

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

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In this article Wim Klinkert explores examples of humanitarian actions initiated in or by the Netherlands during the First World War. Such initiatives developed and changed considerably during and after the First World War, and again after 1945. In the period of the world wars humanitarianism and human rights for instance developed partly in tandem and are still widely understood as tightly connected phenomena today.

During 1914-1918, however, human rights were not at the forefront. Klinkert's examples indicate this as well: the private initiatives were still very close to more 'traditional' charity work like hospitality for children from the warring states or relief for those on the run for the violence of the front ('refugees' for many in that period meant: those fleeing the violence of war. It was not yet a clear legal category with clear definitions, rights and obligations in international law).

Instead of human rights, the more traditional stance of 'upholding international law and civilization' were still key elements in Dutch discourse and policy during these years, which is clearly outlined in Klinkert's article, both with regard to private and government actions: common denominator seems a combination of substantiating this claim to an international audience and at the same time to domestic and diplomatic audiences.

The article may benefit from raising or exploring some broader questions next to the examples discussed: do these examples testify to a merely modest adaptation to the circumstances of the war? They seem to imply the actions still very much bore the characteristics of per-war humanitarian aid and when it came to new initiatives leaned heavily on Swiss examples. Might this modest adaptation be linked to the severely deteriorated international standing of the Netherlands as a neutral by the end of the war? The Netherlands were not invited to the peace talks and especially France and Belgium targeted them for being too 'pro-German' and 'war profiteers'. Also, the 'humanitarian boom', as described by for instance Bruno Cabanes, seems to have passed the Dutch by in many ways in this period.

It may be really promising to further explore the dynamics between the presence of POWs, refugees, deserters and other groups of 'foreigners' and 'aliens' and the development of laws and policies governing (or policing) these groups. Linking such insights to attitudes about national identity and belonging in the post-First World War years might very well help explain why 'traditional Dutch values of hospitality' collapsed in the 1930s.