Noodhulp zonder natiestaat: Bovenlokaal geefgedrag in de Nederlandse Republiek, 1620 - circa 1800

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Summary

Historiography has so far seen early modern solidarity with foreign co-religionists and that with compatriots as two different worlds, each with its own conclusions and assumptions. Historians have argued that the Westphalian Peace signified the end of large-scale religious persecution and forced emigration. In this narrative, it is assumed that 1648 also signified the end of transnational confessional solidarity. For the United Provinces, disaster historiography assumes that long-distance domestic aid was impossible because there were no strong central institutions and because feelings of solidarity were only weakly developed as Dutch people identified mainly with their own city or region. In short, institutional incapacity and particularism turned Dutch disaster relief into a local affair. Third, it was thought that early modern solidarity was confined to one's own social or religious group. This changed in the eighteenth century with the rise of a nation state that was capable of organising supra-regional relief through central institutions and newly emerging national feelings, while simultaneously, the Enlightenment spawned ideas that all people share the same human nature thus enabling empathy with people very different from oneself. These changes subsequently led to the emergence of modern secular humanitarian aid. Although historians have since contended that patriotic feelings and a humanitarian sensibility already existed in the early modern era, we don't know if these were used to promote emergency aid campaigns.

Solidarity with foreign co-religionists, on the one hand, and with victims of domestic disasters, on the other, have so far been studied as separate research areas. As a result, no in-depth research has been done into the apparent contradiction that the Dutch Republic was known for its large-scale assistance to foreign fellow believers while failing to support domestic disaster victims. Working from the hypothesis that these forms of aid were not so different since they were part of the same giving culture, this study integrates these two strands of emergency aid. Reasons for charitable giving have primarily been studied at the level of donors, especially with regard to the local poor. In the Republic every collection required permission from the civil authorities. By concentrating on donors, we not only miss all aid requests that were rejected by the authorities but also the arguments underlying these decisions. Therefore, this study uses a process-based approach in which aid requests are

followed from the victims (level 1) to the higher authorities (level 2, national/provincial) and via the city magistrates that granted local permission (level 3) to the individual donors (level 4). For the first level, it analyses the arguments used by or on behalf of the victims. At the level of the authorities (2 and 3), the emphasis is on the internal justification of the decision to grant or refuse aid rather than on the external legitimation of that decision. Finally, the motivation of the donors (level 4) is studied, using sources such as formal collection notices (in which the authorities authorise and legitimise the relief campaign), collection booklets (in which the victims argue their case), sermons and pamphlets. After all, we may assume that these used those arguments that were known or assumed to appeal to potential donors.

Part I studies solidarity with foreign fellow believers. The first two chapters deal with international Calvinist solidarity during the Thirty Years' War. Chapter 1 shows that the States of Holland consistently rejected provincial collections and the formation of a permanent relief fund for the Palatinate. Hence, relief remained limited to local church collections. This seems to confirm local particularism, but the opposite is true: it was in the joint interest of all cities to curtail the immigration of needy refugees in order to spare the local poor-relief systems. For the States of Holland, domestic interests clearly outweighed Calvinist solidarity. The use of humanitarian arguments in pamphlets aiming to convince donors, such as showing the effects of the terrible famine, indicates that ordinary people were thought to be receptive to a humanitarian discourse as early as the 1630s.

In the public discourse on the 1641 Irish Rebellion and the ensuing ‘massacre’ of Protestants, these were cast as innocent victims of barbarian Catholic persecution, and pamphleteers predicted the imminent demise of the Reformation (chapter 2). Immediately after the Republic declared its neutrality at the onset of the English Civil War in 1642, this policy became the subject of a heated debate in the Dutch press. In most pamphlets the case of the English Parliament was inextricably linked to the defence of the true Reformed religion and by extension, the Dutch Republic. When in 1643 Parliament requested financial support, formally for humanitarian aid to distressed Irish Protestants but actually for the parliamentarian army, the Dutch authorities rejected national and provincial collections and referred the request to the city councils (level 3). The decentralised state structure made this administrative flexibility possible and enabled the higher authorities to avoid the uncomfortable choice between national interests (foreign policy and trade), the stadtholder’s

dynastic concerns and transnational Calvinist solidarity. Again, decentralisation of the collection was not due to particularism, but driven by the desire to stick to the existing foreign policy while at the same time pacifying domestic tensions.

The following two chapters study aid to persecuted Waldensians and Huguenots between 1655 and 1731, when no fewer than seven large-scale collections were organised. Chapter 3 highlights the role of the higher authorities (level 2), the organisation of the collections and the proceeds (tables 5 and 6). Chapter 4 is devoted to the way donors were persuaded to give. Unlike what we saw in the previous chapters, the civil authorities took the lead in all relief efforts from 1655 onwards, with the exception of the 1728 flood disaster. The churches were increasingly relegated from a leading into a supporting role. Three campaigns (1655, 1687, 1699) were organised nationally on the same day. In 1655 Oliver Cromwell had called on all Protestant powers to join forces after the massacre of the Waldensians in Piedmont. Although the decision regarding collection type (door-to-door or in the churches) was left to the provinces, the States General proclaimed the first nationwide collection. In spite of the importance of Protestant unity, this study suggests that upholding the status of the Dutch Republic as one of the great Protestant powers, especially after the recent defeat in the Anglo-Dutch War (1652-1654), was the main reason for the national approach.

Centralisation went even further with the nationalisation of the collection proceeds (from 1687) and the use of uniform argumentation in collection notices (1699). Although confessional solidarity as a motive did not disappear, the main reason for supporting Waldensians and Huguenots during the Forty Years' War against France (1672-1713), was the defence of the Republic, both of its territory and its freedom of conscience. This required the preservation of the religious status quo in Europe and justified the use of the collection proceeds for war purposes, such as the support of Huguenot armies, the *Glorieuse Rentree* of the Waldensians (1689) and the eighteenth-century Camisard uprising. From the 1680s, the civil authorities increasingly regarded contributing to these collections as a civic duty and therefore proclaimed door-to-door collections. When national safety was not at risk (in the 1660s, 1695 and 1731) only provincial or local collections were organised. In the absence of political interests, as in 1728, relief was again left to the churches. Clearly, decentralisation of relief campaigns was not a consequence of particularism or an inadequate state structure but the outcome of a deliberate political choice.

The introduction of door-to-door collections for foreign Reformed did not pass uncontested. Some scholars suggest that the generous Catholic contribution to collections for Huguenot immigrants and Waldensians in Savoy in the 1680s shows Catholic loyalty to the Dutch State. However, chapter 4 shows that this loyalty was enforced by coercive measures, since the authorities feared anti-Catholic rioting if the Catholic contribution lagged. This is not to say that Catholics were disloyal, but that their generous contribution is no proof of loyalty. If anything, these measures show that, under increasing fears of a new religious conflict in Europe, confessional relationships in the Republic hardened.

Chapter 5 studies how the Dutch Mennonites, a tolerated religious minority, succeeded in organising financial and diplomatic aid for their foreign brethren. From 1672 onwards the Dutch Mennonites were seen as loyal citizens because of their obedience and financial support to the Dutch State. Assuming that foreign Mennonites held similar positions, the Dutch authorities were willing to intervene diplomatically on their behalf. While good citizenship remained important in foreign diplomacy between the States General and the Protestant Swiss Cantons, it lost its argumentative value in the domestic discourse in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. At that stage Mennonites began referring to freedom of conscience and humanitarian arguments as reasons for Dutch diplomatic intersessions. However, the preservation of this reputation remained of paramount importance, even more so than transnational Mennonite solidarity. Although the civil authorities limited themselves to diplomatic support, a striking conclusion is that Mennonites had more leeway in organising transnational financial aid than their Reformed compatriots. They could organise themselves into a central Committee for Foreign Needs and an assembly of ‘classes’, which could call for collections or obligatory contributions amongst the participating congregations and even form a central relief fund. Moreover, the authorities never blocked immigration of foreign Mennonites since these didn’t burden the public poor-relief systems. Even though collections were limited to Mennonite circles and in spite of the internal differences, the Committee succeeded in organising substantial aid for their persecuted foreign brethren (table 10).

While Part I shows that the United Provinces were capable of organising provincial and national solidarity, Part II challenges the notion that the lack of a central nation state could then become an obstacle in supra-regional domestic solidarity. Since this observation is mainly based on flood disasters, this study takes city and village disasters as its subject.

When the French army left the occupied Generality Lands in 1748, the States General immediately raised extra funds for the restoration of the fortifications (chapter 6). Although the States rejected responsibility for the cities in or near which these fortifications were situated, it was evident that these were crucial for the functioning of the fortresses and the national defence. The States therefore devised a relief plan based on the reduction of future taxes. After the magistrates of Bergen op Zoom argued that this aid was too little and didn't provide home owners or the city with cash for rebuilding, the plan was expanded with a national collection that was modelled on the 1699 Waldensian collection, and a government-guaranteed (low-interest) loan to be taken out by the city. Obviously, victims were not without influence. Also, this case shows an active and responsive national government that initiated an emergency plan and kept tight control of the funds and the rebuilding process. Moreover, it proves that national disaster aid was possible in Dutch Republic. To investigate whether this was the exception or the rule, the next two chapters explore provincial disaster policies.

Holland developed a relief policy based on four principles (chapter 7). The first was self-reliance and incremental solidarity. This meant that aid was restricted to victims who were unable to help themselves, and that relief should be provided in the first instance by the local community, then by the region and finally by the provincial authorities. Secondly, every relief plan was based on the premise that it should serve 'the benefit of the country' and not harm provincial or national interests, including state finances. The third policy principle was based on ideas of ownership and government responsibilities that dated at least to the sixteenth century. It meant that taxes were raised for specific common goals and shouldn't be used for gifts or to compensate property damage. This principle extended to public buildings as these were city properties. But in practice, the States of Holland sponsored the restoration of private houses and public buildings through remission of *future* taxes and through facilitating private funding (loans, collections and lotteries). Furthermore, Holland regularly subsidised restoration of public churches from the 'ecclesiastical funds'. Fourth, in the middle of the eighteenth century a precedent-based practice had evolved not to allow provincial disaster collections. The States were careful not to thwart giving to the local poor as this might cause destabilisation and social unrest. They therefore preferred not to go beyond expressing support for local collections. Obviously, this policy principle was prompted by the frequency of early modern disasters, but more importantly, it was based on respect for local autonomy.

As chapter 8 shows, these basic principles were also followed by the Provincial States of Overijssel and Gelderland, with the exception of tax remissions, which probably were a responsibility of the provincial authorities. Although national and provincial disaster collections remained an exception, the provincial disaster-relief plans testify to the willingness of higher authorities to aid disaster victims and show supra-regional solidarity.

This study set out to analyse giving arguments at four different levels and compare them in two different strands of emergency aid. It shows that all victims (level 1) created quite uniform images of themselves in which their innocence and self-reliance as well as their dire need were crucial elements. All victims had to convince donors and authorities alike that their gift would be put to good use. Since religion was one of the most important features of life in early modern Europe, religious arguments naturally played a role in all appeals. Foreign fellow believers referred to the international Protestant cause and confessional solidarity, and appealed to a shared experience of persecution and exile. As the Republic was religiously diverse, domestic disaster victims referred only to a general (non-confessional) Christian duty to help those in need. Almost all aid requests included humanitarian arguments. However, these were tailored to the audience that needed to be convinced. Suffering as an independent (true) humanitarian argument was only used to convince donors, while in requests to civil authorities (levels 2 and 3) human suffering mainly served to substantiate the urgency of their need for relief.

At the level of the States General and the Provincial States (level 2) we must distinguish between the international and the domestic emergency policies. For these authorities, international aid was first and foremost a political matter in which confessional solidarity was important, but in itself insufficient. A constant domestic concern was the protection of the public poor-relief system, which in practice meant preventing unwanted immigration. However, the Republic was willing to pay for the resettlement of unwanted refugees elsewhere, a practice that bears resemblance to the current European refugee policy. The main foreign policy concern was the defence of the 'Fatherland' and its freedom of conscience. As a consequence, the protection of Protestant Europe remained topical. When political and religious interests clashed, as in the beginning of the English Civil War, the authorities were faced with a dilemma. By making clever use of the decentralised state structure, both interests could still be served and domestic conflict avoided. Something

similar happened in the 1630s, when Holland allowed only local church collections that held less appeal to aspiring immigrants. While the States General used humanitarian arguments to legitimise their diplomatic interventions and to persuade domestic donors, these were supportive but not decisive in dealing with aid requests. We must therefore conclude there was no purely humanitarian-inspired relief at the level of the higher authorities.

Even though the United Provinces did not have a formal domestic disaster policy, the emergency plans were based on a policy formed by precedents, ideas about self-reliance, incremental solidarity, ownership, government responsibilities and respect for local autonomy. Although the provincial authorities had no disaster funds, they had several options to finance emergency aid. Chief among these were remissions of *future* taxes. The underlying administrative principle was to prevent disasters from unexpectedly creating large holes in government budgets. Although future reductions did not immediately provide victims with money for the reconstruction of their city, they still are a form of provincial solidarity as they affect future provincial incomes. Fortunately, the Provincial States had alternative instruments that directly stimulated reconstruction, such as subsidies from the ecclesiastical funds and providing guarantees for private loans. The civil authorities did not limit themselves to providing financial means. On the contrary, they often installed special committees that rigorously checked damage claims, set requirements for rebuilding and controlled the use of the emergency funds. As funds were limited, priority was given to rebuilding houses and public buildings. While no religious distinction between victims was made, relief plans favoured home owners and rarely provided for tenants or the poor. Apparently, restoring pre-disaster social structures was the main goal.

When national or provincial collections were called, there was no need for the victims to convince the local magistrates (level 3) as, in the political culture of the Dutch Republic, these were usually consulted during the decision-making process. However, when they were restricted to local collections, victims had to convince every city council and carry out the collections themselves. Domestic victims supplemented the above-mentioned generic arguments in their pleas at this level with psychological arguments, such as the charitable reputation of both the donating city and their own community, thereby alluding to reciprocity. Even when the arguments were convincing, there was no guarantee that a collection or a donation would be granted, as city councils had to balance the interests of the local economy and the public poor-relief system against their Christian duty of mercy and the

victims' need. However, the example of other cities or the support of a 'higher administrative order' could tip the balance in favour of the victims, even in economically difficult circumstances. Apparently, city councils did not want to weaken group solidarity. Solidarity with strangers had limits, but so did local self-interest. Moreover, this 'system' of mutual aid served as a collective insurance policy and as a restraint on particularism.

The success of every charitable campaign ultimately rests on mobilising individual donors into giving (level 4). First of all, potential donors need to be made aware of the plight of the victims. Secondly, donors need to be convinced that the cause is worth their money and that the charitable organisation is reliable. Religion remained an important giving argument throughout the period, but its use varied with the type of disaster and over time. In domestic campaigns general Christian values were stressed. In foreign aid campaigns, donor solidarity was evoked with confessional arguments, especially during the Thirty Years' War and the religiously tense 1680s. This changed to general Christian and patriotic arguments when national door-to-door collections had to appeal to a religiously diverse public. Finally, donor self-interest could be aroused by stressing the reciprocity of aid and through providential interpretations. In such interpretations, disasters and persecutions were viewed as divine punishment for sins, not so much of the victims but of the entire community. The Dutch had to mend their ways, and charitable giving was one way in which donors could hope to avert further divine wrath.

The integrated approach of this study has provided us with a fuller picture of long-distance solidarity and emergency relief and more insight into the functioning of the Dutch Republic. What new insights have thus emerged? First, this study shows that aid to foreign co-religionists did not diminish after 1648; the Westphalian Peace was no rupture in this regard. It also shows the lasting importance of religious arguments at all levels, and confirms the use of humanitarian and patriotic arguments throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Apparently, even before the Enlightenment, empathy and humanity were already used to arouse solidarity with distant strangers. Yet, for the higher authorities aid to fellow believers was first of all politically driven, not only after, but also before 1648. By following the decision-making processes, we discovered that individual donors, institutional givers and higher authorities each had their own reasons for giving or refusing aid. Contemporary victims knew this and tailored their arguments to the audience to be persuaded.

The lack of a central nation state was clearly no obstacle for organising national or provincial aid for foreign Protestants and domestic disaster victims. Why then was there no supra-regional solidarity in flood disasters? The difference between floods and other disasters was twofold. Floods are mainly a rural phenomenon and affect mostly the poor as the elites usually don't live in risk areas. Moreover, the frequency of flooding in the Dutch Republic had ensured that flood relief was integrated into the regular water-management procedures in which the water boards were the first to act in the event of a disaster. These, however, were responsible for rescue operations during a disaster and for restoring waterworks, but not for rebuilding communities. They may even have hampered the latter as they formed an additional institutional layer between the victims and the higher authorities. This study suggests that the principle of self-reliance, the role of the elites and the institutional differences may explain the reticence of the higher authorities during flood disasters.

Finally, this study reveals surprising similarities with the present. Even now victims can't count on aid despite the emergence of humanitarianism, human rights and international aid organisations. Some victims are considered less media-genic, get less (media) attention and, as a consequence, less help. Refugees continue to be seen as a threat to the social-welfare system, disputes about administrative responsibilities still hamper adequate victim support and international aid remains strongly politicised.