an existentialist framework, but he differed from De Beauvoir and Sartre in emphasising the meaningful relationship of human beings to their world.¹⁹ His core argument was that being human meant being physically in the world. From birth, a person's body was the 'preliminary sketch of his existence', and being male or female invited a certain relationship with the world, without being deterministic. A woman's body invited her to develop her caring qualities, which culminated in motherhood. However, a woman could cultivate all human capacities, including those that were usually associated with men, as had become evident during the war and on many other occasions (Buytendijk 1969: 9). And the gift of caring for life was human, rather than exclusively female. Buytendijk's learned treatise did not differ basically from Tjeenk Willink's short speech: he too spoke of the need for qualities that women can develop more naturally, and he also liked to speak of the 'mysteries' of human existence that could not be grasped by scientific analysis.

Two years before Buytendijk's book came out, in 1949, a stage play, *De wereld heeft geen wachtkamer* (*The world has no waiting room*), written by Maurits Dekker, caused a small sensation in the Netherlands (Van Lente 2012: 155–156). It portrayed a group of researchers working on a military-funded project to develop a more powerful explosive than plutonium. When a young researcher becomes fatally ill after exposure to radiation, the elderly housemaid of the professor who leads the project

observes how the militarisation of research has changed the atmosphere in the team. No longer do the students come and visit the professor, making jokes, she says, but ‘bigwigs in uniform who have secrets and suddenly shut up when you enter the room’. The professor, she has noticed, has become tense and sleepless. ‘What for?’ she exclaims, ‘Why don’t people just live?’ She expressed what Tjeenk Willink and Buytendijk had formulated as a typically female rejection of the destructive, male pursuit of nuclear weapons research. No doubt, the author was on her side and wanted the audience to feel the same.²⁰

Perhaps the most profound (and beautifully written) exploration of the role of women in the atomic age was the well-known novelist Hella Haasse’s (1918–2011) long essay *Een kom water en een test vuur* (A vessel of water and bowl of fire, 1959). The ‘vessel of water and bowl of fire’ of the title were the gifts that, in Roman times, the bridegroom offered to his bride as she entered the home of which she was to be the *domina* dressed in an orange and saffron robe, as if she were a flame. The fire stood for erotic passion (the origin of all culture, said Haasse), but also for the oven that magically transformed dough into wholesome food, and of course for her womb, which would produce new life. And water was the symbol of life itself. According to Haasse, the modern age, in which water comes from a tap and light from an electric lightbulb, has lost contact with these elementary phenomena. The awareness of women’s deep and mysterious connection with the basics of life is gone. Brides now wear a white dress, symbolising their untouched delivery to the closed-off space of the home where the man rules. This state of affairs is deeply troubling now that water and fire have entered into a monstrous contract in the hydrogen bomb. As humanity is going through its most drastic transformation ever, women should reconnect to this ‘cosmic space’, symbolised by water and fire. For ‘[t]he whole world is the home of woman’ (Haasse 1959: 17, 77). Their special mission was to help others to reconnect to the larger whole, both in a mystical and in a practical sense: to devote ‘all our attention, love, and energy to what is given to us, ‘earthly reality’, things, human beings, nature’ (Haasse 1959: 34–36, 150). This would serve as a counterforce to the male tendency to dominate nature, which had led to the frightening, soulless world of modern machinery.

My final witness, much less well known, is Jo Le Rütte (1888–1972), a retired secondary school teacher, who in 1962 published a pamphlet called *De vrouw en het Atoomtijdperk* (Woman and the atomic age). She was a pacifist, Esperantist and an early member of the Dutch pacifist

party, which was founded in 1957.²¹ Like Haasse, Le Rütte characterised her time in terms of technology: on the one hand, spectacular material improvement after the war, and on the other hand, the coming of the atomic age, bringing constant fear of utter destruction (Le Rütte 1962: 6). She identified technology with male power: certainly not bad in itself, but potentially deadly. 'If we walk the same road as we do now, humanity will be destroyed by technological violence' (Le Rütte 1962: 29, 31). This can be prevented only by placing international affairs in the hands of men and women together, just as children are brought up by a father and a mother. Like the other authors, she regarded the family as the core of society, and motherhood the core quality of women, endowing them with a caring disposition. This care should be extended to the world at large. She proposed, among other things, giving women prominent positions in economic and financial policy—which were similar to managing the family budget—general disarmament and the spread of Esperanto, so that people around the world could get to know each other (Le Rütte 1962: 42).

Le Rütte's pamphlet reminds us that the maternal drive could lead to pacifist activity as well as to supporting civil defence. Lawrence Wittner has documented the prominent role of women in antinuclear movements in several countries from the mid-1950s onward (Wittner 2000). I have not found much evidence for this in the Netherlands, although members of the pacifist party to which Le Rütte belonged sometimes explained their convictions in these terms. One of them wrote later, during the 'second feminist wave': 'Even if you reject the mother role, you don't have to discard your caring and emotional capacities. After all, we have to teach men to also become more caring and "maternal"' (Denekamp et al. 1987: 68).

These women shared the notion that they had a special, caring task in society. This idea had originated in the first feminist wave, but the war and the threat of nuclear war had increased its urgency: women's participation in public affairs was necessary to stymie destructive male tendencies.

This idea found practical expression in the rise of voluntary movements, especially in the 1930s. In 1938, when international relations were tense and war loomed, a group of ladies (most were from wealthy families and many held academic degrees) established the *Korps Vrouwelijke Vrijwilligers* (Women's Volunteers Corps), which trained its members to help protect the population against the consequences of air raids. The Korps presented itself as 'an instrument for the government when it needs

the population to provide help'. This might be in the event of war, a flood or some other disaster (Hueting 1995: 10, 16). Hundreds of women joined the Korps, and very soon there were 30 local chapters all over the country (Hueting 1995: 28).

In May 1940, three days before the German invasion, the Korps offered its services to the National Inspection for Protection against Air Attacks. The government officials rejected the offer. The women, baffled, decided to continue work on their own (Hueting 1995: 37). When the inner city of Rotterdam was destroyed by German bombs a few days later, the Korps provided shelter and food to hundreds of refugees. At the end of the war, girls and women from the Southern part of the country, which had been liberated first, went to help exhausted housewives in the North to clean up and repair their homes. And in 1953, when the South-Western part of the country was inundated during a storm, women volunteers again provided essential help.

In the early postwar years, a conflict arose between the *Unie van Vrouwelijke Vrijwilligers* (Union of Women Volunteers, or UVV), the successor organisation of the Korps, and several local women's voluntary organisations that did not want to be part this organisation. A new umbrella organisation was created in 1951, the *Nederlandse Federatie voor Vrouwelijke Vrijwillige Hulpverlening* (FVVH) (Hueting 1995: 71–86). The UVV declined to join the new federation. The English Women's Voluntary Society, the UVV's admired example, declared that it would only deal with the UVV. This complicated conflict, although not important to our topic in itself, does explain the strange way in which women's voluntary organisations became involved in civil defence a few years later.

WOMEN VOLUNTEERS AND THE BB

When the government began recruiting volunteers for the BB in 1953, the UVV and other women's organisations encouraged their members, except mothers of small children, to join. As we saw, many women volunteered for the Social Care Service and prompted their husbands to join the organisation too. Later that year, the Department of the Interior sent three women, including the president of the UVV, to England to learn about civil defence from the Women's Voluntary Service. As the BB struggled to get started, the UVV decided to follow the example of the WVS, which had initiated a campaign in 1955 to educate small groups of women in 'self-protection'. The campaign was called 'One-in-Five',

indicating that it aimed to reach one fifth of all adult British women, a goal that seemed more realistic than attempting to reach all women (Hunt 2012). Women were invited in groups of ten to twelve persons, who would meet three times to be instructed on how to minimise the impact of fire, radiation and blast caused by a nuclear explosion, and how to care for the injured. Instruction was provided by a volunteer who had followed a short course.

When the BB began its campaign to recruit more women in 1956, it used the rhetoric of women's natural caring talents.²² A recruitment folder said that although the BB was not usually associated with women and girls, their female qualities made them perfectly suited to this kind of work. 'All women share the quality of self-sacrificing love', the pamphlet said, and every woman's heart was inclined 'to help, to serve' people in need, as had been demonstrated so well during the flood of 1953. While some tasks were obviously suitable for women (first aid, providing food and shelter, administration, communication), no position in the BB was unattainable for them—including higher staff functions.

As it turned out that new women volunteers were recruited mainly in areas where the BB had hardly campaigned (Van der Boom 2000: 71–72), the organisation asked the FVVH, in February 1958, for help educating Dutch women in '*Individuele Zelfbescherming*' (individual self-protection).²³ The BB official responsible for recruitment explained that while there were now 166,000 volunteers, including 30,000 women, 250,000 volunteers were needed. He calculated that about two million Dutch women would be eligible for the BB—not counting elderly women and young mothers. Because men would have to do military service or be at their jobs in the event of war, women would have to take responsibility for protecting their homes. And 'obviously', he said, the FVVH was needed to recruit these women. He then repeated the formula of women's fitness for all positions in the BB, their natural caring qualities and their sense of responsibility, which had been proven during the Second World War and the flood of 1953. Their participation would also help give the BB a stronger position in society. In this way, they could contribute to defending the West, which was one of the BB's purposes.²⁴

The FVVH agreed to help the BB, but then discovered that two women from the UVV were already taking a course on the One-in-Five campaign conducted by the British WVS, and that these ladies were determined to set up a similar programme in the Netherlands. As the UVV ladies' trip was financed by the Department of the Interior, which was also

responsible for the BB, this was a curious mistake for the BB to make—and not the last one. The minister, by the way, had approved both the UVV's plan and that of the FVVH.

The UVV's One-in-Five programme was at first directed towards the four large cities in the West: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht. The mayors of those cities were to determine when and where the instruction meetings would be held. The three-part course was devoted entirely to protection in the case of nuclear war, and all women in these cities would be invited. The FVVH set up a rather different programme. It consisted of a much more loosely structured course about all kinds of accidents that could happen in and around the house ('Safety in the home'). Protection against radiation was only one part of the programme. The course was meant for members of the organisations that belonged to FVVH.

When the board of the FVVH discussed its plans with the two UVV ladies, the latter criticised the looseness of the FVVH course and said that they had already been invited by mayors of other cities, besides those of the four large ones. They were very displeased that the FVVH was setting up a programme of its own. But when the FVVH consulted its member organisations, several of them showed strong resistance against the UVV's approach. They rejected being at the beck and call of the mayors, or of the BB. One woman argued that having completed a course to become an instructor, no mayor could keep her from teaching the members of her organisation. Another said that the members of her organisation did not want to deal with emergencies relating to nuclear war only.²⁵ And the secretary of the Liberal Protestant Women's Federation wrote to the BB that several women in her organisation were anti-militarist, and therefore rejected cooperation with the BB.²⁶

Clearly, One-in-Five was much more in line with the BB's purposes than the FVVH's plan. Like the BB (and like its British example, the WVS), the UVV tried to convince women that a nuclear war was not likely to destroy the whole country, and that preparing for an attack strengthened the defensive stance of the country. It also argued that the population's attitude towards the BB should be bent in a more positive direction.²⁷ The Minister of the Interior supported the UVV. He wrote to the FVVH that instruction meetings should be organised only upon the request of the mayor, and that the FVVH did not hold a monopoly on this activity.²⁸

Both the UVV and the FVVH seem to have realised that in order to be successful, they should keep their distance from the BB, as that organisation was unpopular with the wider population. For example, when the BB proposed providing the FVVH with pre-printed meeting invitations which also contained BB slogans, the FVVH replied that they preferred other means of reaching their members. Aversion to the BB was expressed frequently in meetings. It must have been aggravated when BB made another tactical mistake: it distributed its brochure 'Suggestions for protecting your family and yourself' (September 1961) without consulting, or even informing, the women's organisations.

In 1960, the two organisations managed to reach a compromise and created one programme, which was rather similar to the One-in-Five plan. The FVVH would coordinate the project. Two years later, the FVVH had managed to recruit and train 1,600 volunteer instructors.²⁹ The campaign proceeded smoothly and was rather successful. The wives of mayors played an important role in propagating the meetings. Instructors often reported the lively interest of their audiences and requests from several organisations to organise courses for their employees.³⁰ The 'Suggestions' brochure led to a short boom in requests for meetings, but the ridicule of the BB that followed must have harmed the demand for courses too. There was another brief increase of interest in 1965, when the FVVH organised meetings following a course on television about accidents at home (not specifically nuclear war). 4,577 women participated. But in January 1966, fatigue set in. One of the main organisers said that most people did not want to hear about war, and that she had become averse to giving courses. Many women said they felt the same way.³¹ By that time, 43 municipalities had attained the target of reaching one-in-five women. Most of these were in the countryside. In the cities, interest was much lower (for variations in the urban-rural divide in Britain and Sweden, see the chapter by Cronqvist and Grant in this volume). Overall, only 12% of the number aimed for was reached. Still, 88,594 women had taken the FVVH's course.³²

In 1965, the government learned from a preliminary survey that, for many people, creating a shelter in their homes was more difficult than had been assumed. It was decided to investigate precisely how many shelters actually existed (Van der Boom 2000: 157–167). The FVVH was asked in 1966 to suspend its courses until the results were known. This took several years. The Minister of the Interior asked the FVVH to maintain its corps of volunteers in the meantime, so that they could pick up their

activities as soon as the government knew more about the shelter situation in the Netherlands. The FVVH responded by organising regular meetings for its instructors, with invited speakers who discussed the latest developments in international politics.³³ When the survey was finally completed in 1971, the minister informed the FVVH that its courses were no longer needed, but that he would appreciate the organisation staying on standby.³⁴

CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that the FVVH worked much more effectively towards preparing the population for nuclear attack than the BB. Hundreds of women volunteered to become instructors; they often reported successful and well-attended meetings, and were invited to give presentations by several organisations. Although they did not meet the 'one-in-five' target, they did reach a large number of Dutch women. That the FVVH and the UVV managed to overcome fundamental differences in approach and worked out an effective programme together was another indication of their creativity and tenacity. Even when the BB decided to discontinue the courses in 1966, the FVVH kept its corps of instructors up to date on international affairs and the risks of nuclear war, so that they would be well prepared in case the government requested their assistance again.

All of this scores very favourably when compared to the failed recruitment efforts of the BB, the sluggish participation of members in their exercises and the public relations disaster of the 'Suggestions' folder. The FVVH could probably have been even more successful if the BB had not operated so clumsily, first overlooking the government-supported initiative of another organisation, and then publishing and distributing a brochure without consulting the women's organisations first. Its bad reputation must have made the work of the women more difficult, which is why they kept their distance from the BB.

The relative success of the FVVH can be attributed partly to its solid philosophy, as expounded by Tjeenk Willink, Haasse and Le Rütte, that fostered a conviction that the BB lacked. It was an elaboration of the 'maternalist ideology' of the first feminist wave, made more urgent by the threat of nuclear war. It received broad recognition, for example through professor Buytendijk's widely read book, and it inspired women to provide crucial services at the beginning and the end of the war and

during the 1953 flood. Another factor was that the FVVH was a grass-roots organisation. A sociological survey carried out in 1962 showed that most Dutch people felt they had no influence on political decision making, and that in international affairs, the Netherlands was simply powerless. The debacle with the 'Suggestions' brochure in 1961 must have reinforced this scepticism towards the state (Valkenburgh 1964: 208, 229–231, 239).³⁵ Given such a lack of confidence in state authorities, an organisation such as the FVVH, run by women throughout the country, which had proven its competence and organisational power, could much more easily recruit volunteers and keep them engaged. The same survey showed that women tended to be more nationalistic than men and more supportive of military defence, which can be interpreted as indicating their willingness to serve their compatriots in times of a national emergency (Valkenburgh 1964: 239).³⁶ And finally, as was the case in West Germany (see the chapter by Molitor in this volume), including preparations for a nuclear war in a range of first-aid activities around the house made it much less controversial than, say, shelter building.

Several features of Jasanoff's description of sociotechnical imaginaries clarify this analysis. First, contestation was a conspicuous aspect of the development of civil defence imaginaries (Jasanoff 2015b: 323). All conceptions of civil defence had to be articulated in the face of fierce criticism and scorn, which was basically similar, though not equally intense, in all countries examined in this book. We can add that very different practices could be legitimated with the same maternalist imaginary: not only participation in civil defence, but antinuclear activism and *rejection* of civil defence as well. Second, the women's organisations *performed and enacted* this imaginary, rather than proclaiming and expounding it in articles, books or other documents. Theirs was 'a continually rearticulated awareness of order in social life and a resulting commitment to that order's coherence and continuity' (Jasanoff 2015a: 26). To be sure, this awareness was conceptually well-grounded, and expounded in the work of well-known authors such as Haasse and Buytendijk. It had also proven its practical efficacy. But in spite of all this, the women volunteers failed to undermine the dominant paternalist imaginary embodied in the BB. Jasanoff writes that a new imaginary can only assert itself if 'an imagined new order draws on deeper notions of how societies ought to fit together', or when they 'fall in line with the way things are remembered as being' (Jasanoff 2015b: 339). Neither was the case in the Netherlands until in the late 1960s. Only then did the so-called second feminist wave launch

its attack against the paternalism that was so deeply ingrained in society. This illustrates how entrenched ‘infrastructures’ of thought and feeling—in this case gender conceptions and (dis)trust of government—profoundly co-determine sociotechnical imaginaries.

Acknowledgements I would like to express my profound gratefulness to the people who helped me in this project: A. Le Rütte-Veringa and Iris Le Rütte, niece and grand-niece of Jo Le Rütte, who shared their reminiscences of their aunt Jo with me; Roselle Servage and her colleagues, who received and helped me at the Atria archive, even while the rooms were being renovated; Manuel Kaal at Kantar Group in Amsterdam, for locating and sharing NIPO polls with me; Jop Ewijk and Rolf Boost for helping me with the copyrights of Wim Boost’s cartoon; and the editors of this volume for their excellent direction of this collective enterprise.

NOTES

1. My description of the Dutch civil defence organisation relies heavily on Van der Boom (2000).
2. After 1962, the NIPO stopped regularly asking this question, which indicates a degree of relaxation. But fears could flare up. After the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, about half the population believed that war had become more likely, while about 30% said this likelihood had not changed (NIPO report, no. 1229, 12 September 1968). The exact date of the polls matters a lot, as is clear from the data on 1950 (shortly after the start of the Korean war) and 1962: the first poll was taken during tensions around Berlin, but before the Cuban missile crisis started, the second when the crisis was resolved. The date for 1953 is difficult to read. Additional data and analysis in Van Lente (2012). My findings contradict those of Van der Boom (2000: 27, 56, 105) and others who state that the Dutch population only really began to worry about nuclear war from about 1955.
3. *Panorama* 8, November 1946. Based on *Life magazine*, 20 August 1945 and 19 November 1945.
4. E.g. *Volkskrant*, 5 October 1948, *Overijssels Dagblad*, 9 October 1948, *Gooi-en Eemlander*, 13 December 1948, *Volkskrant*, 24 September 1949. Bradley criticised: *Volkskrant* 14 May 1949.

5. A sample: *De Tijd*, 19 July 1955, *Volkskrant*, 9 July 1955, *Leeuwarder Courant*, 30 June 1955, *Trouw*, 29 June 1955, *Vrije Volk*, 29 June 1955. Wykeham-Barnes quoted in *Het Vrije Volk*, 29 June 1955. 'Atom bombs' on the Netherlands: *Trouw*, 25 June 1955.
6. That this was the opinion of most Dutch people was often stated in newspapers, without empirical support: it was an 'everyone knows' type of statement, e.g. *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 31 July 1965.
7. Internationaal Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging (IAV) in Atria (hereafter: Atria), Archief FVVH, inv. no. 129, L. Tielenius Kruythoff, responsible for recruitment of volunteers, in an explanation about 'More women in the B.B.' ('Meer vrouwen in de B.B.'), November 1957.
8. E.g. *Het Vrije Volk*, 16 February 1962.
9. *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 28 May 1968.
10. Van der Boom (2000: 195–196, 200, 209). For criticism of civil defence in West Germany, Switzerland, Sweden and Britain, see the chapters in this volume by Molitor (Chapter 3), Marti (Chapter 8) and Cronqvist and Grant (Chapter 9).
11. *Wenken voor de bescherming van uw gezin en uzelf* (September 1961), *Wenken voor Eerste Hulp* (September 1961); *Toelichting op de wenken voor de bescherming van uw gezin en uzelf* (October 1961), all in my own collection. See the chapters in this volume by Björnsson (Chapter 2) and Bennesved and Sylvest (Chapter 5).
12. Rotterdam City Archives, 1438 Gemeente Barendrecht, no. 2973: Vragenlijst civiele verdediging, naar de toestand op 1 januari 1968; and no 2975, 'Fallout-beschermingsplan gemeente Barendrecht' uitgave 1972; *De Telegraaf*, 4 March 1966.
13. Cf *Volkskrant*, 1 October 1961.
14. Nederlands Instituut voor Vredesvraagstukken (1975: 201, 356–357).
15. Van der Boom (2000: 55–56, 75–86). *De Paladijn*, the organisation's monthly magazine, constantly had to defend itself against criticism and scorn, including from its own volunteers. See the description by a volunteer going to an exercise in *De Paladijn*, 1964, no. 5. More in *De Paladijn*, 1964, no. 4).
16. Goudsblom (1967: 46–49, 128–139), Van Setten (1987: 24–31, 50, 59, 65, 71–72), Schuyt and Taverne (2000: 274–278, 283), and Pott-Buter and Tijdens (1998: 27–28, 136).

17. Others were Helene Deutsch, *Psychology of women* (2 vols., 1944, 1945), Viola Klein, *The feminine character* (1946), Georgene Seward, *Sex and the social order* (1946) and Gina Lombroso, *L'âme de la femme* (1947). For the intellectual context, see Schuyt and Tavernier (2000: 384–386).
18. Published in *Raad en daad. Maandblad van de Unie van Vrouwelijke Vrijwilligers*, 3/7–8 (1 July 1948).
19. Here Buytendijk followed Gabriel Marcel and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who also were critical of Sartre's view of the meaning of life.
20. The young researcher dies after he has sacrificed himself by entering the reactor core and, to prevent an explosion, manually inserting the cadmium regulators which had jammed. In the light of the common symbolism discussed in this section, one could read this as the young man entering a 'counter-womb', which brings death instead of life.
21. She writes a little about herself in a second edition of her booklet *Leven in het Atoomtijdperk! Hoe? Drie brieven naar aanleiding van "De vrouw in het atoomtijdperk"* s.l.s.a. [1968]. Her niece A. Le Rütte-Veringa and her grandniece Iris Le Rütte provided additional information.
22. Stadsarchief Rotterdam, no. 537, archive of the city district head ('wijkhoofd') J.M. Coppens, box 2/4, folder 'Wegwijzer BB 1', recruitment folder 'Ook vrouwen in de B.B.' s.a. [1956].
23. Overviews of FVVH's information campaign in *De Paladijn*, September 1962, 1964 no. 1, 1965 no. 9, and 1966 no. 11; and in Atria, Archief Federatie voor Vrouwelijke Vrijwillige Hulpverlening (hereafter Archive FVVH), inv. no. 122, 'Chronologische gang van zaken mbt Door Vrouwen Aan Vrouwen', 1959; and inv. no. 128, 'Verslag van de actie Door Vrouwen Aan Vrouwen – Een op Vijf', s.a. [1966]. The discussion below is also based on documents in this archive, inv. no. 121–129.
24. Archive FVVH, inv. no. 129, Tielenius Kruythof, speech for FVVH, 16 May 1957; and explanatory letter to FVVH member organisations, November 1957; speech 23 November 1957.
25. Archive FVVH, inv. no. 122, 'Chronologische gang van zaken.'
26. Archive FVVH, inv. no. 129, letters of 20 June and 27 September 1958. Similarly in Britain, the movement against nuclear weapons,

- CND, urged WVS to stop the One-in-Five campaign, which it saw as war preparation. See Hunt, 'One-in-five'.
27. Archive FVVH, inv. no 123, Note by Mrs Ras 'Essentiële punten van het 'Een op Vijf' plan', s.a. [1960].
 28. Archive FVVH, inv. no. 123, Letter from Minister Toxopeus to FVVH, 5 November 1959.
 29. *De Paladijn*, September 1962.
 30. One example: Archive FVVH, inv. no. 127, report by a woman instructor about meetings in The Hague, April–May–June 1966, about courses, among others, at a girls' secondary school and for a group of nurses.
 31. Archive FVVH, inv. no. 124, report on meeting 7 January 1966.
 32. Statistics in Archive FVVH, inv. no. 128, 'Verslag van de actie', s.a. [1966]. And in *De Paladijn*, September 1962.
 33. Archive FVVH, inv. no. 124, 128: documents on the suspension of Voor Vrouwen aan Vrouwen Een op Vijf, 1966. On the 'contact days' for instructors during the following years, see inv. no. 125.
 34. Archive FVVH, inv. no. 126, report on consultation of FVVH with the Minister of the Interior, 28 October 1971.
 35. This study was based on a survey among a random sample of 183 men and 173 women over 23 years of age in the northern city of Groningen in 1962.
 36. This is similar to Great Britain shortly before the Second World War. See Noakes (2012: 748).

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