

# Review of: "The soft power of neutrality Dutch humanitarianism in World War I, 1914-1918"

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This is a well-crafted article that uses four cases to illustrate how a range of Dutch actors, both public and private, engaged in relief work during the First World War. The case studies connect the concrete organizational practice of neutrality with the broader legal and institutional context, discussing both operational mechanics as well as public perceptions. The reader can clearly see clearly how Dutch humanitarianism supported a diffuse dialogue with other neutral countries and with belligerent states. The actors involved all claimed a neutral identity but they did not all align directly with Dutch security policy.

The article shows how large-scale economic warfare blurred the boundary between national security and humanitarian assistance in a neutral setting. For instance, feeding under-nourished German and Austrian children carried heavy implications for Dutch neutrality, as a possible violation of the Allied blockade. At the same time, humanitarian action was invoked to support Dutch diplomatic efforts to secure heating fuel and food from belligerent neighbors. Such examples add a new perspective to the expanding scholarship on economic warfare by highlighting the active role played by neutral humanitarian organizations. This line of analysis could be developed more systematically in the introduction and conclusion.

A more precise definition of "charity" and "humanitarianism" could also sharpen the argument and show how the war contributed to the gradual professionalization of aid work, as well as the distinctive role that neutral states played in that process. Did humanitarian actors leverage different types of technical competence to advance their practical and institutional goals (for example, medical science or nutrition)? Did they firmly ground their humanitarian agenda in their own status as neutral Dutch citizens or was it also tied to their religious and/or organizational allegiances? (Although, these commitments presumably overlapped in complex ways in an organization such as the RK Huisvestingscomité).