

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

Jose Antonio Sanchez Roman¹

¹ Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This is a very interesting piece, casting light on Dutch neutrality during WWI and on the role that humanitarian activities (both, private and governmental sponsored) played in that neutrality. The article is clear and convincing. Therefore, my comments will focus on how to improve the piece by introducing some elements of comparison or by widening the discussion.

For example, it would be interesting to discuss humanitarianism itself, including what the author refers as the Dutch tradition. Some more comments on what that tradition was would be helpful. Moreover, humanitarianism went through important changes precisely at this moment. Increasingly it became associated with a "technical" or "scientific" endeavour and not merely the preserve of religious charities. (The book by Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones* might be useful for the author). To put the Dutch context in this international framework might enrich the piece. Also, since the Dutch tradition apparently emphasized the role of private actors in humanitarian activities, a discussion about the private/governmental responsibilities in the field would be interesting.

The idea of helping human beings was also the idea of helping "our" human beings, both in the 19th and the 20th century. This is apparent in the case of Catholic charities helping Catholic individuals. But again, was an extended phenomenon.

The discussion about "refugees" and "aliens" is truly relevant and enlightening. Again, I would recommend to provide some broader contextualization by, for instance, looking at the discussion on the issue of refugees at the League of Nations. Not everybody fleeing a dangerous situation at home was entitled to the status of refugee (in truth, the Nansen document was specifically created for Russian refugees). An international framework might be really helpful in this crucial part of the paper.

There are important comparisons in the article with the Swiss case. A comparison with Spain, another neutral nation, might be useful. See the article published in *International History Review* by Marina Pérez de Arcos.

Some minor details: the author mentions that humanitarian aid might have helped the Dutch government in the coal deliveries negotiations with the Germans. The idea is plausible. Is there any evidence on this?

On page 8: Where does the quote from Susanne Wolf close?

