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van Dam, P.; van Dis, W.

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Beyond the merchant and the clergyman: Assessing moral claims about development cooperation

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Abstract

This article proposes to move beyond the categories of altruism and self-interest in the analyses of the motives for development cooperation. This opposition ignores the inherently moral nature of development policy. The article illustrates the shortcomings of such a perspective by tracing the metaphor of the merchant and the clergyman as archetypical figures shaping Dutch development policy. Through these images, the suggestion of an opposition between moral and amoral motives in the history of development has gained a strong foothold within the interplay of scholars, policy makers and public opinion. We go on by assessing claims about economy, security, solidarity, prestige and guilt, and ecology, which have been brought forward to legitimise Dutch foreign aid. This analysis calls for research on the dynamics of the transnational exchanges of ideas, interests and expectations, especially during episodes when the moral validity of policy was explicitly contested.

Keywords

Development cooperation, altruism, self-interest, morality, metaphor, the Netherlands

Author information

Dr. Peter van Dam is an Assistant Professor of Globalisation, Religion and Transnational Civil Society at the University of Amsterdam. His current research project analyses the ways in which civil society activists have moralised the global market through campaigns for fair trade. p.h.vandam@uva.nl; Spuistraat 134, 1012 VB, Amsterdam, the Netherlands; 0031 20 525 4466.

Homepage: <http://www.uva.nl/profile/p.h.vandam> (includes full list of publications)

Wouter van Dis MA has conducted research on the relationship between state institutions and NGOs in the field of development cooperation as part of his participation in the History Research Master-

programme at the University of Amsterdam. woutervandis@hotmail.com; Spuistraat 134, 1012 VB, Amsterdam, the Netherlands (p/a Peter van Dam).

Introduction

'Remember that there is only one guiding principle: the Dutch interests and nothing else besides it', long-time foreign minister Joseph Luns told the first secretary of development cooperation, Isaïc Diepenhorst, in 1965.¹ The nature and purpose of foreign aid have been subject to controversy in political and scholarly circles from the start. Within these debates, altruistic and self-interested motives are often pitted against each other, suggesting a clear distinction between moral and amoral arguments for providing foreign aid. In the Netherlands, this distinction has been translated to the images of the merchant (*koopman*) and the clergyman (*dominee*) as two competing motives within foreign aid policy. Whereas the merchant represents egoistic, pragmatic or economical motives, the clergyman embodies altruistic, idealistic impulses for providing aid. Underlying these distinctions is the notion that some forms of policy can be regarded as moral, whereas other forms are exempt of moral evaluation.

By analysing the historiography on Dutch development policy as a point in case, we want to argue that it is fundamentally misleading to distinguish between motives which can be judged as moral and motives which cannot. This analysis will highlight how metaphorical language is used to reinforce such distinctions and how their use is solidified through the interplay between scholars, public officials and opinion leaders. Alternatively, we propose to regard each claim about the legitimacy of development cooperation as intrinsically moral. Such a perspective calls for an analysis of competing and mutually reinforcing claims which have been made to justify or discredit certain forms of policy. The notion that certain fields related to development are built on moral foundations is not new. For example, development economics have been questioned regarding their moral foundation.² In a more sweeping fashion, modernisation and development themselves have been presented as moral undertakings.³ By assessing different legitimising claims, this article attempts to find a middle way between analysing only one specific aspect of development cooperation and assessing development only as an integrated complex.

Development cooperation is one of the most morally polarised fields of policy. The tendency to let moral judgment direct the analysis therefore becomes all the more appealing. A more intricate understanding of the workings of this field needs to take into account the diverse motives and interests at stake. It is inadequate to qualify only some of them as moral claims, or to divide them into the twin categories of altruism and self-interest. Instead, analogous to Frederick Cooper's approach to the concept of development, we need to take into account how different ideas and practices of

development cooperation have been substantiated as competing moral claims.⁴ Such a perspective makes clear that development policy at any time cannot be reduced to the workings of a single motive, but was usually over-determined. Secondly, it will highlight the importance of the moral underpinnings of different proposed policies in a field this morally charged. Thirdly, an understanding of the competing claims and related practices and their interplay may serve to more adequately explain the changing outcomes in actual policies.

The merchant and the clergyman

The question of benefit has dominated much of the debate on foreign aid. As a result, many contributions have focused on economic questions, such as measurements of economic growth after receiving aid. This kind of argument has led influential authors as Jeffrey Sachs and William Easterley to polemically claim aid is either pointless or, contrarily, indispensable.⁵ Doubts about the effectivity of aid have been connected to questions about motives for giving aid. For example, Singaporean diplomat and academic Kishore Mahbubani accuses European nations of creating a barrier for worldwide 'convergence', justified by apologetic accounts of how donor countries wanted to 'help' the developing nations. He states that: 'I believe that if a large-scale objective study were done of Western foreign aid, it would demonstrate that the primary intention is to enhance the national interests of the donors and not to help the interests of the recipients.'⁶ Such studies have in fact been carried out. French economist Jean-Claude Berthélemy has tried to quantify the degree of egoistic or altruistic motives behind aid. Countries as Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands were then deemed altruistic, whereas France, Italy and Australia were categorised as egoistic.⁷ Other scholars have attempted to differentiate the levels of political and strategic considerations versus the needs of the recipient.⁸

This juxtaposition of altruism and self-interest played an important role in the analysis of Dutch development cooperation. In this case, the opposition has been imagined as an opposition between a merchant and a clergyman. By choosing these figures, the history of foreign aid is presented as an element of a supposedly age-old dichotomy of commercial and religious impulses. These can purportedly be traced back to the origins of the Dutch Republic in the 16th century, which came into existence after commercial and religious motives caused inhabitants of the Low Countries to rebel against their Spanish king. The opposition thus conveyed, nevertheless, is by no means a uniquely Dutch phenomenon.

'Strong metaphors' such as the image of the merchant and the clergyman have proven apt in connecting several fields of discourse, such as academia, public opinion and policy making. The appeal to images creates a sense of shared knowledge across these fields, even as the meanings ascribed to the images may in fact differ. Incorporating different strains of knowledge, these metaphors create untranslatable images, which often come to dominate the fields of knowledge they address through

their unavoidability.⁹ The resulting lack in alternative perspectives reinforces the problem of 'blind spots' in perception: by choosing to distinguish certain elements, we also choose to ignore others.¹⁰ Although blind spots are inherent to the use of any concept, a lack of alternative perspectives increases their impact. Historicizing and contextualizing strong metaphors partially counters this problem by creating alternative views of the subject at hand. By asking why different parties involved were ready to accept certain blind spots, their analysis also sheds light on the socio-political agenda's which allowed for a certain view to become and remain dominant. Thus, the metaphor of the clergyman and the merchant is acceptable to critics and supporters of development cooperation alike: self-interest is presented as a practical form of policy, which does not have to be morally justified, or cannot be morally justified, whereas altruism is presented as moralistic, or the only moral thing to do, respectively.

The use of the actual terms *koopman* and *dominee* often occurs in historical works directed at a broad audience. In such works, the dichotomy is used in to either diachronically characterise era's as dominated by a certain policy, or to synchronically distinguish between different elements of policy. Taking the figures to characterise different periods, Paul Hoebink has argued that during the 1980s, the 'merchant had to retreat' from development cooperation.¹¹ Taking up the notion of synchronous competition, historian Mari Smits signalled that in post-war Dutch aid policy 'the merchant and the vicar were quarrelling about the spending of the aid budget.'¹²

Within the walls of academia, explicit references to the images of the merchant and the clergyman are less frequent. However, the underlying distinction between moral and amoral motives has informed much of the writing in this area. In his seminal study of Dutch foreign policy, Joris Voorhoeve wrote that national-economic and political reasons could be distinguished from humanitarian and moral motives in policy making.¹³ Key debates in the historiography of Dutch development cooperation have also taken up this distinction. The first of these concerns question of continuity between colonial rule and postcolonial foreign aid. Starting from the assumption that the former was an immoral undertaking, the question of continuity becomes decisive for morally judging development policy. If later policies were ostensibly a continuation of colonial policy, this then leaves no doubt about the self-interested motivation behind them. If, however, policies can be shown to have discontinued colonial practices, claims to their moral validity may hold water. The case for continuity has been made most frequently concerning the Dutch relations with Indonesia since 1949. The independence of Indonesia left the Netherlands with a smaller sales market and with a host of idle colonial experts. This supposedly kindled the interest in development cooperation, which provided a way to compensate for the loss of the colonies economically, politically and psychologically.¹⁴

A more benevolent view of development cooperation is often connected to a perspective stressing discontinuity. Hoebink has argued that during the 1940s, colonial policy was indeed

transformed into development policy, but the latter then transformed into something completely different as countries other than the former colonies were included.¹⁵ Similarly, Marc Frey argued that post-war policy signalled a departure from colonial policy regarding the fact that ‘the costs of colonial development were fully covered by the profit of the colony’.¹⁶ Gerald Meier has added that ‘unprecedented efforts came from western countries to accelerate the development of poor countries’, especially the case of non-colonies, which is why the post-war foreign aid differs from earlier ‘aid’.¹⁷ On the level of practical policy, Johannes de Jong also claimed discontinuity: while a ‘deeply ingrained, semi-religious belief in the country’s vocation to improve the fate of the indigenous people’ was a constant in Dutch policy, cultural and scientific cooperation with Indonesia were quickly broken off after decolonisation. As a result, the Dutch temporarily lost their belief in a special responsibility to improve the fate of people throughout the world. Only during the 1960s, a new taste for development cooperation arose against the background of a depreciatory view of colonial past.¹⁸

The international position of Dutch foreign aid has been a second issue debated along the lines of a moral-immoral opposition. After the Dutch politician Bas de Gaay Fortman called on his country to be a ‘guide country’ (*gidsland*) to the world, scholars have regularly asked whether Dutch policy indeed reflected a high moral standard. For example, Maarten Kuitenbrouwer has attempted to measure the ‘vanguard role’ of the Dutch by comparing their donor spending’s and their commitment to human rights to other countries. He concluded that the Dutch did play a vanguard role in the years from 1973 to 1985 and sought to explain why other countries ‘did less’.¹⁹ Peter Malcontent and Jan Nekkens have pointed out that Dutch policies in fact complied with standards set by institutions such as the World Bank and concluded that therefore, the term ‘shining example’ was an exaggeration.²⁰ Taking this a step further, Duco Hellema has argued that Dutch foreign policy in general was largely the product of international, external, determinants instead of internal determinants. Dutch thinking about developmental aid largely mirrored the ideological shifts and changes that dominated the international scene.²¹

In a third key debate, the assessment of agency in the history of development policy, the opposition between moral and pragmatic motives likewise frequently surfaces. This ties in with the foregoing insofar as a stress on the absence of opportunities to determine policy renders pointless the question to what extent Dutch development cooperation was a moral project. In this vein, Malcontent and Nekkens have argued that Dutch policy was by and large determined by the course of international developmental thought and a constant shortage of funds.²² In instances where agents are nonetheless discerned, these are often labelled ‘self-interested’ or ‘idealist’. This is especially visible in the evaluations of different Ministers for Development. Thus, Berend Jan Udink, the second Minister holding this post from 1967 to 1971, is portrayed as initiating a policy which brought ‘the merchant’ back in charge.²³ Jan Pronk, the social democrat Minister for Development Cooperation from 1973 to

1977 and from 1989 to 1998, has often been labelled an idealist or even a 'true clergyman'.²⁴ His successor in 1977, Jan de Koning, is characterised as 'pragmatic' and 'more into step with reality' than Pronk.²⁵ A similar contrast between a moral, idealist stance and a realistic, amoral one can also be found in descriptions of high-ranking officials.²⁶ Hellema has cautioned historians not to discuss agents of development policies as people thinking in moral terms. Those responsible for development issues were by no means 'woolly minded ethicists'.²⁷

Lastly, where the role of social movements in the shaping of development cooperation is concerned, an opposition between the moral impetus of these movements is often contrasted with pragmatic or self-interested motives of others involved. Thus, the importance of early carriers of the third world movement for creating a moral agenda in the field of developmental aid is pointed out. Whereas policy was at first made in a 'business like' way, the third world movement reacted to this 'realistic' approach with 'moral' arguments.²⁸ The realist or idealist stance of government officials is thus often related to their ties with civil society organisations. Whereas the influential ministerial official Jan Meijer is being portrayed as a pragmatist who was reluctant towards initiatives from civil society, Pronk is seen as a government representative for the third world movement, even radicalizing its initiatives.²⁹ This view is also taken up by histories of social movements, which have dubbed the third world movement altruistic, as opposed to other, supposedly self-interest social movements.³⁰

The use of the images of the merchant and the clergyman by opinion leaders, public officials and scholars alike can thus be seen to have caused a mutual reinforcement of this distinction. Although the metaphor is most common in public debate, the distinction it transports has also shaped the way in which policy has been conceptualised and the perspective scholars have applied to the history and present practice of development cooperation. By contrasting the supposedly moral inclinations of the clergyman with the amoral policies of the merchant, the inherently moral nature of these policies is bygone in favour of a perspective which dubs only some decisions eligible for evaluation as moral claims.

Assessing moral claims

As an alternative, we argue that development cooperation is a prime example of how policy expresses views on what society *ought* to do, even though these views are not always expressly stated. An analysis of the legitimisations underpinning policy enables a better understanding of its complex composition and the compromises between different approaches which lead to its practical elaboration. Moreover, attention to the different claims presented in the debates about development also allows for a positioning of these debates in a broader perspective. Development cooperation thereby appears not as a singular issue, but as part of a larger debate on moral concerns expressed in any given era. In the following, we present a sketch of how Dutch policies have been legitimised since

its inception in the 1950s, based on an analysis of the government memoranda on the subject issued since 1950.³¹ These legitimisations addressed five categories of moral claims: economy, security, solidarity, prestige and guilt, and ecology. The assertions presented in each of these fields have evolved over time, as has the respective weight of the different categories and the connections made between them.

Economy

After the Second World War, the shattered European countries became the objects of foreign aid on an unprecedented scale. The European Recovery Plan which became known as the Marshall Plan was initiated to enable the economic and social recovery of Europe, thus also fending of the threat posed by communism. After the plan was concluded in 1952, \$13 billion had been funded to European states to stimulate production, overcome difficulties of distribution, and to raise confidence in the post-war institutions among the unsettled population.³² The plans for economic recovery were remarkable in two respects. First, as Tony Judt has observed, they were pervaded by a 'moralised' discourse, which defined a new role and new expectations for the state. The post-war state all over Europe became a 'social state,' which carried responsibility for the well-being of its citizens.³³ Post-war foreign aid policy, according to Kuitenbrouwer, was 'built on the foundations of the domestic reformism that had provided the mainspring for the creation of the welfare states in these countries'.³⁴ Secondly, an international perspective was integral to the economic recovery during in the early post-war years. The economic recovery of the Netherlands was thus seen as inextricably linked to the recovery of other parts of the worlds. Within this vision, colonial and postcolonial notions ran parallel: while some predominantly argued for the development of colonial territories, others proposed to regard development cooperation as a means to compensate for the loss of colonial production and outlet markets.³⁵

These colonial and postcolonial vision of state-led international economic recovery were clearly visible in the first Dutch policy statements, which reacted to the United Nations program for technical assistance (1948) and the announcement of a 'point four program' to aid developing countries by US-president Harry Truman in 1949. In 1950, the government argued in favour of participating in the United Nations program to provide technical assistance to developing countries, because participation would establish Dutch businesses and technology abroad, open up new possibilities for export trade with developing countries, and provide job opportunities for Dutch experts.³⁶ A second memorandum in 1956 explicitly argued that underdevelopment was 'a world economic problem that calls for a global economic approach.' The development of economically underdeveloped countries would naturally benefit the world economy, because two-thirds of the world population were presently living in these countries. Their capacity for production should be build

up for their own benefit, and because industrialised nations had an ever greater need for the commodities they could supply. Moreover, the memorandum stated that ‘these countries are potentially very important markets. Before these markets can be developed, the buying power has to be raised there.’³⁷

During the 1960s, a gradual reorientation of these economic legitimisations took place. This reorientation took two different directions: a pro-business approach stressing bilateral aid relations, and a planning approach which stressed the importance of a supranationally coordinated restructuring of the world economy. The expansion of Western production capabilities and the loss of advantageous market outlets caused by decolonisation made the search for new markets an important argument in thinking about aid.³⁸ Business spokespersons argued for an increase of bilateral aid to benefit economic cooperation between Dutch companies and aid receivers. Whilst adhering to the claim that development cooperation was a form of altruism, a memorandum issued by an influential employers association stated that it should also be a matter of Dutch self-interest. The bilateral relations between Dutch companies and aid-receiving countries were seen by policymakers to address a pressing need to expand the transfer of knowledge from technology to include the training of workforces and the practices of business administration.³⁹

At the same time, the successful economic recovery and the establishment of the United Nations as a regular institution at the supranational level boosted confidence in the capabilities of state-led development. Economists such as Jan Tinbergen expanded on this notion and the earlier view of the world economy as essentially interdependent to plea for a supranationally coordinated division of labour. A well-planned global division of labour would maximise economic benefits for all nations involved, thus raising welfare standards everywhere. Tinbergen had significant influence within the ranks of the officials responsible for Dutch development cooperation. Thus, in 1962, a government memorandum stated that providing aid was crucial, since ‘the flourishing of areas currently lagging behind will lead to better possibilities for an international division of labour, which would enlarge outlet markets and thus enable more efficient production.’⁴⁰ Striving for such a division of labour would undo an economically significant drawback for aid-giving countries, which was specified by Dutch government officials in 1966: ‘receiving countries increasingly produce themselves and thus may become competitors of the donor countries, both within their own country and abroad.’⁴¹ Once both countries involved would however specialise in different sectors of production, they would both benefit from increased productivity and thus negate economic losses.⁴²

Subsequently, the aim of restructuring the world economy to benefit developing countries was taken up by the Dutch Ministry of Development Cooperation, installed in 1965. The notion that such a restructuring would benefit all countries involved equally faded into the background as the economic position of the developing countries relatively declined from the 1960s onwards. Especially during the

1970s, Pronk campaigned for a New International Economic Order, which would strengthen the position of these countries vis-à-vis the industrialised world.⁴³ At the end of the decade, the hopes for such a new ordering of international economic relations took a step back. Against the background of economic crisis, the deteriorating relative position of developing countries and a strong push to reform welfare politics at home, a 1979 memorandum cautiously stated that 'selective adjustments to the international framework can be considered if the functioning of the market mechanism and the process of adjusting fail to overcome existing imbalances in international relations'. Because the international situation was taking a turn for the worse, it was deemed 'inevitable to at least try to limit this process by a clear policy and to reverse it where possible in order to improve structural relations with developing countries'.⁴⁴

The free market was regarded a fair judge of good and bad development since the 1980s. According to Hellema, Dutch development cooperation policy from the late 1970s was inspired by 'liberal pragmatism'.⁴⁵ Seen from this perspective, it was important that aid was compatible with Dutch economic interests. Ideally, it contributed to the solution of domestic problems, such as the rising unemployment rate during the 1980s.⁴⁶ The waning inclination to initiate a restructuring of the international marketplace led to the alignment of the Dutch policy to the agenda of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which favoured free market policies.⁴⁷ The advent of a global village through international communications and organisations, a memorandum in 1993 stated, fostered a globally shared language, which was at once 'the language of the market, but also of democracy'.⁴⁸ The increasing attention to the issue of governance was also framed in these terms. According to policy paper published in 2000, 'pro-poor growth' would only be achieved if the economic, political and judicial environment were stable, the quality of governance guaranteed, social and physical infrastructure adequate and market mechanisms promoted.⁴⁹ Debates on the economic dimensions of aid still take global interdependence as their vantage point. The most recent government memorandum shows how this strain of thought remains dominant, whilst putting self-interest firmly in first place: 'We are dependent on the development of others for our own welfare and prosperity. Sustainable and inclusive growth is in our own interest and in the interest of others.'⁵⁰

Security

International security has been a second influential factor in thinking about development during the post-war era. From the announcement of Trumans 'Point Four Program' until the 1970s, the goals of raising international welfare and limiting the spread of communism were almost inseparable.⁵¹ 'The aim is to promote welfare and peace in the lowly developed areas, which will also benefit the opposition against communism in these areas', the first Dutch memorandum on development cooperation stated. Aid would not just have to stabilise developing countries internally, but also

alleviate tension globally by reducing international imbalances.⁵² Such sentiments were echoed by early attempts to raise awareness for poverty abroad by civil society actors too. As long as poverty existed, peace would not be last, warned the pastor Simon Jelsma, who drew attention to the issue by holding weekly outdoor sermons in The Hague in 1954.⁵³

The notion that the stability of other countries was inextricably connected to the security of the Netherlands was an important argument in favour of providing aid, just as was the case with claims regarding the economy of aid. The 1956 memorandum claimed that 'in the ever more integrated world of the twentieth century the welfare of one's own country is indissolubly linked to the welfare and to the mental and material stability in almost any other country.' Therefore, the unsatisfactory state in which large parts of the world found themselves during the 1950s, which favoured political unrest and the 'lure of communism', imposed a great responsibility upon the Western world.⁵⁴

The threat of communism diminished during the 1980s, but the basic argument for the alleviation of social and economic tension in order to promote international stability remained a constant. Instead of the rhetoric of the Cold War, references to the international rule of law and the upholding of human rights and the attempts to enforce 'collective security' through international coordination provided the framework for these claims. The 1984 memorandum noted that 'the care for fellow humans is closely interwoven with the government endeavours to protect and strengthen the international legal order, which is characterised by peace, security, justice and welfare.' Therefore, foreign policy objectives were regarded as important considerations to take into account whilst formulating development policies.⁵⁵

Though the unpredictability of the early post-Cold War years subsided, security remained a constant theme of government memoranda. However, its meaning subtly shifted: international security was slowly reinterpreted as concerning above all the security of developing countries themselves. Whilst in 1990, a memorandum claimed that 'a world in which no great, unjustified inequality exists, in which common problems are addressed not separately but together, and in which cooperation and integration trump conflict and fragmentation is a stable and secure world.'⁵⁶ In 1993, development cooperation was explicitly included in a broader strategy of foreign policy that focused on collective security and conflict resolution.⁵⁷ More recently, security has above all been presented as a precondition for development. Between 1998 and 2005, countries which specifically contributed to peace-making efforts in their regions were singled out as candidates for special funds, in accordance with the growing attention for the ways in which 'failed states' hamper development.⁵⁸ Most recently, a lack of national and international security was presented as a threat to the prospects of 'fragile states' in the first place. However, it was asserted that such insecurity could also directly affect states such as the Netherlands, by fostering terrorism, piracy and illegal trade in drugs, weapons and other commodities.⁵⁹

Solidarity

Solidarity has been a reason to provide aid to developing countries ever since the inception of development cooperation. Dutch government officials continually expressed the connection of foreign aid to the motive of solidarity with fellow human beings in more dire circumstances. Thus, the 1950 memorandum stated that health and education for the people of developing countries were just as important as the economic development of their countries.⁶⁰ In 1956, this was expressed even more firmly: 'The moral grounds [for development] are of absolute universality. They are anchored in the reverence for human dignity.'⁶¹ And in 1962, the cabinet stated that, in accordance with the stance taken by churches and the United Nations, solidarity remained the main motive for Dutch aid.⁶²

Civil society organisations pressure and popular concern for the fate of fellow humans in developing countries constantly reminded government officials of this moral obligation to solidarity. The 1950s saw the deployment of several initiatives which called on the Dutch to express their solidarity with developing countries. After assistance from all over the world had arrived to the Netherlands to address the consequences of a big flooding in 1953, the Dutch magazine *Vrij Nederland* called upon its readers to take up this example: *Nu wij*, 'now it's our turn', it printed on its front page.⁶³ Several different groups which had taken up the cause of development came together in 1956, founding the *Nederlandse Organisatie voor Internationale Bijstand* (Novib). Novib soon became very successful organising fundraising campaigns. These campaigns could benefit from a widespread feeling of solidarity with people in less prosperous circumstances among Dutch citizens. In a survey conducted in 1962, almost half of the respondents claimed to contribute to aid campaigns regularly, whilst another thirty percent noted its willingness to do so. The motives thus most often identified for providing aid were 'as a form of charity' and 'because I am human I help my fellow humans', whilst the threat of the Soviet Union and the notion that aid would result in economic benefit for the Dutch themselves were least often named.⁶⁴ Since then, over eighty percent of respondents have consistently stated to regard it important or even very important to provide aid to people in developing countries.⁶⁵

The need for autonomy of those who receive aid constantly accompanied government statements about solidarity. The 1950 memorandum signalled that 'this aid will only be provided if it is requested and will not be to interfere with the political and economic independence of the aid-receiving country.'⁶⁶ Against the background of its internationally contested attempts to secure colonial domains, which had only recently been given up regarding Indonesia, Dutch government was evidently signalling its goodwill to both its allies and potential aid-receiving countries.

Facing the critique formulated in terms of dependency theory and anti-imperialism during the 1960s and 1970s, the focus of the references to autonomy shifted from the guarantee of sovereignty towards the goal of self-reliance.⁶⁷ The 1976 memorandum noted the wish of developing countries to

achieve economic, political and social independence and to choose their own path of development. Development cooperation in this perspective could function as a bridge towards greater autonomy by providing the means by which to reach it in the long run. At the same time, assisting states to achieve self-reliance should not be the exclusive aim of policy. Foreign aid should also be used to aid the poorest groups within these states. These groups should be provided with the means to shape their existence and the future of the states in which they lived and were thus object and means of development at the same time.⁶⁸ The shift from the autonomy of states towards the autonomy of people was reinforced by the emergence of human rights as an important goal of foreign aid during the 1970s.⁶⁹ The same memorandum explicitly included the abiding of human rights as a criterion for assessing whether a country qualified for Dutch aid.⁷⁰

As the focus of development cooperation shifted towards free market-oriented models during the 1980s, the theme of autonomy became synonymous with access and means to become part of the global marketplace. The stress on individual rights increased analogously. The 1984 memorandum stated that 'every human being has a right to self-fulfilment according to its nature, ability and conviction, notwithstanding race, sex, language or nationality. This goal has not come close to realisation in the present-day world. It is the fundamental consideration of development cooperation to contribute to the improvement of this situation. The care for fellow human beings is the elementary inspiration for development.'⁷¹

During the 1990s, autonomy in economic matters became the most important form of autonomy considered. Thus, the 1993 memorandum distinguished four variants of autonomy, naming economic autonomy before it mentioned political, socio-cultural and physical independence.⁷² This stress was furthered by the notion of 'pro-poor growth', which was introduced at the end of the 1990s. The 2000 memorandum focussed on economic growth, of which the poor should reap the benefits above all.⁷³ Most recently, the market was brought forward as the most important ally in alleviating poverty. Sustainable and inclusive economic growth was explicitly named the guiding principle in shaping development cooperation as a form of solidarity with the poor.⁷⁴

Prestige and guilt

Considerations of prestige and guilt have influenced the course of Dutch development cooperation with varying intensity. Once again, the first memorandum on the issue made note of this: 'It is also of propagandist value to the Netherlands to play a positive role at the international level, to which it is able because of its overseas experiences. Whilst serving its own interests as well, it can provide a useful contribution to the development of underdeveloped areas, which will also benefit the understanding with many members of the United Nations.'⁷⁵ After the Indonesian independence, a period of slow realisation of the doubtful legacy as a colonial power ensued, which lasted until the late 1960s.⁷⁶ Up

till that time, actual and mental decolonisation were slowly taking shape: in 1963, New Guinea, the last remaining Dutch colony in Asia was given up after a prolonged crises. The 1966 memorandum concluded that 'the policy regarding aid for developing countries entails the contribution to solving the global problem which in fact comprises the socioeconomic complement of post-war political decolonisation. The task therein will be to integrate about 80 new states, which include the poorer two thirds of the world population, in a fast and evolutionary fashion.'⁷⁷

Whilst coming to terms with its colonial legacy, Dutch foreign policy thus gradually adopted a role of a forbearer of decolonisation and development. This allowed for a reassertion of the notion that the Dutch in fact represented an example of high moral standards in international politics, a stance which was compatible with pre-war traditions.⁷⁸ Feelings of moral superiority could not only be reasserted by adopting a pro-development stance among Western peers. Models of progress which laid the groundwork for development theory from the 1950s to the 1980s usually implicitly assumed the superiority of the countries providing aid. Feelings of Dutch superiority could thus also be echoed in the assumption that the Dutch in fact could show other countries how to successfully develop.

Contention on the Dutch colonial legacy took a sharp turn at the end of the 1960s with the publication of the recollection of military operations during the struggle for Indonesian independence in the immediate post-war years. Following up on contentious media coverage of the subject, a parliamentary investigation was conducted, resulting in the *Excessennota*, which was published in 1969.⁷⁹ The double incentive of guilt and attempts to purge the Dutch self-image spilt over into pronounced attempts to play the role of a 'guide country' at the international level. The image of a guide country was applied to many different fields of policy both foreign and domestic, ranging from a liberal approach to sexual issues and drugs to promoting peace and development in international politics.⁸⁰ In 1973 De Gaay Fortman in a much-publicised speech encouraged the Netherlands to act as a shining example in international politics, encouraging other European states and NATO-members to adopt measures to advance global peace and development.⁸¹ Having just taken office as Minister of Development, Pronk acknowledged that he should ensure a pioneering role for the Netherlands in the international arena. He also spoke of a Dutch 'debt of honour' towards both former colonies and the Third World at large, because the west had exploited these countries in the past. Regarding the volume of allocated funds, the insistence on the importance of human rights, and in promoting initiatives leading towards a New International Economic Order, Dutch officials can be seen to have acted according to this self-image of a guide country, albeit with few tangible results.⁸²

Attempts to present the Netherlands as a guide country waned considerably since the 1980s, as a more pragmatic and cautious approach replaced earlier ambitions. Oftentimes, the 1970s visions of development were regarded with unease in retrospect as examples of both naivety and overblown ambitions.⁸³ At the same time, the possibility of playing a lead role in development politics has

remained present as a point of reference for policy. Thus, the 2007 memorandum states that 'Dutch development cooperation is constantly renewing itself and fulfils an exemplary role in many respects.'⁸⁴ In a noteworthy shift of emphasis, the most recent memorandum explicitly connected a notion of exemplariness to prioritising Dutch interests: 'The Netherlands want to advance in the world and the Netherlands want to advance with the world. We are engaged with global problems. Our country is one of the most open countries in the world. We are dependent on the development of others for our own well-being and our own welfare.'⁸⁵

Ecology

The 1970s saw the arrival of a final argument for providing aid, which has since then been brought forward in different guises. The alarming publications by the Club of Rome, which highlighted disastrous ecological prospects and the global scope of both the causes and the solutions to the imminent ecological disasters, provided an important impulse to incorporate ecological concerns into policy.⁸⁶ Striking a balance between economic development and ecological considerations, however, would prove difficult. All the more so, because developing countries have frequently attributed the threats to the environment to the reckless path to economic development Western countries took before them. How could these countries now demand of others that they take heed of the environment, thus limiting their chances to achieve a similar position? The best way forward in this situation was to emphasise the importance of environmental considerations to the future of the developing countries themselves. Thus, the 1976 memorandum noted that ecological aspects of development should be taken in consideration, because of the danger that 'today's solutions will prove to be the problems of tomorrow. An unsettling of the natural balance can put self-reliance at risk at a later stage. The realisation of autonomy can only succeed if a country can utilise its natural resources without restraints in the long run.'⁸⁷

After the end of the Cold War, officials at the Ministry of Development Cooperation regarded the common threat of ecological disaster one of the foremost issues. It also provided a perspective which could unite the states formerly divided into a first, second and third world. This ecological concern was presented as both a Western duty and a common goal: 'A world in which millions are starving whilst others live in abundance, while both waste their natural environment, does not answer the call that is imbedded in our Western traditions.' 'The chance at uniting the world has been enlarged through the growing realisation of common risks in this world and in an international atmosphere of compromise rather than confrontation.'⁸⁸

The following years saw a steady alignment with the strain of thought presented in the UN-report *Our common future*, which had called attention to the idea of sustainable growth. This approach offered both a remedy against feelings of Western superiority and divided interests between different

parts of the world, and a way to translate thinking about development to local communities in the Netherlands. The connection between ecological concerns and international development was symbolised by the merging of the organisations which had funded Dutch initiatives on development and sustainability respectively in 1996. The new platform *Nationale Commissie voor Internationale Samenwerking en Duurzame Ontwikkeing* (National commission for international collaboration and sustainable development, NCDO) launched a successful campaign to encourage local communities to contribute to a sustainable future by connecting thinking about their immediate environment with initiatives aimed at aiding people in other parts of the world to achieve sustainable development as well.⁸⁹

Hopes for a uniting ecological perspective proved short-lived, however. In 1998 the former Dutch World Bank representative Eveline Herfkens took office as Minister of Development Cooperation in the Netherlands. She insisted that the problems of developing countries had to come first in Dutch development policy, and that issues such as state debt and the availability of healthcare provisions in these countries trumped a hypothetical common concern for environmental issues.⁹⁰ Similarly, developing countries have since then demanded a differentiation of ecological standards which would provide them with more possibilities to develop their economies, whilst more advanced economies should take the lead in implementing stricter measures to protect the environment.⁹¹ Notwithstanding these difficulties in incorporating an ecological perspective into development policy, ecological arguments have continued to inform it. As recently as 2007, 'sustainability, climate and energy' was labelled one of four focal points.⁹² The latest memorandum did not break away from this trend, although it can be seen to focus more attention on specific ecological issues such as water, instead of an inclusive ecological perspective: 'we keep fighting for a fair world. Therefore we strive for sustainable and inclusive growth. And therefore we address the issues of food security, water, security, migration, climate and trade. Poor countries have a lot to gain by a global approach.'⁹³

Beyond the merchant and the clergyman

'In the past development cooperation has often been accounted for by listing ethical, political and economic motives. Such a juxtaposition is heard of less often as the insight into the historical importance of welfare inequalities has grown,' claimed the Dutch administration in 1966.⁹⁴ The juxtaposition of economy, security, solidarity, prestige and guilt, and ecology provided above has demonstrated that indeed the legitimisations for providing foreign aid cannot be separated into categories which separate ethical from other considerations. Such a separation between ethical and practical, idealist and pragmatic, altruistic and self-interested motives has often been suggested, and has been reinforced by the metaphorical distinction between the merchant and the clergyman in thinking about Dutch development cooperation. Instead, several – implicitly or explicitly – moral claims

about the five issues presented competed throughout its history, each shaping the actual course of this policy to a varying extent.

Development cooperation thus appears as a field which is closely connected to other fields of policy on the basis of a shared discourse of morality. This discourse also connects the field of development to wider public debates on which concerns can be regarded as legitimate, and how these issues should be conceptualised. Seen as such, debates about policy provide a fascinating perspective on the ways in which officials, politicians and the public define their own community and their relationship to others. In this respect, the first striking feature of the history of Dutch foreign aid is the extent to which global interdependence was acknowledged in the Netherlands immediately after the Second World War. In fact, the considerable attention devoted to the issue of development was a direct result of this 'global conscience'.⁹⁵ The unfolding history of development however also casts doubt on existing narratives of the rise of such a global conscience. Rather than a deepening and widening of the awareness of global interdependence, different approaches to interconnectedness seem to have dominated the debates on development in the post-war era. Whereas the basic fact of interdependence was rarely disputed, the perceived consequences of this realisation varied greatly. For example, some took economic interconnectedness as proof for the assumption that economic development would naturally benefit all, others regarded it as a reason to restructure the world economy, whilst still others argued for the assimilation of other parts of the world to the market structures dominant in the global North.

Many concerns about the own community and about the shaping of the global interconnectedness have focused on the role of the state. In the early post-war years, states were regarded as the primary carriers of development both at home and abroad. Similarly, doubts about the capacity of the state to provide social security for its own citizens went hand in hand with a more sceptical stance towards the role of states in development cooperation. The latter scepticism was concerned both with the role of the Dutch state in this field and with the possible detrimental effects of the state structures of developing countries. If the state proved unable to successfully plan for a better future of the Netherlands, how could it be trusted (and committed) to do so for other countries? The other side of the coin, concerned with developing countries, was characterised by an international focus on good governance and on 'failed' and 'fragile' states. Both strains of critique strengthened the focus of development policy on individual capacities and market structures as alternatives.

Finally, the attempts to discern between moral and immoral motives for development cooperation in itself provide insight into the debates about the self-image and the perception of others. It can be regarded as an attempt to evade engaging the ambiguities which every claim for aiding development comprises. Such a tendency to ignore the contentious nature of development cooperation is quite possibly also an important drive behind the focus on the effectiveness of aid since

the 1970s. Apart from legitimate concerns about the way development was brought into practice and the uses of the resources provided in this field, a focus on effects has also provided a way around debates about the moral dimensions of development by focusing on the quantitative output of aid, rather than debating about the qualitative principles which shape the input.⁹⁶

Can these competing and evolving motives help explain the shape of development policy? Much of the debate on Dutch policies has centred on the question of whether its practice was mainly the result of international circumstances, or whether internal traditions also had considerable influence.⁹⁷ The foregoing analysis has demonstrated that idealistic and pragmatic notions of development cooperation cannot be pitted against each other. Conceptions of what the policies concerned should accomplish did not arise in splendid national isolation or conversely, without any input by the actors involved in formulating policy, but within a transnational exchange of ideas, interests and expectations. Therefore, transnational moments of moralisation in development cooperation, during which moral claims informing policy were explicitly stated and contested, deserve particular attention. Which actors managed to gain currency for which ideas? The analysis of the claims made about economy, security, solidarity, prestige and guilt, and ecology during such episodes will provide us with a better understanding of the interplay between government officials, politicians, civil society organisations, the media and the wider public in defining what development should be.

¹ Cited by: Dierikx, "In Arren Moede", 4. All translations from Dutch by the authors.

² Meier, *Biography*, 9-12.

³ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*; Bhambra, *Rethinking Modernity*.

⁴ Cooper, "Writing the History of Development".

⁵ See Easterley, *The White Man's Burden*; Sachs, *The End of Poverty*.

⁶ Mahbubani, *The Great Convergence*, 199. A similar claim is presented by Moyo, *Dead Aid*.

⁷ Berthélemy, "Bilateral Donor's Interest!". See also: Nunnenkamp and Thiele, "Are 'New' Donors Different?".

⁸ Alesina and Dollar, "Who gives Foreign Aid to Whom and Why".

⁹ Schäfer, "Historicizing Strong Metaphors"; Ankersmit, *History and Topology*; van Dam, "Constructing a Modern Society Through "Depillarization"."

¹⁰ Luhmann, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, 426.

¹¹ Hoebink, "Hoe de dominee de koopman versloeg", 580. Kuitenbrouwer and Schijf have argued for a different periodisation: Kuitenbrouwer and Schijf, "De Koopman, de dominee en de ambtenaar", 284, 279.

¹² Smits, "Main topics of Dutch development policy, 1949-1989", 51. See also: van Wijnen, "De koopman en dominee in de buitenlandse politiek", 10.

¹³ Voorhoeve, *Peace, Profits and Principles*, 281.

¹⁴ Malcontent and Nekkers, *Introduction*, 12; Kuitenbrouwer, *Ontdekking*, 31. Heldring, "Nederland in de wereld. 1945-1985"; Hellema, *Buitenlandse politiek van Nederland*.

¹⁵ Hoebink, "Hoe de dominee de koopman versloeg", 578.

¹⁶ Frey, *Control*, 397.

¹⁷ Meier, *Biography*, 6.

¹⁸ de Jong, "Flying the ethical flag", 60, 76-77.

¹⁹ Kuitenbrouwer, "A Shining Example?", 181-184.

²⁰ Malcontent and Nekkers, "Introduction", 36-37.

²¹ Hellema, "A special Place in the World", 325; Kuitenbrouwer, "A Shining Example?", 184-185.

²² Malcontent and Nekkers, "Introduction", 15-18.

²³ Kuitenbrouwer and Schijf, "De koopman, de dominee en de ambtenaar", 278.

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- ²⁴ Kuitenbrouwer and Schijf, “De koopman, de dominee en de ambtenaar”, 284; Kuitenbrouwer, “A Shining Example”, 175.
- ²⁵ Malcontent and Nekkers, “Introduction”, 38-40
- ²⁶ van Dam, “A Civil Servant in Politics”, 110-111; Malcontent, “Het blijft voortmodderen”, 188-190.
- ²⁷ Hellema, “Shameful Institutions”, 119.
- ²⁸ Malcontent and Nekkers, “Introduction”, 40-41. See also Dierikx, “Introductie”, XXVI.
- ²⁹ Dierikx, “Mister Ontwikkelingshulp”, 150; Malcontent and Nekkers, “Introduction”, 43.
- ³⁰ Wijmans, “De Solidariteitsbeweging”, 121–140.
- ³¹ The following memoranda have been analysed:
Nota 1950, *Nota betreffende de Nederlandse bijdrage aan het programma der Verenigde Naties voor technische hulp aan economisch laag-ontwikkelde landen*, Handelingen Tweede Kamer, no. 1734, nota nr.4 [Memorandum 1950];
Nota 1956, *Nota inzake de hulpverlening aan minder ontwikkelde gebieden*, Handelingen Tweede Kamer, no.4334, nota no.2 [Memorandum 1956];
Nota 1962, *Nota over de hulp aan minder-ontwikkelde landen*, , Handelingen Tweede Kamer, no. 6817, nota no. 1 [Memorandum 1962];
Nota 1966, *Nota hulpverlening aan minder ontwikkelde landen*, Handelingen Tweede Kamer, no. 8671, nota no 4 [Memorandum 1966];
Nota 1976, *Nota Bilaterale Ontwikkelingssamenwerking – Om de kwaliteit van de Nederlandse Hulp*, Handelingen Tweede Kamer, 14.300, chapter V Buitenlandse Zaken, bijlage 4 [Memorandum 1976];
Nota 1979, *Nota Ontwikkelingssamenwerking in wereldeconomisch perspectief*, Handelingen Tweede Kamer 16.400 [Memorandum 1979];
Nota 1984; *Nota Herijking bilateraal beleid*, Handelingen Tweede Kamer 18.350 [Memorandum 1984];
Nota 1990; *Nota Een wereld van verschil – Nieuwe kaders voor ontwikkelingssamenwerking in de jaren negentig*, Handelingen Tweede Kamer 21.813, nota no 4 [Memorandum 1990];
Nota 1993; *Nota Een wereld in geschil. De grenzen van de ontwikkelingssamenwerking verkend* Handelingen Tweede Kamer 23.408, nota no. 1-2 [Memorandum 1993];
Nota 2000; *Nota Ondernemen tegen armoede. Notitie over Economie en Ontwikkeling*, Tweede Kamer, vergaderjaar 2000-2001, 27 467, nr. 1 [Memorandum 2000];
Nota 2007; *Nota Een zaak van iedereen. Investeren in ontwikkeling in een veranderende wereld*, Beleidsnotitie Tweede Kamer (2007) [Memorandum 2007];
Nota 2013; *Nota Wat de wereld verdient. Een nieuwe agenda voor hulp, handel en investeringen*, Beleidsnota (2013) [Memorandum 2013].
- ³² Zeiler, “Opening doors in the world economy”, 218-222.
- ³³ Judt, *Ill Fares the Land*, 47; Judt, *Postwar*, 73-77; Hu and Manning, “The Global Social Insurance Movement since the 1880s”.
- ³⁴ Kuitenbrouwer, “Shining example”, 177.
- ³⁵ Garavini, “The colonies strike back”, 301; Hellema, *Buitenlandse politiek*, 202.
- ³⁶ Memorandum 1950, 7-8.
- ³⁷ Memorandum 1956, 4.
- ³⁸ Kuitenbrouwer, “Shining example”, 187; Frey, “Control”, 227.
- ³⁹ Arens, “Multilateral Institution-Building and National Interest”, 464–466.
- ⁴⁰ Memorandum 1962, 6.
- ⁴¹ Memorandum 1966, 23.
- ⁴² Memorandum 1966, 24-25.
- ⁴³ Kuitenbrouwer, “A shining example?”, 183–200.
- ⁴⁴ Memorandum 1979, 3.
- ⁴⁵ Hellema, *Buitenlandse politiek*, 333.
- ⁴⁶ Baneke and Jepma, “Dutch interests and development interests”, 258; Beerends, *Nederlandse ontwikkelingshulp*, 62.
- ⁴⁷ Breman, “Ontwikkeling en de kwaliteit van het bestuur”.
- ⁴⁸ Memorandum 1993, 8.
- ⁴⁹ Memorandum 2000, 27.
- ⁵⁰ Memorandum 2013, 4.
- ⁵¹ Smits, “Main topics of Dutch development policy”, 50.
- ⁵² Memorandum 1950, 8.
- ⁵³ Beerends and Broere, *De bewogen beweging*, 21–22.

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- ⁵⁴ Memorandum 1956, 3.
- ⁵⁵ Memorandum 1984, 5.
- ⁵⁶ Memorandum 1990, 72.
- ⁵⁷ Memorandum 1993, 8-10.
- ⁵⁸ Inspectie Ontwikkelingssamenwerking en Beleidsevaluatie, *Van projecthulp naar sectorsteun. Evaluatie van de sectorale benadering 1998-2005* (The Hague 2006).
- ⁵⁹ Memorandum 2013, 24.
- ⁶⁰ Memorandum 1950, 8-9.
- ⁶¹ Memorandum 1956, 4.
- ⁶² Memorandum 1962, 1.
- ⁶³ J. Winkler, 'Nu wij', *Vrij Nederland*, 7-3-1953.
- ⁶⁴ Nederlandse Stichting voor Statistiek, *Novib opinie-onderzoek*, 6, 47.
- ⁶⁵ de Goede, "Publieke opinie over ontwikkelingssamenwerking", 36.
- ⁶⁶ Memorandum 1950, 7.
- ⁶⁷ Malcontent and Nekkers, "Do something and don't look back", 31-34; Baneke and Jepma, "Dutch interests", 255.
- ⁶⁸ Memorandum 1976, 4-5.
- ⁶⁹ Kuitenbrouwer, "A shining example?", 180-182.
- ⁷⁰ Memorandum 1976, 5.
- ⁷¹ Memorandum 1984, 5.
- ⁷² Memorandum 1993, 85.
- ⁷³ Memorandum 2000, 6.
- ⁷⁴ Memorandum 2013, 8-9.
- ⁷⁵ Memorandum 1950, 8-9.
- ⁷⁶ Arens, "Mission Interrupted?".
- ⁷⁷ Memorandum 1966, 7.
- ⁷⁸ Constandse, "Nederland en de Sowjet-Unie", 22-24.
- ⁷⁹ Meijer, *Oostindisch Doof*.
- ⁸⁰ Kennedy, "Nederland Als Het Meest Progressieve Land Ter Wereld".
- ⁸¹ de Gaay Fortman, "De Vredespolitiek van de Radicals".
- ⁸² Kuitenbrouwer, "Shining example", 175; Kuitenbrouwer and Schijf, "De koopman, de dominee en de ambtenaar", 283.
- ⁸³ de Gaay Fortman, "Nederland Gidsland in Noord-Zuidbetrekkingen".
- ⁸⁴ Memorandum 2007, 5.
- ⁸⁵ Memorandum 2013, 4.
- ⁸⁶ Meadows et al., *The limits of growth*. Cf. McNeill, "The environment".
- ⁸⁷ Memorandum 1976, 5.
- ⁸⁸ Memorandum 1990, 72, 73.
- ⁸⁹ Beerends and Broere, *Bewogen beweging*, 159-162.
- ⁹⁰ Beerends and Broere, *Bewogen beweging*, 162-163.
- ⁹¹ Buch-Hansen and Lauridsen, "The Past, Present and Future of Development Studies", 297-298.
- ⁹² Memorandum 2007, 35-38.
- ⁹³ Memorandum 2013, 4.
- ⁹⁴ Memorandum 1966, 22.
- ⁹⁵ Robertson, *The Three Waves of Globalization*; Mazlish and Iriye, "Introduction", 4.
- ⁹⁶ A similar tendency to avoid ideological debates by focussing on technocratic issues has also been attested to the pragmatic style of politics which has dominated the Netherlands since the 1980s. Daalder, *Van Oude En Nieuwe Regenten*.
- ⁹⁷ Cf. De Graaf, Hellema and van der Zwan, *De Nederlandse buitenlandse politiek*; Kuitenbrouwer, "De rol van de mensenrechten".

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