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# No justice Without Charity: Humanitarianism After Empire

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## ABSTRACT

Humanitarian actors have firmly stated that they have moved on from charity since the 1960s. Instead, they have anchored their work in a notion of justice, rejecting religious differences and colonial ties. Their new focus was on the structural reforms to which the disadvantaged had a right. The analysis of the activities of the agencies which imported fair trade products from the 1960s until the 1980s demonstrates how the purported transition from charity to justice impacted humanitarian action. Despite being important to contemporaries, it does not provide a plausible historical account. Earlier ‘charitable’ initiatives did present a transformative impetus. Presuming a transition from charity to justice also fails to acknowledge the continued importance of charitable impulses among activists and their supporters. The changing interplay between charity and justice is crucial to understanding how social justice was defined within a transnational network of activists coming to terms with a postcolonial world.

## KEYWORDS

Humanitarianism; religion; human rights; charity; fair trade

## From charity to justice?


Charity has fallen into disrepute. Since the 1960s, humanitarian actors have firmly stated that they have moved on from charity. Instead, they have anchored their work in a notion of justice, rejecting religious differences and colonial legacies. They focused on the structural reforms to which the disadvantaged had a right. In their foundational texts, activists repeatedly distanced themselves from the motive of charity. In the United Kingdom, the informal network of development activists known as the Haslemere Group stated in their 1968 declaration that:

‘We do not align ourselves with the Third World out of charity. We do so because we are concerned with the health of our own society, because we recognise that it, too, is damaged by an exploitative system. (...)’ We recognise the value and humanity of the work done by the overseas aid charities and the genuine motivation of many of those who contribute to them, but we refuse to accept this salving of consciences.’<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, in the booklet *Je geld of je leven* (‘Your money or your live’) the Dutch activist Piet Reckman of the ecumenic activist group Sjaloom wrote that:

‘The UNCTAD-conference in New Delhi signals the end of an era, to which we cannot return. It is the era of the quiet conscience, bought with a few silverlings. Of development aid, which covered up the true issues: a more just distribution of the earthly goods and opportunities.’<sup>2</sup>

Statements such as the Haslemere declaration and *Je geld of je leven* expressed a break with a humanitarian tradition which had valued charity and with the more recent humanitarian engagement in projects promoting development.<sup>3</sup> They were important touchstones for initiatives

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promoting equality in global trade and solidarity with the so-called Third World, which emerged during the late 1960s. The Sjaloom group would help to launch a cane sugar campaign in the Fall of 1968 as a reaction to the disappointing results of the second United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in New Delhi. The attempts to gain international support for this campaign would serve as an important catalyst for connecting activists from around the world, accommodating a transnational flow of ideas and repertoire around the issue of 'fair trade'.<sup>4</sup> Activists within this network often consciously resisted framing their activities in terms of charitable initiatives, presenting them instead as based on the principle of justice. Help should not be provided from a position of perceived superiority, but practiced on the basis of equality. This was translated to an emphasis on achieving structural change rather than relief or development of 'underdeveloped' countries. Additionally, it entailed an inclusive view of those potentially involved. It surpassed denominational divides and even bridged the distinction between secular and religious views. Consequently, these activists developed their campaigns in consultation with their counterparts in the global South. They aimed to provide opportunities to act out equal relations between North and South and to instigate changes in their own environment too.

The relation to charity continues to be contentious among practitioners and scholars of humanitarianism. Should humanitarian organizations focus on emergency relief, or should they consider their efforts in light of achieving lasting change?<sup>5</sup> The break between charitable initiatives and new justice-based solidarity activism has also been introduced into the historiography on humanitarian campaigns since the 1960s. Whereas the distinction has been important for contemporaries, however, it is less helpful for historical analysis. The status of charity has been contested at least since the late nineteenth century, as proponents of social reform scolded charitable initiatives for not addressing underlying causes of misery.<sup>6</sup> Ever since, charity has been an uneasy, but inseparable bedfellow of humanitarian ideas, initiatives, and organizations. Contrary to the claims of contemporary activists, it remained a vital aspect of humanitarian campaigns since the 1970s. Following Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, humanitarianism can be understood as a fluid notion, with recurring references to helping others, humanity, impartiality, independence and doing good.<sup>7</sup> Contesting the notion of charity was fundamental to the evolution of humanitarianism in the postcolonial era, because the fundamental humanitarian values of impartiality and equality were at stake. Evaluating the purported shift from charity to justice can be regarded as part of a broader trend in the historiography of humanitarianism. As the history of humanitarianism has gradually been extended from the present into earlier periods, scholars have pointed out continuities in relation to religion and empire in particular.<sup>8</sup> Charity remained fundamental to humanitarians, even though its meaning changed notably in reaction to the emergence of a postcolonial global order.

The history of the Western European alternative trading organizations is uniquely suited to probe the continuing importance of ideas and practices of charity in humanitarian action. Activities promoting 'fair trade' since the 1960s have revolved around campaigning, trading, and certification. The organizations which were importing products which activists distributed have taken up an awkward position in this history. On the one hand, they can be regarded as the very backbone of the movement. During the late 1960s, such organizations offered activists products from the global South which enabled them to present tangible links between the South and the North in their campaigns. Before the onset of regular long-distance travelling and internet communications, their personnel provided one of the few direct lines of communication between people in South and North. On the other hand, the alternative trading organizations have always been suspect within the movement. They often sprung from denominational religious networks and had close relations with traditional humanitarian organizations. As businesses, they were hard to reconcile with the image of a social movement. The products they provided were constantly scrutinized: could they function as symbols of unfair trading practices?

Were their producers really benefitting from the trade? And were these producers deserving of support?

For alternative trading organizations, the suspicion of a continuation of charitable work was always just around the corner. Their close connections to traditional humanitarian networks and ideas and their proximity to its critics makes their history particularly intriguing. The analysis of their activities from the 1960s until the 1980s demonstrates that the purported transition from charity to justice during the 1970s is not analytically viable. It ignores the transformative impetus of earlier 'charitable' initiatives. Reversely, presuming a transition from charity to justice fails to acknowledge charity's continued importance among activists and their supporters. Instead, the constant interplay between charity and justice is crucial to understanding how social justice was defined within a transnational network of activists.

The changing evaluation of charity is not just indicative of the transformation of relations between the global South and North. A focus on charity sheds light on notions of justice and community before and after the 1960s. The distress of others has traditionally been a moment at which communities have felt compelled to reaffirm their sense of righteousness by demonstrating their solidarity through moral and material support. In this sense, charity has usually been connected to notions of justice, both in an immanent and a transcendent context. By acting out solidarity through actions ranging from prayer and fundraising to actually lending a hand, people had the plight of others and their own moral standing in mind, demonstrating their justness to higher powers and their fellow citizens. Such efforts have often been regarded in the light of a religious, civic or even civilizational collective. Many alternative trading agencies emerged out of the relief work within transnational denominational communities. Despite the growing importance of universal human rights and justice during the 1960s, calls to promote the cause of the global South continued to be underpinned by appeals to the sense of righteousness and moral prestige of communities and 'civilized nations' in the North.<sup>9</sup>

The fair trade movement has historically operated in several overlapping fields. A typical local group in the 1970s and 1980s would promote activities around the issues of development aid, relief work, solidarity with specific countries and groups, human rights, and the environment. Those involved employed traditional activist repertoire – rallies, picketing, distributing leaflets – as well as actions specifically suited to the markets they were targeting, such as boycotts, selling specific products and influencing public procurement.<sup>10</sup> The history of fair trade activism has therefore been written partly as the history of the Third World-movement, partly as the history of humanitarianism, most recently as the history of consumer activism. This has caused a fragmentation of the research and a focus on individual initiatives. The history of humanitarianism provides an opportunity to connect these important strains of historiography, because it offers an opportunity to include secular and religious groups, relief and development work, small activist groups and large organizations.<sup>11</sup>

A second source of historiographical fragmentation has been a focus on individual national cases, despite the obvious transnational perspective and co-operations of those involved. By reconceptualizing the fair trade movement as a transnational movement, we can discern how charity was reimagined in a postcolonial world through a dialogue across borders. Addressing global trade, its scope was transnational from the outset, as were the personal contacts across continents which instigated its activities. As activists established organizations around this topic, these built on a range of international contacts to exchange information and goods. The alternative trading organizations imported goods from many different countries and usually distributed them to several countries at the same time. Since the 1970s, fair trade activists institutionalized cooperation between different organizations on a transnational level through regular meetings and international secretariats. These were supplemented with international umbrella organizations in the course of the 1980s. The transnational perspective is all the more viable, because differences within the fair trade movement did not align to national borders, but to different ideological views and strategic choices.

The transition from the self-fashioning of historical actors and their organizations to historiography is often fluent in histories of civil society. Many initial publications relating to the history of fair trade were commissioned or supported by the organizations involved and often written by people who had been involved in their activities. These naturally took up the narratives which had carried their activism since the 1960s, the criticism of charity a prime theme among them. Thus Maggie Black has noted how Oxfam moved on from charitable relief work and came 'to regard its cause as larger than itself and had set about building momentum behind ideas belonging to the realm of public policy', applying the ideas of the influential welfare economist William Beveridge about the state's obligations towards its citizens – 'freedom from want, from disease, from ignorance, from squalor, and from idleness' – to an international context.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, Black sharply observes how part of Oxfam's staff became increasingly vocal about giving priority to education of the British public and achieving public policy change instead of overseas programs. Rather than redirecting Oxfam's outlook, this led to the foundation of the independent World Development Movement (WDM) in 1970. WDM focused on educating the public about causes and possible solutions for global inequality and lobbied for policy changes.<sup>13</sup>

The crucial ambivalence of continuing to relate to charity whilst doubting its viability comes through in Black's account of Oxfam during the 1960s and 1970s. It can also be discerned in the history of other Western European groups. The activist and publicist Hans Beerends has observed how a 'structural' approach to the predicament of the global South emerged among Dutch Third World activists during the 1960s. He also noted the considerable variety within this group, which attracted people ranging from moderate reformers to radical anti-capitalists.<sup>14</sup> However, this ambivalence often takes a backseat in favor of a more schematic view. Collaborating with the journalist Marc Broere, for instance, Beerends wrote that 'the rise of the Third World movement in the fifties and sixties was in fact a protest against the (...) illusion that the problem of poverty could be solved by gathering many generous gifts'.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, social scientist Claudia Olejniczak has argued that the West-German Third World movement had no direct predecessors, but was rooted in the international solidarity of leftwing internationalists, thus passing by its relations to charitable organizations.<sup>16</sup>

The focus on the 'new' in these so-called new social movements translated to their conceptualization. In the case of the Third World movement, its purported radical altruism was presented as a significant difference from other movements. Instead of promoting their own interests, Olejniczak argued, the movement was driven by moral indignation.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the sociologist Luuk Wijmans argued that the Third World movement was a unique case among social movements, because it promoted human rights globally without a direct relation to the interest of its members.<sup>18</sup> The historian Konrad Kuhn has made a similar point about the Swiss movement, noting that 'for the Swiss Third World movement, it was about enforcing global justice, for which it campaigned without direct community relations'.<sup>19</sup>

The more recent historiography on humanitarianism has similarly foregrounded the commitment to human rights and social justice since the late 1960s. The 'moral universalism' which framed humanitarian campaigns emerged as a key theme.<sup>20</sup> The narrative of a breakthrough of human rights as the dominant frame of reference for civic activism aligns closely with the contemporary activists' proclaimed shift from charity to justice.<sup>21</sup> The ongoing historicization of human rights has called this periodization into question, pointing out the historically influential presence of notions of human rights before the dawn of the 1970s and the continued contestation of its dominance since.<sup>22</sup> As scholars of the history of humanitarianism have recently reconsidered the relation between solidarity and humanitarian aid, the continued relevance of the notion of charity merits special attention.<sup>23</sup>

The following sections track the evolution of post-war humanitarianism in relation to the notion of charity. The first section discusses the emergence of alternative trading organizations, establishing their relations to existing traditions of humanitarian engagement and their

commitment to structural change. These organizations reacted to a politicization of humanitarianism since the late 1960s, as new initiatives positioned themselves in opposition to the existing international order and the activities of previous humanitarian actors. The second section shows how justice was foregrounded as a vantage point. This resulted in new frame of reference within which charity, however, remained crucial. The third section demonstrates how the insistence on fundamental global equality gradually became normalized among humanitarians during the 1980s. The alternative trading organizations developed strategies to realize improvements on a smaller scale, despite frustrations over a lack of structural change. Humanitarianism after empire entailed a new way of presenting charity as an obligation and novel strategies to integrate it into people's daily lives.

### ***'Trade, not aid'? humanitarianism and self-reliance***

The first alternative trading organizations were established during the 1950s and 1960s. Usually, they emerged from religious networks, which provided them with inspiration, relations to producers and potential buyers, venues and facilities. Although they publicized the idea that people in distress needed 'trade, not aid', these organizations positioned their activities somewhere between asking people to buy products and donating on behalf of others. As historians of religion and empire have pointed out, in practice, missionary work had a tradition of distancing itself from the political project of empire and had long been concerned with the improvement of the immanent lives of those they engaged with.<sup>24</sup> Similar to such missionary work, the early years of the alternative trading organizations highlight how these were operating from the assumption that their work was contributing to a long-term transformation, in which self-reliance was the ultimate goal.

This is especially apparent in the history of the North American alternative trading organization nowadays known as Ten Thousand Villages. Its activities can be traced back to the efforts of Edna Ruth Byler, who was linked to the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), a relief organization originally founded by Mennonites in 1920 to support fellow believers in the Ukraine. Since then, the MCC had expanded its activities to support Mennonites across the world. Byler had worked for the MCC as a host at the headquarters of the MCC in Akron, Pennsylvania, during the Second World War, as the committee had taken up the responsibility of deploying the many conscientious objectors from their constituency.<sup>25</sup>

After the war, Byler accompanied her husband in his capacity of Overseas Director to locations where the MCC was involved internationally. During a visit to Puerto Rico, a group of women she met asked her to sell their needlework on their behalf in the United States to supplement their income. Soon, groups from Hong Kong, India and Jordan sent handicraft which could be sold. By 1962, producers from South-Korea, Taiwan, Greece and West-Germany procured handicraft which Edna Byler would sell during visits to local Mennonite communities and women's groups across North America (see [Figure 1](#)). Eventually, she established a gift shop in her home town of Akron.<sup>26</sup> Trading products on behalf of others was related to a tradition of so-called 'relief sales', at which people would buy products made by people in distress (or which others had made on their behalf) in order to raise money. Selling handicraft was especially suited to the North-American Mennonite culture which valued artisanship, frugality and self-reliance.

Byler's work on behalf of handicraft producers relied on the MCC network to find producers and buyers but was only officially incorporated in 1962, as Byler was appointed an MCC-project manager. During the 1950s and 1960, there was no clear geographical distinction between producing and consuming countries. Handicraft could be sold locally as well as in North America, whilst Byler would also sell toys which were made by a group from the North American Appalachia.<sup>27</sup> Neither was there a clear-cut division between charity and structural transformation. In 1954, Byler discontinued ordering from Puerto Rico because she deemed that due to



Figure 1. Edna Byler presenting needlework from Jordan, 1965. MCC, press photos.

the improved standard of living there, the seamstresses could make a better living by other means. Similarly, as the program officially became part of the work of the MCC, guidelines explicitly stated that it aimed to provide 'meaningful employment', producers should receive fair remuneration, and the program itself should be self-supporting.<sup>28</sup>

Around the time Byler started selling items from MCC-related groups, another Protestant group took up a similar initiative. The Sales Exchange for Refugee Rehabilitation Vocations (SERVV), with its main center in New Windsor, Maryland, grew out of the network of the Church of the Brethren and its involvement with the activities that the interdenominational humanitarian organization Church World Service deployed worldwide since 1946. SERVV aimed to enable refugees in particular to provide for themselves by being able to sell the handcraft they could produce.<sup>29</sup> Notably, it was the voluntarist nature of the enterprise which initially strengthened the position of the producers. 'This is a church program, not a business', stated Ray Kyle, who coordinated the program during the early 1960s. This implied that all of the profits from the sales were channeled back to the producers.<sup>30</sup>

The activities of SERVV during the 1950s and 1960s illustrate how the group of producers and the consumer base of such organizations would gradually expand beyond the initial focus on the initial denominational network. SERVV's operations were primarily directed towards related denominational groups of producers, which it supported by selling their products through channels the religious community provided in North America. By establishing 'international gift shops', SERVV appealed to a public beyond its own religious community, although some products were explicitly earmarked to be used to strengthen the ties between denominational groups in different parts of the world.<sup>31</sup> If they were interested, products could even be channeled to commercial partners. At the same time, SERVV's correspondence is laced with examples of producer groups seeking out trading partners. If both sides deemed a partnership viable after exchanging samples and estimated sales figures, this could lead to new trading partnerships.<sup>32</sup>

In North America and Western Europe alike, the Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s indirectly impacted the trading organizations. Their rise was tied to ideas about development which grew in importance as the United States and the Soviet Union competed over the global South.<sup>33</sup> Transnational, depoliticized solidarity also served as a morally superior alternative to promoting ideological and military conflict. In practice, the transnational networks established by

missionaries, relief workers, and intradenominational relations were more important than the political framework. For the North American organizations, the direct contact established to refugees in Europe and Asia provided an important impulse. In the case of the Western European organizations, this impulse was amplified by the experience of hardship during the Second World War and its aftermath and receiving aid through transnational channels. Here, the Cold War sometimes explicitly appeared as a motive. The fear of a new war as a consequence of the destabilizing effects of poverty and global inequality were invoked as a reason to come to the aid of those in need.<sup>34</sup> In the case of the alternative trade instigated by Oxfam in the United Kingdom and by Stichting SOS in the Netherlands and neighboring countries, the distinction between supporting people from the own network and working for the good of all humanity soon all but disappeared.

In the United Kingdom, members of the humanitarian organization Oxfam developed an approach similar to the MCC and SERV during the 1950s and 1960s. Even though Oxfam was firmly rooted in religious networks, it did not share the focus on a specific religious community. Members of the campaign had sold items such as Christmas cards on behalf of relief and development programs through incidental stands as well as stalls and shops since the late 1940s. During the early 1960s, they also started to sell items such as pincushions which had been made by Chinese refugees living in Hong Kong. Illustrative of the international networks which enabled such activities, the contact had been established through the German pastor Ludwig Stumpf who was stationed in Hong Kong by the Lutheran World Federation Department of World Services to assist these refugees. Oxfam's staff deemed such products suitable for selling, because they had a direct relation to the kind of programs Oxfam was engaged with 'overseas'. They provided good quality for an affordable price, which made them preferable over items volunteers could make at home or which would be bought from professional outfits in the United Kingdom.<sup>35</sup> During the 1960s, other suitable products from countries such as Mexico and Kenya were identified through the international network which Oxfam had established.<sup>36</sup> Christmas cards, however, long remained the best-selling item.<sup>37</sup>

The historian Matthew Anderson has rightly cautioned against equating these activities with what is nowadays known as 'fair trade'. They were rooted in a view which presented trade in labor-intensive goods from developing countries as an apt way of providing employment in these countries whilst also generating a profit which Oxfam could utilize for its operations. Consistent with the popular slogan 'trade, not aid', they built on the idea that being able to trade would provide people in developing countries a natural path to development.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, Oxfam had to operate carefully to avoid difficulties with the Charity Commission, which during the 1960s repeatedly cautioned the organization not to engage in political activities such as legislation and regulations, and was even suspicious of activities which could be deemed 'development aid' outright.<sup>39</sup> Here, charity comes into view as a legal status, which complicated the contestations about it in the context of the United Kingdom. In this predicament, activities which could still be presented as charitable, but could also have a transformative impact provided a viable course.

Charity could thus be redirected to support a transformative agenda by asking people to buy an item as a way of helping and then using the income from the sales for development. The objectives of charity and structural reform could even be almost indistinguishable. The case of Oxfam in the 1960s shows how this could follow from regulative frameworks and from strategic considerations. The early years of the Dutch alternative trading agency SOS underline, however, that more often than not a charitable approach entailed a transformative agenda. Similar to its North American counterparts, SOS developed out of a distinct religious community, gradually extending beyond this community in the course of its activities. During her summer holidays, twenty-three-year-old Enny Wolak had travelled to Paris to participate in the work of abbé Pierre, a Catholic priest who was committed to improve the lives of the poor there. A priest who Wolak met whilst in Paris subsequently contacted her from his new station in Sicily about the



dire lack of medicines and child nutrition. Wolak and her Catholic youth group decided to raise money for powdered milk in their Dutch hometown, Kerkrade. The success of their fundraising inspired a Catholic youth leader, Paul Meijs, to follow up on it. The committee 'Steun Ontwikkelings Streken' (SOS)<sup>40</sup> hosted numerous campaigns to support projects in developing countries during the ensuing years. In 1962, for example, it raised money to fund a hospital and a school for domestic science in Malawi, which had been brought to its attention by Catholic missionaries.<sup>41</sup>

Just as SOS relied on a worldwide network of Catholic missionaries for its foreign contacts, the network of Catholic churches, political committees and youth groups was crucial to its activities in the Netherlands. However, the ambition of Meijs and his fellow campaigners soon took their efforts outside of the Catholic community too. During the 1960s, they would distribute a hundred-thousand leaflets or took to calling anybody listed in local phonebooks in the course of their fundraising. An attempt to enlist the support of the main Catholic political party, the *Katholieke Volkspartij* ('Catholic People's Party'), reinforced this trend in an unexpected way in 1960. Representatives of the party demanded that SOS refrain from issues related to missionary work, in order not to interfere with the work of other organizations in this field. Instead of complying, Paul Meijs redirected his efforts beyond the Catholic community and also transnationally towards West-Germany, Belgium and eventually Austria and Switzerland.<sup>42</sup>

The campaigns initiated by SOS gravitated towards ideas about development which were common in Western Europe and North America during the 1960s. They entailed supporting 'developing countries' to build 'modern' economies after the Western example. By supporting local initiatives with a one-off grant and monitoring the subsequent progress, social and economic projects would be guided towards self-reliance. Positioning SOS somewhere in between the philosophies of Edna Byler and SERVV on the one hand, and Oxfam on the other, Paul Meijs promoted selling products which aided producers in developing countries in achieving economic independence, whilst SOS could invest profits it made from selling these products into new projects.<sup>43</sup> Although SOS appealed to the charitable sentiments of potential supporters and buyers, it combined such appeals with the aim of transforming economic and social conditions in the global South.

### **'It is about justice': The politicization of humanitarianism**

The rise of alternative trading organizations in Western Europe and North America during the 1950s and 1960s was accompanied by a growing interest in issues of international development at the national and international level. Crucially, economists and politicians from the global South succeeded in raising issues of trade and development in international politics. The years which had officially been labelled the Development Decade (1960-1970) by the United Nations saw the so-called Group of 77 successfully demand the installation of the United Nations Conferences on Trade and Development. Despite high expectations, the first of these conferences in 1964 and 1968 produced few results. Frustrations over the disparity between the stated good intentions by officials from the North and the lack of results concerning trading conditions and development efforts built.<sup>44</sup> Sympathetic groups in the North which united around issues of development, peace and charity launched a series of new campaigns to support the call for equitable terms of trade and more commitment to development.<sup>45</sup>

It was in this context of frustration over a lack of results and the justification of new initiatives that the critique of charity was reinvigorated. Instead of asking for charity, the decolonized people in the global South demanded justice, activist outfits such as the Haslemere Group and Sjaloom claimed. They built on declarations like the Charter of the United Nations, in which the participating countries had vowed to promote peace, fundamental equality between people and nations and worldwide progress. Equality between different parts of the world in this light was a



**Figure 2.** Dom Helder Câmara is met by the press upon his arrival in the Netherlands, 1970. Filius, *Helder Camara in Nederland*, 12.

matter of justice – obligatory rather than optional.<sup>46</sup> Such statements had been reinforced during the 1960s by people like Raúl Prebisch, the Argentinian general secretary of UNCTAD, who in 1968 had demanded ‘either reforms or your necks’.<sup>47</sup> They were popularized among Northern solidarity activists through liberation theology, which was first disseminated through networks of progressive Catholics, eventually gaining an interdenominational following.<sup>48</sup>

Interventions of prominent Latin American religious leaders were influential too. According to observers, ‘justice’ was central to the message the Brazilian archbishop Dom Helder Câmara communicated during his much-noted tours of Western Europe (see [Figure 2](#)). During a visit to the Netherlands in 1970, he told members of the Advent fundraising campaign that ‘help is welcome. Help is good. Thank you for what you are doing for us. But let us not forget one thing: the point is to achieve a situation in which help is not needed anymore. It is about justice!’ And in an address to the Dutch public, he urged: ‘Set an example by demanding that the situation changes. That instead of continued paternalism a new situation arises: a situation of justice’.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, during an international meeting of Third World activists in 1970, the Argentinian labor leader Emilio Máspero stressed that the dire situation of the people in the South would only be improved if the global power relations could be changed. Such change, according to Máspero, would have to start in the North, where ‘the capitalist and imperialist centres of power’ were located.<sup>50</sup>

The rhetoric of a break with a tradition of charity thus furthermore signalled an attempt to present humanitarianism in a framework of equality between South and North. The emphasis on justice bridged potential divides between religious and secular groups. It also served to distinguish and legitimize new initiatives. The fact that the break was all but clear in practice, however, could lead to considerable tensions. For example, in Belgium so-called Oxfam Wereldwinkels had been established since 1971, cooperating closely with the Dutch pioneers of the cane sugar campaign and world shops Sjaloom and the Dutch alternative trading organization SOS. Remarkably in the field of fair trade activism, Oxfam Wereldwinkels would go on to function as both an umbrella organization for world shops and an alternative trading organization. Positioning itself primarily as a political campaigning organization rather than one rooted in the older humanitarian tradition led to an incident at a conference in 1974, as the founding father of Oxfam in Belgium, the eccentric baron Antoine Allard, disputed the right of the world shops to represent Oxfam, especially because Oxfam had always refrained from political activities.<sup>51</sup>

A tradition of helping incidentally was thus often summarily contrasted with a new approach which built on a notion of justice and transformation. The context of these appeals, however, makes clear that the thrust of this new approach was to posit a fundamental social, political and economic equality as a framework within which charity was acceptable. According to people like Câmara and Máspero, this demanded not just a willingness to help, but also changes in global socio-political structures. They did not claim that earlier initiatives had lacked a transformative perspective or a sense of solidarity, but that meaningful results would only be achieved by targeting political structures. Seen as such, the new approach did not break with the notion of charity, but rather redirected it. Proponents of solidarity between South and North did not aim to eliminate aid to those in distress but shifted the moral foundations of these appeals. A sense of religious duty remained essential, although the reference to human rights extended the duty to help to a secular audience too. Stressing a political perspective did put these critics at odds with other religious actors in South and North. In Latin America, the left-leaning politics of people like Câmara were regarded with suspicion by religious authorities, who feared communist infiltration and strained relationships with state officials. In the North, the rift was between traditional religious institutions and new initiatives with outspoken political agendas.

The rejection of charity challenged the self-image of humanitarian action as impartial and apolitical, because it insisted on the primacy of structural change and the accompanying necessity of political interventions. It resulted in a politicization of humanitarianism, because its political implications and inclinations were laid bare. The politicized interpretation of transnational solidarity which was voiced among activists since the late 1960s impacted the way alternative trading organizations regarded their own work. In the case of the MCC's Self-Help Crafts, which had grown out of Edna Byler's initiative, this resulted in debates about the course of the program. In 1977, Dorothy Friesen and Gene Stoltzfus, who were involved in MCC's activities in Indonesia, wrote a memorandum which proposed to take social justice as a guiding principle for Self-Help Crafts. If pursued uncritically, they feared, the program could foster consumerism in the North and the economic dependency of producers in the South. They also criticized the prominent role of MCC-functionaries in producer groups and the gendered hierarchy of the projects, where women did most of the manual labor, while men dominated the management. The only justification for the self-help program is its potential use as a concrete consciousness-raising tool which directly connects the producer in the Third World with the consumer in North America', they concluded.<sup>52</sup>

The ensuing discussions showed that those involved in Self-Help Crafts had incorporated some of the ideas that critics had brought forward. The program was deemed successful in demonstrating that people in the South were creative, skilled and could provide for themselves.<sup>53</sup> In 1979, a self-assessment showed that the people who sold Self-Help Craft's products also wanted to contribute to educating their customers about development work. Those involved in the program had continued to promote 'self-reliance' but had expanded this notion beyond the traditional aim of providing producers in the South with a chance to earn a living, the study concluded.<sup>54</sup>

Similarly, Oxfam's way of selling products came under scrutiny during the 1970s. In 1972, Roy Scott proposed a new approach, that would address the structural confines in which producers in the Third World had to make a living. Scott had managed Oxfam's program Helping by Selling, which had boosted the sales of handicraft from developing countries during the early 1970s. Working with producers, he felt that Oxfam should do more to provide people in the global South with a steadfast economic footing.<sup>55</sup> In 1973, Scott and Paul Meijs of SOS jointly published a proposal for Bridge. This proposed European venture would be initiated by Oxfam and SOS. It built on the experiences of people like Scott and Meijs, who had concluded that the activities of Helping by Selling and SOS could only improve the lives of people in the global South on a very limited scale. Beyond these ventures, which had their primary value as

educational tools for the public in the North, producers in the South needed professional sales channels. Scott and Meijs observed how fair trade structurally relied on charity. Wrote Scott:

'A producer does not want to have his product bought out of charity or because of its educational or political message. A basic human need is for people to know they are playing a really valuable role in society – a producer needs to have his production bought simply because the products are good articles at attractive prices.'<sup>56</sup>

Eventually, Bridge was founded as a trading venture which was nominally independent of Oxfam, even though Oxfam assured it could control its activities. Roy Scott was disappointed by the lack of political orientation and producer participation and left the organization shortly after it was founded. However, Bridge did offer Oxfam a way of engaging more actively in work which went beyond the legal definition of charity, which hampered Oxfam's activities in this respect.<sup>57</sup>

SOS did not officially become involved with Bridge. After several years of rapid expansion, it was on the brink of collapse by the middle of the decade. After a popular campaign which promoted fair trade focused on the issue of cane sugar, many local campaign groups had founded so-called world shops in the Netherlands. Although world shops related to the practice of the Oxfam shops and their North American counterparts, they were more overtly political in their outlook.<sup>58</sup> Rather than giftshops, they were presented as local platforms for campaigns around issues of development, peace, human rights, and ecological issues. Selling products was primarily meant to serve the goal of publicizing the structural problems of the Third World rather than to help directly by selling. The members of these shops therefore combined political solidarity campaigns with selling products which were demonstrative of the situation of producers in the global South. Looking for other opportunities beyond cane sugar, these activists had taken up selling items imported by SOS. This was all the more attractive because SOS provided these items on a consignment basis, which meant that local groups did not have to have funds at their disposal to start selling.<sup>59</sup>

The model of the world shop was actively promoted by Dutch activists and soon introduced in neighboring countries such as West-Germany and Belgium. SOS had also expanded its activities to these countries, establishing subsidiaries in Belgium, West-Germany, Austria and Switzerland. SOS' expansion had been funded to a large extent through a cooperation with the West-German Catholic development agency Misereor. Whilst SOS could benefit from financial support, Misereor's relations with many producer groups and access to West-German networks, Misereor regarded SOS' emphasis on attaining self-reliance as an attractive model for its development activities.<sup>60</sup> Just as was the case in the Netherlands, many of the groups in West-Germany who were potentially interested in cooperating with SOS, however, wanted to emphasize the political perspective rather than the immediate benefits of trade. In a new strategic plan for SOS which he presented in 1971, Paul Meijs tried to fuse both approaches. It set out to state that 'trade, not aid' could only be achieved by structural changes in the South and North. 'The task which SOS takes up next to direct aid is to establish under which conditions trade can in practice be aid.' In some cases, it was possible to sell products which had particular 'demonstrative value'. However, providing immediate support was a more pressing concern. Whilst improving the lives of producers was the immediate effect of SOS' activities, the ultimate goal was to enable producers to establish themselves in the regular market.<sup>61</sup> To Meijs, there was no distinction between charity and transformation, but rather the question of which help would lead to what kind of transformation.

Despite the attempt to integrate the political and the pragmatic approaches, the relations between activist groups across Western Europe and SOS became increasingly strained during the first half of the 1970s. Tension partly arose around the question of products. Should activities revolve around products which could demonstrate the structural inequalities in global trade, such as coffee or cocoa, as many local activists demanded? Or should they focus on artisanal products, because these could call attention to the 'culture, history and tradition of the countries

of origin' of products, as Meijs would have it?<sup>62</sup> A second issue was about the focal point of the campaigns. After the failure of the UNCTAD conferences many activists had concluded that their main objective was to publicize issues of global inequality among the public in the North, in order to create political pressure on those governments obstructing reforms. The alternative trading organizations prioritized direct trade to improve the lives of producers. Finally, there was tension over the underlying ends of the movement. Outfits such as SOS, Helping by Selling, SERV and Self-Help Crafts aimed at enabling individual producers to become self-reliant economic entities. Many vocal activists initially hoped to achieve a quick and all-encompassing reform of global trade by politically establishing a global framework. After their attempts failed in the years between 1968 and 1973, these activists shifted their attention to supporting producers which were connected to alternative economic modes, such as leftist states or cooperatively organized groups of producers.<sup>63</sup>

The different angles on tactics and goals could be mitigated in practice, because groups such as world shops could easily combine more explicitly political campaigns with selling a range of products. SOS' downfall as a multinational venture, then, resulted mainly from the contentious relationship between the mother organization and its subsidiaries in different countries. Trouble started in West-Germany, where the Gesellschaft für Partnerschaft mit der Dritten Welt (GFP) was accused by Paul Meijs of being too preoccupied with its own affairs. This led to a break between SOS and GFP in 1974, after which the Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Partnerschaft mit der Dritten Welt (GEPA) was founded, which was led by Jan Hissel, a former employee of SOS.<sup>64</sup> After similar struggles over autonomy, the alternative trading organizations in Austria and Switzerland continued independently of SOS too.<sup>65</sup>

The international ambitions of SOS had resulted in a Europe-wide network of alternative trading organizations which kept in close contact despite the organizational splits of the 1970s. They had also catalyzed the development of a network of relations between South and North. Through a series of international meetings, producers and members of alternative trading organizations had come to know each other (see Figure 3).<sup>66</sup> Even as these meetings served to become familiar with what kind of products were available and what kind was in demand, they were also platforms for debates about the goals of alternative trade. The politicization of the humanitarian



**Figure 3.** Representatives of producer groups and alternative trading organizations during the final meeting of the international conference on alternative trade in Noordwijkerhout, 1976. *Wereldhandel*, 11 (1976): 17.

tradition which marked debates about fair trade during the 1970s also came to the fore here. At an international conference for alternative trade held in 1976 in the Dutch town of Noordwijkerhout, producers spurned the ambitions for expanding trading activities which Paul Meijs had designated as the main issue.<sup>67</sup> Instead, the producers presented a joint statement noting that

'the efforts of groups like ours touch hardly the fringe of problems that lie at the root of unequal exchange relations between the third world and the first world. It is indeed encouraging for us to learn that even more people in the first world, are beginning to recognize the real nature of the problems involved and are increasingly coming out in solidarity with the cause of the third world. It is our earnest hope that alternative marketing organizations will also increasingly pay attention to this aspect of the question in addition to direct relations with production groups in the third world countries.'<sup>68</sup>

By the end of the 1970s, SOS had parted ways with its energetic but headstrong pioneer Paul Meijs and had abandoned ambitions to become a European enterprise. Instead, it focused on importing products which would be sold in the Netherlands. What SOS' crises of the 1970s had demonstrated most of all, was how fast the idea of alternative trade had disseminated up until the point where those involved in different European countries were able to operate as individual organizations. Below the surface of the ideological battles over the tactics and goals of alternative trade, many local groups across the continent had taken up the practical activity of selling fair trade products. As surveys demonstrated time and again, attempts to break away from the humanitarian tradition of charity bypassed many supporters. Even in the course of the highly politicized cane sugar campaign, participants continued to regard buying products primarily as an act of solidarity with producers.<sup>69</sup> The rhetorical break between charity and justice thus led to a slightly different practice, which gave more priority to providing the public with information and to political campaigning. These activities, however, remained firmly tied to a notion of charity, both among the buyers of fair trade products and among activists. For the former, the notion of helping by buying was often simply continued. For the latter, charity was now seen as a necessary step in creating the more equitable world to which the disadvantaged had a right.

### **'The direct good we can do': The normalization of postcolonial humanitarianism**

After the rhetorical politicization of humanitarianism which had occurred since 1968, a more moderate tone became widespread during the 1980s. Even though the heft of the break with the tradition of charity dissipated, the moderation which emerged integrated several aspects which had been articulated during the preceding controversies. Crucially, the insistence on fundamental global equality based on common humanity remained a shared vantage point. From this, the obligation to help and to address structural disadvantages were deduced. The frustration over the lack of results was gradually replaced by steadfast strategies to realize improvements on a smaller scale. The need to polemically position new initiatives as alternatives to 'old' organizations and ideas likewise diluted. Instead, the equal partnership between producers and buyers became the norm, just as the inclusive collaboration between religious and secular groups was expected rather than contentious. The evolution of the alternative trading organizations highlights how a moderate humanitarian tradition was carried forward in a more self-evident vein. It contrasts sharply with humanitarian activities such as the 1985 Live Aid-campaign and its follow-ups, or the spectacular interventions by *Médecins sans Frontières*. Rather than generating states of exception, fair trade activists set out to integrate their postcolonial strand of humanitarian action into the daily lives of people in the North.

A shift in the global political and economic relations was crucial to this development in the practice of humanitarianism. The scale on which alternative trading organizations had operated during the 1970s had been relatively small. As the demand for products which local groups could sell rose sharply during the first half of that decade, organizations such as SOS had

scrambled to keep up, coming up short repeatedly. The potential supply for alternative trade had notably risen with the establishment of a number of leftist states like Nicaragua, Mozambique, Angola which exported products on a larger scale. Alongside their rise, a new type of alternative trading organization had also appeared. Stichting Ideële Import and similar importers rooted from solidarity groups which had supported national liberation movements in the global South. They exclusively focused their efforts on importing from leftist states in the South, whilst the organizations which had been part of SOS' network had a broader orientation.<sup>70</sup>

As the supply increased, the urgency of selling products grew. More so as the producers in Latin America were affected by a severe economic crisis which started around 1981. As the livelihood of coffee farmers depended on it, people selling their coffee could not give its political relevance priority over the volume of sales. Seen as such, the aim to achieve an equal position for producers demanded of fair trade activists that they go about the trade of the products as seriously as the producers. This sentiment was expressed by coffee farmers who wanted to sell more of their coffee for a fair price. Moreover, producer groups who travelled through Western Europe voiced criticism about the amateurish way in which fair trade groups went about selling their products.<sup>71</sup> This combination of pressures and opportunities caused considerable interest among activists in the North in selling fair trade products professionally in the course of the 1980s.

The shift towards a more pragmatic approach was evident in the debates around a new position paper which unfolded within the Belgian Oxfam Wereldwinkels during the early 1980s. Even if the Belgian movement adhered to the goal of achieving a socialist society, the members of the preparatory committee wanted to draw up a text which foregrounded the daily reality of those active in local campaigns.<sup>72</sup> Intellectualism and 'nineteenth-century' Marxist terminology had to be avoided, whereas practical experiences should be accentuated.<sup>73</sup> Similar conversations were common across the board in Western European groups, both at the local, national and international level.<sup>74</sup>

The alternative trading organizations were forerunners in trading more professionally. Historically, they had been the most commercially oriented part of the fair trade movement. Although they usually did not aspire to make a profit, they operated as businesses. In addition, staff members of these organizations were among the very few in the movement to have direct relations with producers. Therefore, they had been most aware of the fact that even though products might have symbolic value, individual livelihoods were at stake too. The North American and British alternative trading organizations had been especially well-versed in commercial approaches, producing professional catalogues and evaluating their commercial activities from a business economics perspective. SOS too had introduced mail-order during the second half of the 1970s.<sup>75</sup> By the early 1980s, the alternative trading organizations had substantially expanded the range of products they offered from several handicraft items and coffee. The Belgian Oxfam Wereldwinkels in 1983 reported that next to handicraft from several countries, it sold coffee, cane sugar and rum from Nicaragua, cashews from Mozambique, Algerian wines, juices and jams, Tanzanian tea and coffee, Mexican honey, pineapple and lychees from Vietnam and Cape Verde tuna.<sup>76</sup> The extent to which those involved across Europe embraced professional marketing could differ considerably, however. It was only in the 1990s, for example, that GEPA tentatively released a mail-order catalogue, carefully navigating to preserve its relationship with the many local shops on which it depended for a large part of its sales.<sup>77</sup>

Ever since the fair trade movement took off during the 1970s, different activist groups had fostered transnational contacts not just between North and South, but also across European countries. These contacts had served to reflect common experiences, exchange models for action and other relevant knowledge, and to bolster the morale of local groups by underlining the transnational scope of their movement. For their part, producers made use of this network to locate potential trading partners.<sup>78</sup> The alternative trading organizations had an especially manifest interest in consulting regularly. Building on the relations which had been established during

SOS' European expansion in the 1970s, representatives of these organizations met regularly to exchange information on specific products, discuss trips to producers they were planning and arrange to import items on behalf of one another.<sup>79</sup>

These meetings were an important instrument for operating professionally and were also used to discuss possibilities for improving the commercial practices of those involved. At a meeting in the English town of Nuneaton in March 1983, around thirty-five organizations involved in producing and trading discussed how the importance of educating the public about global trade could be balanced against sales promotion and how sales could be expanded beyond the 'alternative' market. The difficulty of doing justice to the autonomy of producers whilst acknowledging consumer interests came to the fore in discussions over jute products.<sup>80</sup> Jute bags had become a popular item in many Western European countries, representing an environmentally responsible alternative to plastic bags whilst also providing producers from countries like Bangladesh with an opportunity to sell their products.<sup>81</sup> The discussants noted that jute bags were indeed a very suitable product, which people could potentially buy not just out of sympathy, but because of its usefulness. However, in order to meet that criterion, the bags would have to suit the tastes of Western consumers and be durable enough for lasting use – neither of which was the case at that time. Suggestions about altering the bags, however, met with the objection that this would go against the producers' tradition and reduce them to catering to the needs of rich consumers.<sup>82</sup> The alternative trading organizations were caught between the fires of increasing sales by limiting the autonomy of producers or risk declining sales, with no clear-cut solution in sight.

Such debates about prioritizing political or practical goals astonished their North American colleagues. In 1985, Edgar Stoesz and Paul Leatherman represented Self-Help Crafts during an international meeting of alternative trading organizations in the Swedish city of Linköping. Despite the optimism of the participants, who expected their activities to expand over the following years, Stoesz was skeptical about their approach. The participants were serious about helping the Third World, but 'the leaders seemed to me to be idealistic generalists (some political activists) and the resources which they command minuscule in comparison to their objectives', he noted. Stoesz did not share their expectation that the global market could be changed through alternative trade: 'Even if that were to be our goal, I suspect that there are other approaches that would be more effective.' Instead, he concluded that Self-Help Crafts should continue to trade 'for the direct good we can do'. Nevertheless, he saw a considerable overlap of interest, which made him recommend his American colleagues to keep in contact.<sup>83</sup>

The regular meetings were solidified during the second half of the 1980s. First, a group of European alternative trading organizations which had already cooperated closely established a European federation which was dubbed European Fair Trade Association (EFTA). Informally, EFTA functioned from 1987 onwards as a platform for its members to discuss matters of common concern, plan joint campaigns, coordinate lobbying at the European level and prevent unwelcome competition among those affiliated.<sup>84</sup> Parallel to the establishment of EFTA, attempts to set up an international federation to coordinate the efforts of producer groups and European and North American alternative trading organizations had also been pursued since the early 1980s. At an international conference of these organizations in West-Berlin in 1987, the establishment of EFTA was presented as part of an inventory of forms of regional cooperation, but whereas reports by the North American and Nordic organizations spoke of informal and incidental cooperation, EFTA was clearly more ambitious and had a more exclusive character. The announcement of the closer cooperation by this 'group of ten' led to considerable discontent among the participants to the international conference, because it threatened to reinforce disparity within the movement.<sup>85</sup>

Countering the EFTA-initiative, the participants at the international conference in West-Berlin decided to establish a common international federation which was to be named International Federation for Alternative Trade (IFAT). It was based on a common understanding of their goals: 'co-operation with the poor and oppressed in the Third World on the basis of justice and solidarity,



aimed at improving living conditions in Third World countries, mainly by means of (promoting) trade in products from those countries', in addition to publicizing unfair economic structures and attempting to set an example for an alternative way of doing business.<sup>86</sup>

Even though alternative trading organizations from Europe dominated both initiatives initially, EFTA clearly prioritized the interests of the group of organizations its represented and had a firm basis in the daily work of its members. IFAT, on the other hand, would hardly impact the day-to-day practice of its members during the 1990s. It developed into a platform for a regular exchange of information among producing and trading organizations which identified with the goals of the fair trade movement, aspiring to display the global character of the movement and the fundamental equality between all of its members.

As the alternative trading organizations were debating new forms of cooperation at the end of the 1980s, the initiative which would have the largest long-term impact on the movement was developed elsewhere. The development of fair trade certification reinforced the normalization of postcolonial humanitarianism as a reconfiguration of charity and justice. Modeled after existing certification schemes concerned with environmental standards, the fair trade label Max Havelaar was introduced by the Dutch ecumenical campaigning organization Solidaridad in 1988. The idea had been developed in close cooperation with the Mexican coffee cooperative UCIRI, which had vocally lobbied to increase the sales of coffee which was sold for a fair price.<sup>87</sup> The Max Havelaar-label could be applied to any product which met the criteria of the label. These stipulated that the coffee had to be produced by a pre-selected group of producers and countries, and coffee producers had a right to pre-financing. Buyers had to work towards a long-term trading commitment. Above all, the criteria guaranteed a minimum price and a premium for the producers, which they could use for development purposes of their own choice.<sup>88</sup>

The Dutch alternative trading organizations SOS and SII had also been involved in the introduction but had raised serious concerns. They feared that large companies would become involved with fair trade for purely strategic reasons and crowd out the activities of the economically less powerful alternative trading organizations and world shops.<sup>89</sup> The alternative trading organizations concluded that the introduction of the label relegated them to playing second fiddle in the field of fair trade. As the Max Havelaar-label spread across Europe, EFTA's members looked for a way to regain a leading role. In cooperation with the German Arbeitsgemeinschaft Kleinbauernkaffee they set up a second international initiative for a fair trade label: Transfair International.<sup>90</sup> Soon after its launch in 1992, however, it transpired that they had miscalculated. As Max Havelaar and Transfair International competed to introduce their models across Europe, Transfair could not be controlled by EFTA's members. The alternative trading organizations wanted control over the label even as they wanted it to independently certify their products. The labelling organization had to protect its credibility by limiting the influence of trading agencies. Despite the initial competition and their slightly different approaches, eventually the practical and ideological overlap between Transfair and Max Havelaar proved decisive. In 1997, Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International was established as the common umbrella organization for all fair trade labelling organizations.<sup>91</sup>

## **No justice without charity**

The introduction of fair trade labelling caused a long-term shift in the relations within the movement. Whilst the alternative trading organizations had long been regarded with suspicion by activist groups because of their proximity to commercial practices, they were now viewed as representatives of a more pure variety of fair trade next to the more perilous strategy of cooperating with large commercial organizations such as supermarkets and coffee chains. The alternative trading organizations thus took up a middle position between activist local groups such as world shops and the more commercially oriented labelling organizations.

A second shift was discernable in the background: the debate now centered around the question of how products should be sold on behalf of producers. It had emerged gradually since the 1980s, and the introduction of fair trade labelling was a result rather than its cause. Focusing on how to help by selling, in many ways it represented a silent return to the humanitarian tradition in which fair trade activism was rooted. Despite the politicization of the 1970s, charity had remained a crucial element in thinking about fair trade as an idea and a practice. The 'imperative to help' was not replaced by a framework stressing justice and human rights but was redirected. As a result of the debates about justice as an alternative, many fair trade activists now regarded charity as a stepping stone to equal relations. At the same time, many people buying and selling fair trade continued to regard it as an act of voluntary solidarity. The notion of charity had thus evolved into two parallel tracks: it could be presented as a supplement to justice or function parallel to it.

The focus on charity in fair trade activism thus highlights its continued importance for the history of humanitarianism. Rediscovering the centrality of this notion, continuities before and after the 1960s come to the fore, whilst it becomes possible to gauge the impact of the shift towards a postcolonial framework. The early years of the alternative trading organizations shows how these organizations were rooted in religious communities, which provided them with ideological inspiration, networks and facilities. However, it also demonstrates that these initiatives did not understand the kind of charity they engaged with to be only a form of relief work. Similarly, the calls to buy products on behalf of others were tied to promoting self-reliance, diversification and modernization. In this light, limiting histories of humanitarianism to initiatives for emergency relief risks neglecting an important dimension.<sup>92</sup> Helping distant others has often gone hand in hand with the aim of a long-term transformation of the relations between those helping and those being helped.

For the period beyond the 1960s, the focus on charity brings the continuity between 'old' and 'new' initiatives to the fore. 'New' social movements distanced themselves from older initiatives which they presented as old-fashioned charity steeped in religious traditions. Despite activists' proclaiming a break with the past, charity was preserved as a crucial notion. It was presented as a crucial step towards justice and continued to underpin many appeals to solidarity. The rhetorical break was prompted by the frustrations about the meagre results of the first Development Decade, the need to assert their independence from earlier campaigns and religious institutions. Insisting on a break with earlier campaigns, organizations and practices thus opened the way to position charity within a postcolonial framework of justice and global equality. It also opened up a space for cooperation between secular and religious groups, which could be united under the banner of justice.

As the history of the alternative trading organizations beyond the 1960s demonstrates, religious networks and inspiration continued to be crucial to humanitarian action. The influence of religion did become harder to discern. The dividing line between religious and secular initiatives became increasingly blurred. In churches across Western Europe, people sold products from explicitly secular organizations such as Stichting Ideële Import alongside products from the evangelical Tearfund and the informally Catholic SOS. Although religion remained a crucial factor in the ideas and networks of humanitarian action, the history of fair trade does point towards a gradual decline of more exclusive interpretations regarding the community within which charity and justice were situated.

Rather than limiting it to a distinct denominational community, as organizations such as Self-Help Crafts or SOS initially did, the trading organizations gradually expanded their potential base of consumers and producers beyond their denominational communities. Just as is true of many civil society organizations in the post-war era, they transitioned from an exclusive to an inclusive perspective without disbanding their religious underpinnings.<sup>93</sup> Instead of focusing on competing processes of secularization and sacralization, then, the oftentimes fluent combination of these two appears to be crucial to understanding humanitarian action in the post-war era.<sup>94</sup>



**Figure 4.** 'Don't send money, buy Max Havelaar products' – poster to a Max Havelaar campaign from the 1990s, Private Archive Max Havelaar.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the ambiguous use of the notion of justice, which had clear religious connotations, but extended into secular contexts too.

As the politicization of humanitarianism subsided, the degree of continuity became more clearly discernible. Charity had not been replaced by justice, but was invoked in relation to it. Similarly, many of the ideals and catch-phrases of earlier campaigns continued to resonate with fair trade activists. 'Trade, not aid' and the associated goal of self-reliance corresponded closely to new slogans such as 'don't send your money, buy Max Havelaar products' in the 1990s (see Figure 4). At the same time, the ideas and practices of the fair trade movement were now voiced within a postcolonial framework. The right of producers to be treated equally and fairly indeed promoted a more pragmatic approach to fair trade. If the producers' livelihood depended on selling products, activists could not be content to use these products primarily as means for symbolic action. Whilst grandiose campaigns called on people in the world to donate for relief work, a tradition of inconspicuously buying products for which a fair price had been paid was introduced into the daily lives of people shopping in supermarkets. References to charity as a form of one-sided helping could regularly be heard, but they were not the norm for humanitarian campaigns anymore.

Humanitarianism after empire, then, did not suddenly break away from charity. There was considerable continuity regarding its relevance, the view towards a structural transformation and the way in which humanitarian action was tied to a reconfirmation of the righteousness of the

community. The tension between universal claims and distinctive groups and regions persisted. However, there were notable shifts of emphasis. Whereas an explicit focus on the whole of humanity was not commonplace as the alternative trading organizations in North America and Western Europe first established themselves during the 1950s and 1960s, they evolved into the implicit or explicit standard during the 1970s and 1980s. This was accompanied by a stronger formulation of the obligation of charitable action. Charity was what was demanded of people as a result of their obligation to promote justice, because of their common humanity and the universal right to equality. Rather than pitting charity and justice against each other, histories of humanitarianism could productively focus on how communities of charity were delimited and how the sense of justice within these communities evolved.

## Notes

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