

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

Branden Little<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Weber State University

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Demonstrating that humanitarianism constituted part of a particular First World War-era government's strategic framework, Klinkert exposes a false dichotomy that permeates thinking about humanitarian activity—in reality, aid to victims was configured by governments and non-governments alike, and it was not preponderantly (or exclusively) the province of a nongovernmental sector of compassionate activists.

Klinkert's use of "soft power" is very appealing for its subtle critique of customary definitions used by international relations scholars and pundits that too often narrowly define the concept as primarily economic activity rather than "hard" (military) activity. Humanitarianism sat athwart the full spectrum of powers exercised by state and civil society in the First World War. Its "soft" forms, as Klinkert shows, were no less consequential to the preservation of Dutch neutrality and its advocacy as a neutral power. Much ink has been spilled describing Woodrow Wilson's pursuit of a negotiated end to the war but Dutch efforts have not been accorded much attention despite working along similar lines. Klinkert's research illustrates that several neutral countries practiced humanitarian statecraft.

Klinkert's fascinating examination of the role of the Catholic Church in its ministry to children affected by the war reveals the ways in which religious institutions acted internationally and skillfully navigated seemingly intractable hostilities among warring countries. Quakers, Jews, and other faith-based communities regularly crossed warring lines to aid victims and were able to do so because of the trust they retained among the belligerents. Undoubtedly, aid to children in the war could constitute a new area for transnational researchers. Yet Klinkert reminds us how complex it was even for contemporaries to discern who had conceived the idea to support German children through compassionate feeding and recreational programs. The firestorm the proposal elicited unambiguously displayed that aid could not be separated from politicized understandings of the war. Answers to questions of what constituted a neutral's "moral duty," as Klinkert aptly describes it, were entangled in disputed definitions of international law and uncertainty about how best to safeguard Dutch neutrality.

Suggestions for revision:

- The notion of a humanitarian identity could be incorporated into this essay as a way of conceptualizing how the Dutch interpreted their paramount duties in wartime. The conclusion alludes to this concept but it could be emphasized earlier in the paper to good effect.
- Navy could replace military in the phrase "The German *military* torpedoed Dutch ships."

- “In 1918 the number certainly dropped considerably.” Why? A little more explanation would likely clarify that military operations were intruding in what would have been the third successive year of hosting considerable numbers of German children.
- “were relatively quickly [and permanently] sent back home.” (The addition of ‘and permanently’ might help to better distinguish the continuing program to aid German and other children in 1919.
- One wonders if there are any sources that discuss the selection of German children by German officials and whether it was the same children returning every year or not.
- It seems to me that the last paragraph in the German children section is a bit too complicated and lacks a central focus. It is perhaps rightly concerned with appraisals of the whole endeavor. The sentence which indicates Dutch criticisms of the deportations program in Belgium does not lead to discussion of German responses (which could have been hostile), and instead transitions to a sentence about a German official’s praise. In short, several elements of the last paragraph could probably be better intermixed with the preceding paragraphs to better preserve the chronology of 1914-1920s, rather than returning to 1917.
- Elaborate briefly on Kuyper’s “very one-sided” support of the Hungarian Red Cross. What were the implications? The reasoning?
- “During the crucial month of 1919”—explain briefly why it mattered that in early 1919 the Allies were not strongly favorable toward the Netherlands. Linking this sentiment to the Treaty negotiations would probably convey the importance of preserving Allied favor. Or was it related more to postwar economics and ongoing humanitarian aid?
- “And as they were many press” should probably be “And as there were many press”
- Is interference or meddling the best way to describe potential government sponsorship, encouragement, promotion of ambulance services? If the Dutch government was potentially obstructionist, your characterization makes a lot of sense—but if so, a little clarification about why it was intrusive would reveal better the relationship of government to private ambulance service.
- “Were eligible for leaving the camps [because they could no longer perform military duties].”
- “We can [safely] assume the Dutch government was well informed . . .”
- “Belligerent’s blocks” should probably be “belligerents’ blocs”