

# Outraged, yet moderate and impartial

The rise of Amnesty International in the Netherlands in the 1960s and 1970s<sup>1</sup>

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This article contributes to the recent historiography on human rights by analysing the rise of Amnesty International in the Netherlands. It uses the Dutch section's archives extensively for the first time and explores how, despite the first section's failure to gain traction, upon its second founding it quickly grew into one of the largest national sections of Amnesty. Apart from highlighting differences in approach between the first and the second group of organisers, this article explains the remarkable success of the latter. It focuses on the interaction between Amnesty's 'model' and the Dutch cultural and political context, discussing how the national section's leadership mediated this. The organisation capitalised on the idealism of the 1970s while steering clear of radicalisation and political polarisation in both the national and international spheres. In addition, the Dutch section's approach and message spoke directly to memories of World War II, while organisational innovation allowed it to tap into growing reserves of volunteers and members, contributing to a more general shift in Amnesty's work.

Dit artikel draagt door middel van een analyse van de opkomst van Amnesty International in Nederland bij aan de recente historiografie over mensenrechten. Het maakt voor het eerst uitgebreid gebruik van de archieven van de Nederlandse afdeling en gaat na hoe de Nederlandse afdeling in eerste instantie geen voet aan de grond kreeg, maar bij de tweede poging alsnog uitgroeide tot een van de grootste nationale afdelingen van Amnesty. Naast verschillen in de aanpak tussen de twee pogingen verklaart dit artikel dit plotselinge succes uit de interactie tussen Amnesty's 'model' en de Nederlandse culturele en politieke context, zoals

vormgegeven door de leiding van de nationale afdeling. Amnesty's activisme sloot aan op het idealisme van de jaren zeventig, maar de organisatie vermeed radicalisering en politieke polarisering op zowel het nationale als het internationale vlak. Daarnaast deed de boodschap van de Nederlandse afdeling een beroep op herinneringen aan de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Ten slotte maakte organisatorische innovatie het mogelijk een groeiende reserve van vrijwilligers en leden aan te spreken, hetgeen bijdroeg aan een algemene wijziging van Amnesty's koers.

## Introduction

The vigorous recent debate on the history of human rights has focused on the middle of the twentieth century, from the 1940s to the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> Whereas established narratives of what is referred to – in shorthand – as the rise of human rights have focused on the post-war moment, newer accounts emphasise the importance of the 1970s. Although some scholars have begun to question the utility of an approach focused on identifying 'breakthrough' moments, debates on continuity and discontinuity seem likely to carry on.<sup>3</sup> What is relatively uncontested, however, is that the 1970s saw a marked increase in the use of human rights language, at least in the West, and that a major, if not the defining, element of this development was widespread human rights activism. Jan Eckel has written that 'non-governmental organisations can arguably be considered the most important driving force behind international human rights politics after the Second World War', and contrasts the relative failure of the International League for the Rights of Man to the later success of Amnesty International.<sup>4</sup> Writing about the Netherlands, the late Peter Baehr held that 'the issue of human rights has been put on the political agenda mainly thanks to the efforts of non-governmental

1 I would like to thank James C. Kennedy, Piers Ludlow, the reviewers, and the journal's editors for their comments on an earlier version of this manuscript, as well as Alex Mayhew for proofreading the final draft. I also benefitted greatly from presenting my findings in the University of Reading's 'History of International Organisations' seminar, and in particular from comments offered by Kiran Klaus Patel. This article is based on my Research Master's dissertation, entitled 'Geëngageerd, maar onpartijdig en gematigd. De opkomst van Amnesty International in Nederland, 1961-1990'

(University of Amsterdam 2013), which is available in full at: <http://dare.uva.nl/document/508323>.

2 Cf. Devin O. Pendas, 'Toward a New Politics? On the Recent Historiography of Human Rights', *Contemporary European History* 21 (2012) 95-111.

3 Cf. Robert Brier, 'Beyond the Quest for a "Breakthrough": Reflections on the Recent Historiography on Human Rights', *European History Yearbook* 16 (2015) 155-173.

4 Jan Eckel, 'The International League for the Rights of Man, Amnesty International, and the Changing Fate of Human Rights Activism from the 1940s through the 1970s', *Humanity* 2 (2013) 184.

organisations'.<sup>5</sup> Amnesty International was the most important of these and would remain the most authoritative nongovernmental human rights organisation in the world until at least the 1990s, when it began to encounter serious competition from Human Rights Watch and other organisations.

### Amnesty and the rise of human rights in the 1970s

What explains Amnesty's rise? Scholars have advanced several general theories. Firstly, as the Cold War entered a phase of *détente* during the late 1960s, discontent with superpower competition and its consequences was widespread.<sup>6</sup> Amnesty promised to transcend the divisions of the Cold War, which it did by taking an 'impartial' stance, focusing only on political prisoners, not political systems. During its initial decades, Amnesty's groups would 'adopt' three 'prisoners of conscience' at a time: one from the East, one from the West, and one from the Third World. A second aspect of Amnesty's appeal was that Amnesty's founder, the British lawyer Peter Benenson, conceived the project as spiritual in nature. Himself a recently converted Catholic, Benenson noted an increasing trend towards secularisation and hoped that Amnesty would act as a sort of secularised religious community, which would 're-ignite a fire in the minds of men'. Not coincidentally, the organisation's symbols and practices, like the candle enveloped by barbed wire, were deeply linked to Christianity.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the accuracy of its information played a key role: the organisation's London-based International Secretariat and its Research Department focused on collecting detailed and reliable evidence about political persecution. For instance, Amnesty's reports on the Greek junta from 1968 helped establish its reputation as an objective source.<sup>8</sup> The gathering and dissemination of Amnesty's information was aided by an increase in global connectivity and consciousness during the late 1960s and 1970s. This stimulated an increasing number of people to

5 Peter R. Baehr, 'Trials and errors. The Netherlands and Human Rights', in: David P. Forsythe (ed.), *Human Rights and Comparative Foreign Policy* (New York 2000) 57.

6 Cf. Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA and London 2003).

7 Tom Buchanan, 'The Truth Will Set You Free. The Making of Amnesty International', *Journal of Contemporary History* 37 (2002) 575-597; Stephen

Hopgood, *Keepers of the Flame. Understanding Amnesty International* (Ithaca 2006).

8 Barbara Keys, 'Anti-Torture Politics. Amnesty International, the Greek Junta, and the Origins of the Human Rights "Boom" in the United States', in: Akira Iriye, Petra Goedde and William I. Hitchcock (eds.), *The Human Rights Revolution. An International History* (New York et al. 2012) 202-203.

become concerned about global issues, including human rights.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Samuel Moyn has recently suggested that the attraction of human rights, and of Amnesty in particular, lay in a general disillusion with ‘transformative utopias’, particularly those of reformed socialism and student revolts. People began to turn to ‘minimalist utopias’ of the kind that Amnesty was able to offer through its goal of making the world not perfect but merely, in the words of one Amnesty member, ‘a slightly less wicked place’.<sup>10</sup> Eckel has provided a similar account, focused on Amnesty in the United States. However, he focuses less on disillusion and more on the importance of participation: ‘[H]uman rights offered a departure from the dilemmas into which social utopianism and ideological rigor had maneuvered the protest movements of the 1960s, once they had successfully broken up the anti-totalitarian consensus and opened up new avenues for political participation.’ In his view, human rights promised to overcome the political polarisation within Western democracies and the bipolarity of the Cold War. At the same time, it offered direct individual engagement, which catered to a rising demand for ‘moral subjectivity and personal politics’.<sup>11</sup>

### Amnesty’s national sections

To fully understand Amnesty’s success, it is necessary to look at how the organisation managed to successfully root itself in various societies. As Tom Buchanan – who has written the most authoritative articles on Amnesty’s early years – has written: ‘[M]ore research is needed to investigate why Benenson’s ideas flourished in some national environments and not in others.’<sup>12</sup> Eckel has pointed out that even by the end of the 1970s the geographical spread of Amnesty was highly uneven: three quarters of all its prisoner adoption groups were located in just six countries.<sup>13</sup> Amnesty’s lack of success outside of Northwest Europe and North America was not very surprising, given its geographical origins, cultural affinities, and ideological priorities. Also, until 2001 members were not allowed to address human rights issues in their own countries, which alienated activists striving to overcome political

9 Michael Cotey Morgan, ‘The Seventies and the Rebirth of Human Rights’, in: Niall Ferguson et al. (eds.), *The Shock of the Global. The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA 2010) 237-250.

10 Eckel, ‘The International League for the Rights of Man’, quoted in Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 146-147.

11 Eckel, ‘The International League for the Rights of Man’, 204. Cf. idem, *Die Ambivalenz des Guten*.

*Menschenrechte in der internationalen Politik seit den 1940ern* (Göttingen 2014) 347-435.

12 Tom Buchanan, ‘Human rights, the Memory of War and the Making of a “European” Identity, 1945-1975’, in: Martin Conway and Kiran Klaus Patel (eds.), *Europeanisation in the Twentieth Century. Historical Approaches* (Basingstoke 2010) 165-166.

13 Eckel, ‘The International League for the Rights of Man’, 205.

repression in many non-Western countries.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, such repression curtailed the possibilities for setting up Amnesty sections in the first place. Yet even among those countries where Amnesty did, over the course of its first few decades, attract a large membership, its development varied. During the 1960s, the organisation grew at a steady pace in Britain, Denmark, Norway, and particularly Sweden, as well as in the Federal Republic of Germany, but elsewhere in Europe sections struggled to gain traction.<sup>15</sup> Without further attention as to the trajectory of individual sections of Amnesty, we lack a complete explanation of the organisation's emergence. This, in turn, is crucial for explaining the rise of human rights more widely.

Studying national sections is also necessary if we are to understand properly Amnesty's transnational character. The organisation's self-definition as a movement beyond borders emphasises Amnesty's essential unity and has served to downplay the differences between national sections. This tendency is also present in the work of sympathetic chroniclers.<sup>16</sup> Political scientists who have studied Amnesty's history and advocacy tend to view it as a single 'non-governmental organisation' which has exerted influence by lobbying at the United Nations and publishing trustworthy information on human rights violations.<sup>17</sup> This perspective focuses attention on the International Secretariat rather than national sections. The International Secretariat contained the Research Department, which gathered the information that Amnesty depended on. It guarded this vital asset closely, leading it to adopt a cloistered attitude. But as Stephen Hopgood – who carried out an ethnography of the International Secretariat – has acknowledged, national sections could be quite distinct from the London-based Secretariat.<sup>18</sup> National sections were rooted in societies towards which they had to take an outgoing, mobilising approach. Moreover, their leadership's approach could be shaped by convictions that differed from those of Amnesty's founders, at least beyond the foundational tenets of the organisation.

Little historical work has so far been done on national sections, in part because archival access has not always been forthcoming. But the work that has been done bears out the value of studying Amnesty at the national level. Lora Wildenthal has produced a valuable account of the initial years of the West German section, though this is based largely on secondary literature, contemporary journalistic articles by the section's founders, and their reminiscences.<sup>19</sup> Tom Buchanan has done archive-based work on

14 Hopgood, *Keepers of the Flame*, 98.

15 Eckel, *Die Ambivalenz*, 362 and 352-353.

16 E.g. Jonathan Power, *Like Water on Stone: The Story of Amnesty International* (Boston 2001).

17 E.g. Ann Marie Clark, *Diplomacy of Conscience: Amnesty International in International Politics* (Princeton 2001).

18 Hopgood, *Keepers of the Flame*, ix.

19 Lora Wildenthal, *The Language of Human Rights in West Germany* (Philadelphia 2013).

Amnesty's earliest years in Britain, but has focused on the International Secretariat and the international leadership rather than the British national section (although these were closely intertwined at the time). Up until now it has been the American section that has been the subject of the most rigorous archival research, most notably by Kenneth Cmiel, Sarah Snyder, and Jan Eckel.<sup>20</sup> We might, though, aspire to a history of Amnesty which integrates a large number of sections, so as to develop a more complete account of why Benenson's message resonated more in one country and less in another.

The Dutch section of Amnesty provides a particularly important case. Although it initially struggled, the section became exceptionally successful at growing its membership, which allowed it to exert significant influence. It was founded in 1968, seven years after Amnesty's initial appeal, and by 1970 had acquired 200 members.<sup>21</sup> Yet by 1972 the organisation had grown to 7.000 members, which suddenly made it, according to its secretary, the largest Amnesty section not only in relative but also in absolute terms.<sup>22</sup> In 1977, the year Amnesty won the Nobel Peace Prize, the organisation as a whole had roughly 180.000 members – one in about five of whom was Dutch.<sup>23</sup> More recently, in 2009, Amnesty in the Netherlands reached its peak of over 300.000 members, almost 2 per cent of the population, making it the largest in absolute terms after the American section.<sup>24</sup> How did the Dutch section establish such a prominent position in Dutch society? This story, based on extensive research in the archives of the Dutch section, reflects on both wider developments in Dutch society in the 1960s and 1970s as well as the history of Amnesty and similar civil society organisations. First and foremost, however, it throws light upon the process by which the Dutch section established itself. This exemplifies how Amnesty's model could be adapted to a given social, cultural, and political landscape, and thereby contributes to our knowledge of the wider rise of human rights.

20 Kenneth Cmiel, 'The Emergence of Human Rights Politics in the United States', *Journal of American History* 83 (1999) 1231-1250; Sarah B. Snyder, 'Exporting Amnesty International to the United States. Transatlantic Human Rights Activism in the 1960s', *Human Rights Quarterly* 34 (2012) 779-799; Eckel, 'The International League for the Rights of Man'; idem, *Die Ambivalenz*. The latter publication also briefly draws on the Dutch section's archives, but focuses heavily on the International Secretariat and the American section.

21 International Institute for Social History (hereafter IISH), archives of Amnesty International. Nederland (hereafter AINL), inv. nr. 2, 'Een schets van de ontwikkeling van Amnesty International' (September 1977).

22 IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 7, Brief van Herbart Ruitenbergh aan de Algemene Raad van de Nederlandse Orde van Advocaten, 13 October 1972.

23 IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 41, 'diskussiestuk beleidsplan nederlandse a.i. sectie', 22 November 1977.

24 'Amnesty International Afdeling Nederland. Jaarverslag 2010' (Amsterdam 2011) 8.

## From the first to the second founding (1962-1968)

The first attempt to found a Dutch section was made in 1962, but was abandoned in 1964 because the organisation could not manage to attract sufficient members or funding. In the years after, Amnesty in the Netherlands led a slumbering existence. There existed only a few disparate writing groups with no national coordination. This makes the section's spectacular growth in the 1970s all the more remarkable. In 1968, a second attempt at founding a national section was made by a different group, which quickly proved more successful. This can be explained through changes in the political and social environment as well as the strategy adopted by the new founders.

The first founding was undertaken under the leadership of the journalist and writer Elka Schrijver, who wrote to Benenson on 25 July 1961 and then proceeded to assemble a provisional organising committee, which met several times at the Café Americain in Amsterdam.<sup>25</sup> Schrijver had been active in the wartime resistance and had been imprisoned in Germany. While these experiences drove her to establish a Dutch section of Amnesty, they also laid the foundations for her failure. She regarded Benenson and his colleagues as naïve, having never experienced occupation, and derided his inattention to the possibility of infiltration by communist or fascist elements.<sup>26</sup> Although Schrijver's suspicions were to a degree understandable, they led her to adopt a highly centralised and guarded approach. She gathered a committee of elite individuals, whose reputation was beyond reproach, but who were unable to commit a significant amount of their time to the enterprise. She insisted, as the organisation's secretary, on being the central hub through which all communications passed. This, given her heavy workload, turned her desk into a bottleneck. Under her stewardship, Amnesty was legally incorporated as a foundation, instead of an association, meaning it would not have members. Schrijver feared that they might maliciously take control of the organisation. This approach did not help to mobilise resources or invite initiative from other participants. Given its very limited means, the organisation remained isolated and had to give up its efforts in 1964.<sup>27</sup>

Schrijver's attitude contrasted sharply with that of the leader of the second founding, Cornelis van der Vlies. Van der Vlies, a colleague of the development economist and soon-to-be Nobel laureate Jan Tinbergen, had been active during the first attempt as well, but had found Schrijver's behaviour stifling. He established contact with the British organisation on his own, and – in contrast to Schrijver – developed a personal rapport with them. He kept working with a small group of adherents in Rotterdam (whereas

25 IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 175, Elka Schrijver aan Amnesty, 25 July 1961.

26 IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 175, Schrijver aan Peter Benenson, 1 December 1961, 3.

27 IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 171, 'Mededeling aan de begunstigers van De Nederlandse Beweging "Amnesty"' (1964) 5.

Schrijver was based in Amsterdam) and in 1966 Van der Vlies even took on a position on Amnesty's International Executive Committee.

In the meantime, Van der Vlies persisted in trying to expand the base of people interested in engaging with Amnesty's work. He adopted a posture diametrically opposed to Schrijver's; in Van der Vlies' view, Amnesty should be built from the bottom up, from a growing base of loosely affiliated writing groups into a coordinated national section. Rather than attempting to exclude any possible malign influence at the gate, Van der Vlies believed any such figures would easily be identified and isolated should they join the organisation.<sup>28</sup> He therefore took a much more inclusive and open attitude towards new members. This yielded a more heterogeneous group than Schrijver had assembled, although, as before, its members could be described as political progressives. Van der Vlies himself was an avowed social democrat who loathed the 'pomposity, faith in authorities and mental inaction' which plagued the Netherlands.<sup>29</sup> Whereas Schrijver's group had consisted largely of politicians, officials, and theologians, Van der Vlies gathered a significant number of lawyers around him.

On 18 April 1968 Van der Vlies and his companions once again founded the organisation's Dutch section, but this time as an association. At its first general assembly that year, held at the Hotel Krasnapolsky in Amsterdam, Amnesty's secretary-general, Martin Ennals, and the Czechoslovak dissident writer Jan Beneš spoke. Although the meeting's turnout was disappointingly low and the response of the press underwhelming, it resulted in a television broadcast and almost sixty requests for information.<sup>30</sup> Through this and other initiatives the organisation quickly attracted a few hundred members, which gave it sufficient finances to proceed, thus demonstrating the merits of an approach aimed at mobilising as much participation and support as possible.

### Adapting to a changing national landscape during the 1970s

Yet while the difference in organisational approach between the first to the second founding was surely important, the way in which it meshed with a changing societal and political environment was also very significant. Within Dutch society during the late 1960s and early 1970s several socio-political developments occurred which were comparable to those in other Northwest European societies, yet some were particularly pronounced in the Netherlands – four of which are discussed below. Both in

28 IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 171, Verslag door Brongersma en Van der Vlies van de jaarlijkse conferentie van Amnesty te Königswinter am Rhein (20-22 September 1963), September or October 1963.

29 'Deftigheid, autoriteitengeloof en geestelijk immobilisme.' IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 171, Cornelis

van der Vlies, 'ENIGE OPMERKINGEN over de activiteiten van Amnesty's "Threes' Groups"'.  
30 IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 174, Brief van secretaris Mentink

aan alle bestuursleden, 4 October 1968.



terms of its message and its organisational approach, Amnesty's model was well-suited to this new environment, and the Dutch section made the most of this as its membership and visibility grew sharply after 1970.

*Progressive idealism in a 'guiding country'*

The findings of the American sociologist Ronald Inglehart have often featured prominently in explanations for the increased interest in human rights. Inglehart observed that during the late 1960s and the 1970s a generation came of age in affluent and secure circumstances, which enabled it to focus on 'post-material' issues such as the environment, nuclear disarmament, and human rights.<sup>31</sup> However – and leaving aside the problems inherent in the dichotomy between 'material' and 'post-material' values<sup>32</sup> – this explanation cannot provide more than an enabling condition. It does not explain why it was specifically the concept of human rights that galvanised such support. David Hollinger has argued that '[w]e can speak of a "political economy of solidarity" because solidarity is a scarce commodity distributed by authority'.<sup>33</sup> If he is correct, the reasons why Amnesty's message reached so many people and carried such authority are more important than the fact that there was a reserve of idealism for the organisation to tap into. Amnesty was not only in a synergetic relationship with other internationalist organisations. It was also in competition with them for funding, volunteers, media attention, and access to government.

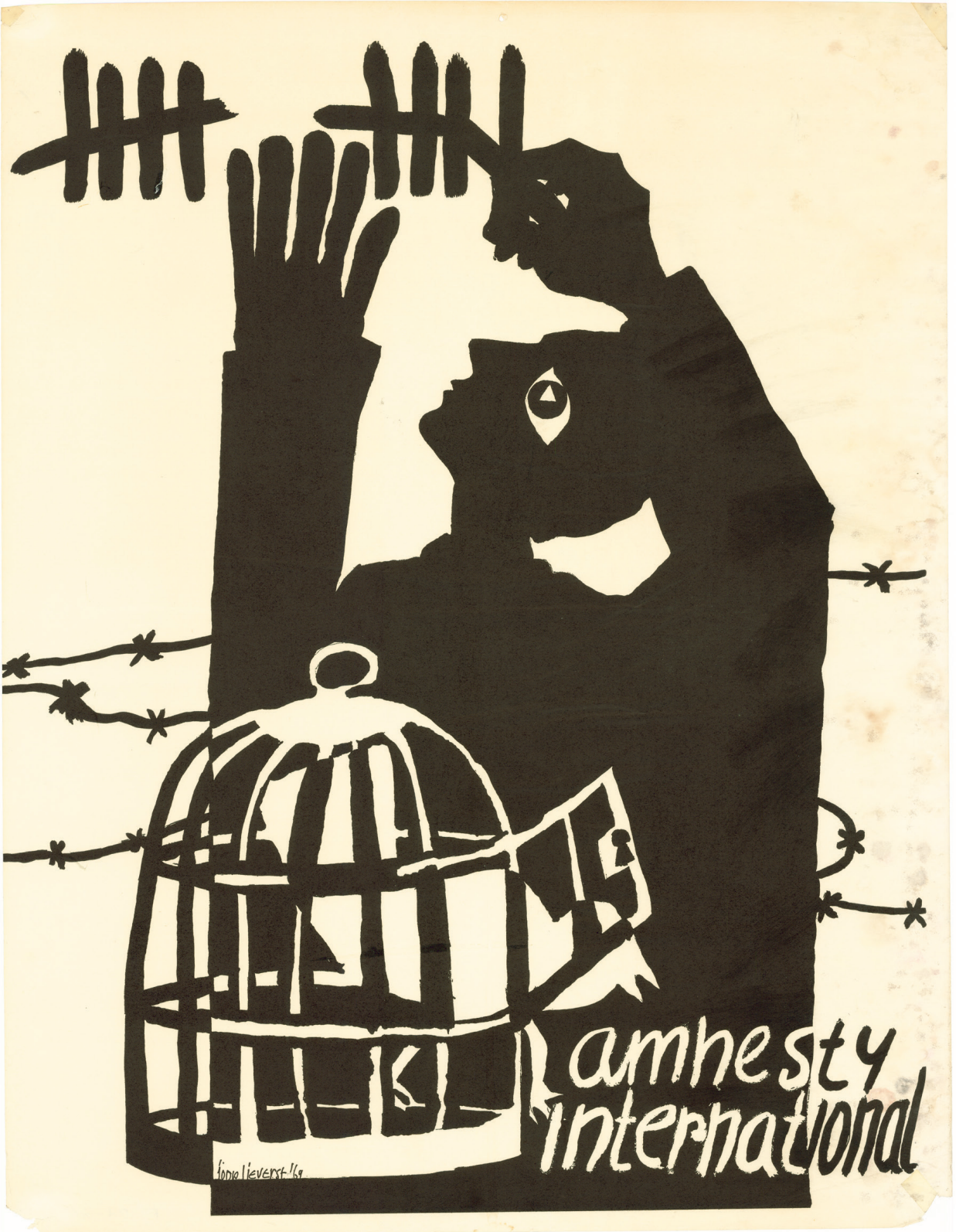
From the 1960s on, the notion that the Netherlands was – or should be – a 'guiding country' gained currency among progressive circles. The argument went that its small size and supposed long-standing humanitarian tradition marked it out for a role as a global champion of international law and cooperation. Such ideas had been espoused by Dutch intellectuals in the past, but acquired new prominence as the loss of its colonies relegated the Netherlands to a decidedly lower rung on the world ladder. Human rights became an important part of this idealism, which was driven in part by

31 Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution. Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics* (Princeton 1977); cf. Peter Malcontent, *Op kruistocht in de Derde Wereld. De reacties van de Nederlandse regering op ernstige en stelselmatige schendingen van fundamentele mensenrechten in ontwikkelingslanden, 1973-1981* (Hilversum 1998); Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, 'De rol van mensenrechten in het buitenlands beleid na 1945. Politicologische en historische literatuur', *BMGN*

– *Low Countries Historical Review* (hereafter *BMGN* –*LCHR*) 118 (2003) 179-192.

32 Cf. Benjamin Ziemann, 'European Peace Movements During the Cold War and Their Elective Affinities', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 49 (2009) 351-389.

33 David Hollinger, 'From identity to solidarity', *Daedalus* 3 (2006) 27.



amnesty  
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humanitarian concerns and in part by the desire to develop a new role for the Netherlands on the international stage.<sup>34</sup> In foreign policy and other areas the notion of a ‘guiding country’ was not unique to the Netherlands. Sweden, for example, was a similar case, though it lacked the recent colonial history of the Dutch. But the ‘progressive consensus’ which emerged in the Netherlands during these years was more pronounced than in most other Western countries.<sup>35</sup>

In 1973, the social-democratic Den Uyl government – usually considered the most left-wing in Dutch history – came to power. The two previous ministers of foreign affairs, W.K.N. Schmelzer and C. Boertien, had already given the initial impetus to the development of a concerted human rights policy. However, the ministers for development cooperation and foreign affairs in the Den Uyl government (Jan Pronk and Max van der Stoel) were strongly and openly committed to human rights ideals (although they diverged on whether to promote these through public or silent diplomacy).<sup>36</sup> Yet even the subsequent defeat of Joop den Uyl in favour of the more conservative government of Dries van Agt did not mean a reversal for human rights. On the contrary, in a 1979 policy document, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs institutionalised human rights as an ‘integral element’ of foreign policy. This remains fundamental to the Ministry’s work to this day.

Another feature of the newly fluid social landscape of the late 1960s was the strength of Dutch ecumenism. Catholic and Protestant elites saw a need for ‘renewal’ in order to prevent the faithful from abandoning the Church because of its ‘archaic’ character. This sense was especially pronounced among those groups which had previously been the most cloistered: Catholics and Calvinists. As James Kennedy has argued, the ecumenical movement in the Netherlands was exceptionally powerful in comparison with other Western states. This was evidenced by the strength of organisations such as the Raad van Kerken in Nederland [Dutch Council of Churches in the Netherlands] and the Interkerkelijk Vredesberaad [Interchurch Peace Council].<sup>37</sup> These organisations helped to pave the way for Amnesty by

34 Peter Malcontent and Floribert Baudet, ‘The Dutchman’s burden? Nederland en de internationale rechtsorde in de twintigste eeuw’, in: Bob de Graaff, Duco Hellema, and Bob van der Zwan (eds.), *De Nederlandse buitenlandse politiek in de twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam 2003) 69-104.

35 James C. Kennedy, ‘Nederland als het meest progressieve land ter wereld’, in: Wim van Noort

and Rob Wiche (eds.), *Nederland als voorbeeldige natie* (Hilversum 2006) 105-118.

36 Malcontent and Baudet, ‘The Dutchman’s burden?’, 85.

37 James C. Kennedy, *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw. Nederland in de jaren zestig* (Amsterdam and Meppel 1995) 91-94. On the IKV, see Maarten van den Bos, *Mensen van goede wil. Pax Christi 1948-2013* (Amsterdam 2015) chapter 3.



stimulating engagement in the field of human rights and internationalism more broadly. Moreover, from the 1960s onwards, ecumenically minded Protestants who wanted to engage with international issues increasingly did so through secular organisations. Amnesty provided an ideal vehicle for this.<sup>38</sup>

Dutch international moral exceptionalism was particularly distinctive in relation to another rapidly growing Amnesty section: that in West Germany. According to Lora Wildenthal, the West German section was founded by intellectuals who opposed the dominance of Konrad Adenauer's Christian Democracy. They deployed the language of universal human rights to facilitate a critical perspective on West German politics and undercut what they perceived as a suffocating ideology of anti-communism, aimed in particular at the German Democratic Republic. Wildenthal has argued that the founders hoped that '[i]f West Germans honed their sense of human rights with work in Amnesty International [...] then most would protest more strongly against political repressiveness inside their own country as well as elsewhere'.<sup>39</sup> The German section was likely an exception in its domestic focus; the Dutch section was much more international in outlook.

#### *A distaste for radicalism*

Another distinctive feature which provided fertile ground for the Dutch section was the low degree of support for radical activism in the Netherlands. In comparison with the student riots in France, or the extremism of the Baader-Meinhof group in West Germany, the ambitions of Dutch activists in general were not so much revolutionary as evolutionary.<sup>40</sup> A significant number of organisations concerned with Third World politics and development did radicalise from the middle of the 1960s onwards. These changed from a 'money-giving and aid-promoting movement' into a one that 'supported the liberation struggle in the Third World directly and indirectly'.<sup>41</sup> These organisations at times used the language of human rights. However, this was often in the context of solidarity based on political affinity. As Patrick William Kelly has argued in the context of activism pertaining to Chile, whereas 'Amnesty saw human rights as an ideology that rose above politics, solidarity activists saw it as a means to a political end'.<sup>42</sup> Amnesty,

38 James C. Kennedy, 'Protestant Ecclesiastical Internationals', in: Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene (eds.), *Religious Internationals in the Modern World: Globalisation and Faith Communities since 1750* (Basingstoke 2012) 292-318.

39 Wildenthal, *The Language of Human Rights*, 76-77.

40 Antoine Verbij, *Tien rode jaren. Links radicalisme in Nederland 1970-1980* (Amsterdam 2005) 11-12.

41 Hans Beerends and Marc Broere, *De beweging beweging. Een halve eeuw mondiale solidariteit* (Amsterdam 2004) 28.

42 Patrick William Kelly, 'The 1973 Chilean Coup and the Origins of Transnational Human Rights Activism', *Journal of Global History* 8 (2013) 168.

on the other hand, was always able to appeal to a broad section of Dutch society by insisting that it would maintain its impartiality and moderation. In the media, the leadership emphasised the pragmatic and realistic nature of Amnesty's work – in contrast to the idealistic approach of other activist groups.<sup>43</sup>

Members of Amnesty did, of course, hold political views, which their engagement with human rights fitted into in various ways. Relevant to this is Floribert Baudet's argument that in the Netherlands 'Cold War anti-totalitarianism' dating from earlier decades persisted into the 1960 and 1970s and contributed to the rise of human rights organisations.<sup>44</sup> Yet while this may have been the case for a number of other actors and further research into this connection is desirable, it seems that Amnesty's Dutch membership was less concerned with prevailing in Cold War competition than transcending it. They focussed either on rectifying the excesses of Western power on the international stage, or forming a movement that was unified regardless of Cold War divisions. Adherents to the first approach instigated vehement internal debates during 1974-1975. These revolved around the question whether Amnesty should address the 'systemic' or 'structural' roots of political imprisonment, or whether true impartiality did not include advocating for social and economic as well as civil and political rights. But the latter approach won out, based upon both principled (the unifying appeal of remaining apolitical) as well as pragmatic (the limited capacity of the organisation) arguments. As such, Amnesty did not fundamentally change its course and, of course, the section's position within the international organisation put a high premium on staying within the limits of the agreed mandate.<sup>45</sup> The section thus adhered to a restrictive definition of impartiality, which largely inoculated it to criticism from both sides of the polarised political spectrum throughout the 1970s.

Amnesty's impartiality allowed it to gain a remarkable degree of trust with the government, something that was not shared by most other activist organisations. From early on, Amnesty enjoyed good relations with important diplomats such as the Dutch representative to the UN Human Rights Commission, Theo van Boven, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Max van der Stoep, and the Chairman-Rapporteur of the Working Group to draft the UN Convention Against Torture, Jan Herman Burgers. When, in 1979, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs formally began to institutionalise its

43 IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 310, 'Amnesty International als de dood om een theoretische praatclub te worden. Gesprek met vroegere en nieuwe voorzitter', *De nieuwe linie*, 3 January 1973.

44 Floribert Baudet, "'A Statement Against the Totalitarian Countries of Europe": Human Rights

and the Early Cold War', *Cold War History* 16 (2016) 137.

45 See the 1974-1975 debate started under the auspices of the board: IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 1, 'Discussiestuk', *Wordt Vervolgd* (May 1974) and on, including the many members' letters sent in response.

human rights policy, it was Amnesty which spearheaded a group of non-governmental organisations to form the Breed Mensenrechtenoverleg [Broad Human Rights Platform] (BMO). This group served as an officially recognised consultative partner of the ministry and soon helped to bring about further institutionalisation of human rights in Dutch foreign policy.<sup>46</sup> The trust necessary for this kind of relationship was only developed because Amnesty had remained ‘apolitical’.

In relation to this, an important difference with the narrative put forward in Moyn’s *The Last Utopia* should be highlighted. In the United States, the main source for Moyn’s observations, President Carter embraced human rights in no small part as an attempt to overcome the sully of the state’s moral character under the leadership of the previous presidents. The Watergate affair and the atrocities of the Vietnam War had been particularly damaging.<sup>47</sup> As Moyn argued: ‘[I]n the face of soiled utopias in politics, a nonpartisan morality existed outside and above them.’<sup>48</sup> However, as Moyn acknowledged, in Europe ‘the mobilisation of the grassroots and the intellectuals proceeded without any equivalent to Carter’s role across the ocean’.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, in the Netherlands, the state’s earlier and more active role in promoting human rights – combined with the lack of political scandals on the scale of the American ones – meant that it more readily served as a focal point for internationalist hopes. The relatively close relationship between Amnesty and the Dutch government bore this out. This low degree of friction also distinguished the Dutch section from the British section: whereas the decolonisation of West New Guinea in 1962 had marked a break with the Dutch colonial past, the British state was still actively involved in the thorny process of decolonisation in places such as Rhodesia and Aden. Such connections had helped generate a crisis in 1966-1967, which saw Benenson ousted from Amnesty.<sup>50</sup>

Peter Malcontent has stressed that government policy only integrated human rights as one of several considerations, and did not shy away from using human rights as a political instrument. For instance, the Dutch, under the leadership of Van der Stoep, were notoriously tough on this issue in the negotiations leading up to and following the Helsinki Final Act

46 Renée Konings, ‘We zijn er omdat iedereen vindt dat we er zijn. Het functioneren van het Breed Mensenrechtenoverleg in de periode 1979-2010’ (MA dissertation, Utrecht University 2011). Cf. J. Herman Burgers, ‘Dutch Nongovernmental Organisations and Foreign Policy in the Field of Human Rights’, in: P.J. van Krieken and Ch.O. Pannenberg (eds.), *Liber Akkerman. In- and Outlaws in War* (Apeldoorn and Antwerpen 1992) 157-168.

47 Cf. Barbara J. Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA 2014).

48 Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 132.

49 *Ibidem*, 167-169.

50 Tom Buchanan, ‘Amnesty International in Crisis, 1966-1967’, *Twentieth Century British History* 15 (2004) 267-289.

(1975).<sup>51</sup> Duco Hellema has similarly argued that Amnesty's work increasingly dovetailed with Western governments' foreign policies towards the end of the 1970s.<sup>52</sup> This rightly points to the fact that the 'impartial' character of Amnesty did not give it a Midas touch that turned all those it engaged with into proponents of human rights for purely humanitarian reasons. On the one hand, the agendas of governments and other actors were in part transformed by the inclusion of human rights. Yet, on the other hand, they could also selectively draw on the standard Amnesty embodied to serve other more politicised goals – such as undermining a Cold War adversary's political stability. Nevertheless, the prior establishment of Amnesty's advocacy as fundamentally 'apolitical' was of central importance: the assertion of universality through impartiality was what provided even governmental human rights claims with much of their power. The entanglement of political and humanitarian motives deserves further study, but the appeal of its impartiality was what set Amnesty apart and can therefore help explain its growth.

#### *The changing memory of the war years*

Recent debate on the connection between Holocaust memory and human rights has focused on the late 1940s and on the reasons why references to the former were so scarce in debates about the latter.<sup>53</sup> Moyn has suggested that the 1970s 'breakthrough of popular Holocaust memory' contributed to and shaped the rise of human rights. At the same time he observed that 'there is no serious research' on the historical intersection between human rights and Holocaust memory around this time.<sup>54</sup> This makes it difficult to put the case of the Netherlands in perspective. Nevertheless, while the subject deserves separate study, some tentative observations can be made on the basis of Amnesty's success in the Netherlands.

What stands out as the key moment of Amnesty's rise in the Netherlands are the memorial days of 4 and 5 May 1970. 4 May was the official day of remembrance of the Dutch victims of military conflicts from World

51 Peter Malcontent, 'Nederland en de mensenrechten', in: Jacco Pekelder, Remco Raben, and Mathieu Segers (eds.), *De wereld volgens Nederland. Nederlandse buitenlandse politiek in historisch perspectief* (Amsterdam 2015) 138-141.

52 Duco Hellema, *Nederland en de jaren zeventig* (Amsterdam 2012) 214-215.

53 For two competing views, see G. Daniel Cohen, 'The Holocaust and the "Human Rights

Revolution": A Reassessment', in: Akira Iriye, Petra Goedde and William I. Hitchcock (eds.), *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History* (Oxford 2012) 53-72; Marco Duranti, 'The Holocaust, the Legacy of 1789, and the Birth of International Human Rights Law', *Journal of Genocide Research* 14 (2012) 159-186.

54 Samuel Moyn, *Human Rights and the Uses of History* (London and New York 2014) 95-96.

War II onwards; 5 May was the celebration of the liberation from the German occupation. In the years preceding this twenty-fifth anniversary the way the years of the occupation were remembered had changed markedly. In the years immediately after the war, the collective suffering of the Dutch people had predominated in public memory, while the role of the Dutch resistance had been glorified.<sup>55</sup> During the 1960s attention shifted towards the plight of individuals; persecution became a major theme and collaboration an increasing concern. Furthermore, although the Holocaust had certainly not been absent from public debate, during the 1970s awareness of this particular crime increased.<sup>56</sup> This change in public memory was not confined to occasions of remembrance. For instance, protesters would frequently accuse the Dutch authorities and elites of exhibiting ‘fascist’ behaviour and accuse them of a collaborationist mind-set.<sup>57</sup>

This change was most clearly visible in the content of the celebration on 5 May. In 1965, Liberation Day, which was then only celebrated once every five years, had had a distinctly apolitical theme: ‘5 May. Have a good time.’<sup>58</sup> While the development organisation Novib distributed a brochure which called attention to the plight of people in other countries, such activity was marginal. In 1970, the organising committee felt the need to adopt a much more serious tone, and chose the motto: ‘Liberty: Also For the Other.’ This phrasing was obviously aligned with Amnesty’s message.<sup>59</sup> The event’s focus was reoriented from the past to the present and the Dutch Amnesty section seized the moment. For the commemoration on 4 May 1965 the Dutch section built a makeshift prison camp close to the seat of government in The Hague. This installation saw several high-profile Dutch citizens wear signs bearing the names of actual political prisoners.<sup>60</sup> On 5 May, a large event in Amsterdam brought together a colourful assembly of speakers and artists. In his lecture, Rabbi A. Soetendorp drew an analogy between passivity with regard to National Socialism and passivity in the face of the present injustices occurring in the world. He called on the audience to take action. The singer Liesbeth List performed sections of the *Mauthausen Cycle*. This piece used text written by a Greek Holocaust survivor and had been composed by the Greek composer and political activist Mikis Theodorakis, who had only been released from the prison camp of Oropos the month prior to the commemoration. The Dutch section also commissioned and

55 J.C.H. Blom, ‘Lijden als waarschuwing. Oorlogsverleden in Nederland’, *Ons Erfdeel* 38 (1995) 537.

56 Ido de Haan, *Na de ondergang. De herinnering aan de Jodenvervolgning in Nederland 1945-1995* (Den Haag 1997) 118.

57 Herman de Liagre Böhl, ‘Consensus en polarisatie. Spanningen in de verzorgingsstaat, 1945-1990’, in: Remieg Aerts et al., *Land van kleine gebaren*.

*Een politieke geschiedenis van Nederland, 1780-1990* (Nijmegen 2001; 1st edition 1999) 299.

58 ‘5 mei. Maak er een feest van.’ Ilse Raaijmakers, ‘4 en 5 mei. Het herdenken van de Tweede Wereldoorlog in Nederland 1945-1975’ (MA dissertation, Utrecht University 2008) 123.

59 ‘Vrijheid – ook voor de ander.’ *Ibidem*, 128.

60 *Ibidem*, 131.



distributed a vinyl record of the cabaret duo Sieto and Marijke Hoving. Their ‘Song of the Rights of Man’ and ‘You Who Now Celebrate Your Liberty’ drove home Amnesty’s message: ‘While you celebrate your liberty of twenty-five years/ Know that others crave it dearly.’<sup>61</sup> These events garnered a significant amount of media attention and precipitated the strong growth of the Dutch section’s membership from 1970 on.<sup>62</sup>

Was the experience of German occupation and the memory of the persecution of Jews and other groups particular to the Netherlands in such a way as to (partially) explain Amnesty’s rise in this country? Memory of German occupation was obviously not a necessary condition for an Amnesty section to grow; Amnesty attracted many members in countries that had not undergone it. Not all Western European countries that suffered occupation proved receptive to Amnesty’s message, however: in France and Belgium sections lagged behind.<sup>63</sup> Ido de Haan has argued the memory of the Holocaust was marginalised in these two countries – in comparison to the Netherlands – because of the history of the Vichy regime in France and the foreign nationality of the vast majority of Jews deported from Belgium.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, Frank van Vree has argued that whereas early narratives of the war foregrounded national unity, during the 1960s Dutch wartime memories shifted relatively quickly and radically towards an indictment of society’s responsibility for enabling atrocities or participating in them. This was coupled with an emphasis on victimhood and recognition of the specific groups that had been targeted.<sup>65</sup> This suggests that Dutch Holocaust memories may have been particularly manifest by 1970, which helps to explain the level of response to Amnesty’s references to the wartime years. The image on page 70, distributed as an Amnesty postcard, illustrates how the imagery of concentration camps could link Amnesty’s message to wartime persecution.

*The rise of ‘light’ organisations, professionalisation, and mass membership*

The socio-cultural changes which occurred in Dutch society during the late 1960s and 1970s have often been called ‘revolutionary’ in their speed and

61 ‘Lied van de rechten van de mens’ and ‘Die nu uw vrijheid viert’; ‘Die nu uw vrijheid viert van vijftiengint jaren, Weet dat u bitter om die vrijheid wordt benijd.’ Sieto en Marijke Hoving, ‘Die nu uw vrijheid viert’ (1970, in possession of author).

62 IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 7, Cornelis van der Vlies, ‘VERSLAG SECRETARIS OVER DE PERIODE SEPTEMBER 1968 – MEI 1970’, 8 May 1970; ‘Verslag sekretariaat over de periode mei 1970 – april 1971’, April 1971.

63 Thomas Claudius and Franz Stepan, *Amnesty International: Portrait einer Organisation* (Munich 1976) 216.

64 De Haan, *Na de ondergang*, 206-212.

65 Frank van Vree, ‘De dynamiek van de herinnering. Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog in een internationale context’, in *ibid.* and Rob van der Laarse, *De dynamiek van de herinnering. Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog in een internationale context* (Amsterdam 2009) 33-34.



Fritz Behrendt, 1981. The author would like to thank Nicole Immler for drawing his attention to this illustration. Private collection Renate Behrendt.

profundity.<sup>66</sup> Peter van Dam has criticised caricatural accounts of these developments as a sudden implosion of a ‘pillarised’ socio-cultural system. He argues that both this term and its corollary, ‘depillarisation’, suggest a sharp discontinuity, whereas he contends that sociocultural changes are better understood as gradual. Van Dam deploys the notion of a transition from ‘heavy’ to ‘light’ communities, coined by the sociologists Jan Willem Duyvendak and Menno Hurenkamp, to throw light on this more gradual process of change. As Van Dam explains, the new ‘light’ communities were based on ‘only a few shared characteristics, a low degree of exclusiveness and a strong emphasis on personal freedom of choice’.<sup>67</sup> Such communities were distinct from specific organisations, since established organisations continued to exist while reorienting themselves towards a ‘light’ conception of community. For instance, the Dutch Reformed Church had sought to become a broad-based ‘popular church’ since the 1940s. It therefore adopted a more open and inclusive attitude, becoming ‘lighter’ in the process. Van Dam acknowledges, though, that the 1970s were the decade during which an orientation towards ‘light’ forms of community became dominant.<sup>68</sup> For existing organisations, such an adjustment was not easy. A ‘light organisation’ like Amnesty, with its identity narrowly defined around engagement with the issue of political persecution, could be inclusive to a wide variety of supporters from its inception (in the 1980s, the meteoric rise of Greenpeace was to provide another striking example).

Amnesty’s model fitted these circumstances well to begin with. Yet early on the Dutch section implemented an organisational innovation which allowed it to reap the benefits more than other sections: the use of so-called ‘working’ or ‘action groups’. Amnesty’s model had always focused on the well-known institution of adoption or writing groups, which gathered a small number of people to write on behalf of three political prisoners at a time. It was, however, the Dutch section that pioneered the use of groups whose task it was to raise awareness of Amnesty’s work and thereby gather members, donations, and media exposure. Especially amidst the political ferment of the 1970s, this way of participating in Amnesty’s work carried an appeal that its adoption groups lacked. Action groups therefore helped to attract members who otherwise would have preferred to spend their time working for a different organisation.

The section’s action groups worked closely with a large number of other organisations, most notably religious organisations, women’s organisations, and – somewhat later on – labour unions. This spread

66 Piet de Rooy, *Republiek van rivaliteiten. Nederland sinds 1813* (Amsterdam 2002) 233-261.

67 ‘[S]lechts enkele gedeelde kenmerken, een geringe mate van exclusiviteit en een sterke

nadruk op persoonlijke keuzevrijheid.’ Peter van Dam, ‘Een wankel vertoog. Over ontzuiling als karikatuur’, *BMGN – LCHR* 126 (2011) 59.

68 Van Dam, ‘Een wankel vertoog’, 52-77, 61.

Amnesty's influence widely. For instance, in 1974 the Raad van Kerken in Nederland supported Amnesty by organising discussion groups about the issue of torture, which reached approximately 40.000 potential Amnesty members.<sup>69</sup> By September 1970, Dutch board members had already reported great interest from other national sections in the method of working with action groups.<sup>70</sup> A memorandum sent in 1974 by the International Secretariat to all national sections clearly indicated that the international leadership and other sections were impressed by the success of the Dutch action groups. Other sections were sent information so that they might emulate these 'groups which have been so important in the development of the Dutch section'.<sup>71</sup> If this method indeed proliferated throughout Amnesty as a result, the Dutch section's innovation not only prefigured but may have even contributed substantially to a general shift in Amnesty's work.

The development of the American section in the 1970s seems to have similarly involved innovations in mobilising support. As Sarah Snyder has shown, in the 1960s, the American section struggled in a somewhat similar way to the first Dutch section. It did not work effectively to mobilise volunteers. Instead, its director, Paul Lyons, a former government official based in Washington, D.C., focused on publicity and lobbying. Clashes with the British organisers of Amnesty ensued and Lyons eventually resigned in July 1970. Subsequently, the American section conformed more closely to the British model. It incorporated adoption groups, but its efforts at publicity continued and resulted in a rapid growth of its membership. Kenneth Cmiel has argued that the 'revelation' of direct mail in December 1973 – which the Dutch tried to emulate, but which never caught on – allowed the New York-based section to grow its budget from 140.000 to two million dollars between 1974 and 1980.<sup>72</sup> Already from 1974, the American section established 'Action Groups' analogous to those of the Dutch section. These accommodated its growing membership and allowed the organisation to expand further.<sup>73</sup>

The Dutch shift towards action groups thus dovetailed with a more general shift in Amnesty's work, which was actively supported and promoted by the leadership of the Dutch section. During the 1970s, the organisation moved away from its well-known technique of writing letters for individual prisoners and towards more general public campaigns against torture (starting in 1972) and the death penalty (starting in 1977). These aimed at exerting pressure on sections' own governments to take action bilaterally and to enact

69 IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 1, 'De problemen die samenhangen met de groei van Amnesty International', 26 May 1974.

70 IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 1, Herman van Geuns and Herbart Ruitenbergh, 'Enkele notities naar aanleiding van de vergadering van de

"International Council" op 25 en 26 september 1970 in Oslo', 1970.

71 IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 124, 'Action Groups', December 1974.

72 Cmiel, 'The Emergence', 1243.

73 Snyder, 'Exporting Amnesty International', 791.

and enforce international human rights norms, although they did still use individual cases as examples and targets for immediate action. Therefore, active membership in the form of adoption groups became less important, whereas the size of Amnesty's constituency was crucial in order to exert pressure on the state. An important stimulus in this respect was the establishment of the BMO in 1979. This in effect premised access to government on expertise and the representative nature of the member organisations. Amnesty board members promoted action group work in general because it was more efficient and effective than the 'traditional' practice of 'adopting' individual prisoners of conscience.<sup>74</sup> By 1978 the active membership of the Dutch section stalled and remained stable at around 7.000. Yet its passive membership continued to rise by tens of thousands per year. As such, the proportion of active members declined from one in six to less than one in fifteen by 1987.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, the organisation professionalised. While the number of volunteers working at the secretariat remained stable at around 150, the number of paid workers rose from 14 in 1978 to 35 in 1988.<sup>76</sup> Therefore one might say that by the late 1970s Amnesty in the Netherlands began to evolve from a grassroots social movement organisation towards a mass membership pressure group.

## Conclusions

Amnesty International's rise in the Netherlands shows that local contingencies and national contexts need to be taken into account even when studying a transnational organisation as centralised as Amnesty and developments as widespread as the rise of human rights discourse. Since the 1990s, numerous authors writing about 'global civil society' have asserted that borders among activists are vanishing, giving way to global networks that increasingly pressure the very notion of state sovereignty.<sup>77</sup> As the political scientist Sarah Stroup has shown, however, even in recent years, national origins and contexts persist in shaping the work of organisations like Human Rights Watch, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Oxfam

74 IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 7, Herbart Ruitenbergh, 'Future development of Amnesty', 26 January 1972; IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 1, Bestuursgroep aktie en adoptie (Roel Nijmeijer), 'Groeï en ontwikkeling van het adoptiewerk', 13 April 1977, 6.

75 IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 3, 'Beleidsplan '84-'88 organisatieontwikkeling secretariaat Amnesty International Nederland', 25 February 1984; IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 4, Voortgangsrapportage uitvoering beleidsplan 1986-1988, 13 June 1987.

76 IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 3, 'Beleidsplan '84-'88 organisatieontwikkeling secretariaat Amnesty International Nederland', 25 February 1984, 3; IISH, AINL, inv. nr. 4, Beleidsplan 1988-1990, 11 June 1988, 17.

77 E.g. Aryeh Neier, *The International Human Rights Movement: A History* (Princeton and Oxford 2012) 191.

International.<sup>78</sup> If this applies to the present, surely it does so even more for the Cold War period and before. Even if global connectivity and consciousness increased notably from after the late 1960s this should not cause us to lose sight of national specificities.

The ways in which the Dutch section adapted itself to its local environment fed back into the larger transnational organisation – possibly shifting its long term development. Thus, it seems that even though Amnesty as a whole became highly centralised, its evolution did not only occur in a top-down manner. It remained, in part, a bottom-up process, particularly with regard to its organisational aspects – though further research is needed to confirm the scope of these dynamics. The interaction of Amnesty’s model with the Dutch context was mediated by the section’s leadership, which underwent crucial changes from its first to its second founding. After the second founding, the Dutch section deftly adapted to evolving cultural, social and political circumstances. This agency allowed it to become one of Amnesty’s largest and most prominent sections. While its influence waxed and waned, it became a lasting focal point for the moral imagination of the Dutch population.

The two most salient aspects of the rise of the Dutch section were its organisational innovations and its appeal to the memory of the war years. Regarding the former, it seems that Eckel was right to emphasise the importance of participation. However, the shift towards greater professionalisation and mass membership meant that such engagement was reduced in importance towards the end of the 1970s. Likewise, although Moyn rightly emphasises the appeal of Amnesty as an organisation beyond the realm of conventional politics, in the Netherlands it was in relatively close proximity to the state. This meant that the importance of its apolitical identity might have been matched by its perceived ability to work in conjunction and even in cooperation with government. Connecting human rights with memories of the war years further cemented the status of human rights as being beyond political divisions. Nevertheless, as Hellema and Malcontent suggest, in the long run this did not prevent the concept’s increasing convergence with Western foreign policy aims in the Cold War.<sup>79</sup>

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78 Sarah S. Stroup, *Borders Among Activists. International NGOs in the United States, Britain, and France* (Ithaca and London 2012).

79 Cf. Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge 2011).