

ENGLISH SUMMARY

This dissertation studies the worldviews and beliefs that motivate activists to advocate mass atrocity interventions. It unravels the ideological conceptions and assumptions through which anti-genocide activists view the world and humanity and make moral judgments on human suffering and violence. It does so by studying two anti-genocide movements: the international solidarity movement for East Timor (1975 - 1999) and the Responsibility to Protect-coalition (2001 - now). I regard anti-genocide activists as a sub-group in the broader humanitarian and human rights community, one that has particular affinity with human rights activism.

The international solidarity movement for East Timor was selected as an early example of anti-genocide activism. The first solidarity organizations were already established in the late 1970s, but the movement became most active in the 1990s. Although East Timor-activists advocated for East Timorese self-determination, they were motivated by the conviction that a 'silent' genocide was occurring on this Southeast Asian island. In 1975 the Indonesian military invaded East Timor shortly after it had declared independence from its former colonial administration Portugal. Indonesia occupied East Timor until 1999. Many East Timor-activists believed that near to 200.000 Timorese were killed by Indonesians during this period, either through bombing campaigns and massacres, or through starvation.

The Responsibility to Protect-advocates ('R2P-advocates') have been selected as a contemporary example of anti-genocide activism. R2P-advocates strive to halt mass atrocities anywhere on the globe through the building of a new international norm. The 'responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity', shortened as R2P, is a new international norm that was endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 2005. R2P stipulates that if a state is unwilling or unable to protect its populations from mass atrocities, the responsibility to protect falls on the international community who should intervene - if need be - by the use of force.

The study builds on the view that the urge to respond to horrific scenes of ethnic cleansing cannot be explained solely as an act of altruism or merely by the need to protect international stability. Mass atrocity interventions are also a response to an image of human cruelty that is so appalling to those who cherish a worldview of human rights and humanitarian values that they feel they must resist it, if need be by violent means. The communal killings in Rwanda, Srebrenica and Darfur are experienced as a direct attack on core beliefs of what it means to be human - beliefs and values that have become so central to the meaning of life of many activists that the mere thought of giving up their struggle evokes questions of an almost existential nature. As one anti-genocide activist exclaimed during an interview, 'if we cannot end or prevent these atrocities, then what's it all for?'

This existential nature of the call for mass atrocity interventions constitutes the first theme of enquiry in this research. I contend that the existential and ideological undercurrent that I observe in the call for mass atrocity interventions can better be grasped, examined and explained with the aid of concepts from anthropology and science of religions - such as the 'sacred'. Consequently, I postulate the proposition that *although humanitarianism and human*

rights are secular worldviews, notions of the sacred inform that worldview and resonate in the call for mass atrocity interventions. I thus build on the view that conceptions of the sacred are not exclusive to religions but also function in secular worldviews. I examine whether there exists a notion of a ‘sacred in the secular’ that informs the call for mass atrocity interventions, and if so, of what it consists.

The second theme of enquiry in this dissertation concerns a shift in moral sensibilities to human suffering and violence that I contend can be observed in the world of humanitarianism and human rights. As noted above, genocide- and mass atrocity prevention are recently new phenomena and only began to emerge as a topic on the human rights agenda in the 1990s in response to the mass atrocities in Rwanda, Srebrenica, East Timor and Darfur. This historical development contributed to a shift in moral sensibilities that, so I hold, can be observed in an increased susceptibility amongst (human rights) activists to military interventions, and an increased focus on sustaining collective instead of individual life. I thus postulate as the second proposition of this dissertation that *the call for mass atrocity interventions (also) reflects a shift in moral sensibilities to human suffering and violence from an emphasis on safeguarding the life and rights of individuals to a concern with sustaining the life of the group, of the whole of humankind through the preservation of ‘humanity’.*

The study is based on participant observation, archive research and in-depth interviews with a total of 71 anti-genocide activists. Spread over the period of January 2010 to November 2012, I conducted five months of field research in New York, five months in the Asia-Pacific region and one month in Europe (the Netherlands and Portugal). For the Responsibility to Protect-case, research was conducted in the USA, Canada, Sweden and Australia. For the East-Timor case, research was conducted in the USA, Indonesia, Australia, East Timor, Portugal and the Netherlands

Chapter One introduces the themes of enquiry and case studies, and describes the methodology and theory that underpin this study. Based on scholarly discussions on ‘the secular’ and ‘the religious’, I propose to examine whether there exists a notion of ‘the sacred in the secular’ and suggest a working definition of the sacred to facilitate that examination. To study the increased concern with the preservation of collective life, I propose to analyse altered understandings of human life in human rights and humanitarianism building on Foucault’s notion of biopolitics and Agamben’s notion of bare life.

Chapter two describes the historical backdrop of the evolving interest in mass atrocity intervention. It identifies the major developments that altered the nature and orientation of humanitarian and human rights activism from roughly 1975 (Indonesian occupation of East Timor and emergence of solidarity activism) to 2011 (UN sanctioned ‘R2P’ intervention in Libya), focusing on the histories of the two movements that are the case studies of this research. In addition, chapter two provides a profile of the people and organizations that make up both movements, describing commonalities in background and motivation of both groups of activists and the strategies they employ to influence international politics. I identify the shock over the genocide in Rwanda and the ethnic cleansings in former Yugoslavia as historical events that drastically changed the mood in humanitarian and human rights

activism. I observe that the idealism of the East Timor solidarity activists has been replaced by the realism of R2P-advocates. I argue that professionalization changed the nature of activism from a calling into a career.

Chapter three studies the specifics of the concern for the preservation of collective life amongst anti-genocide activists. It asks: who do the East Timor solidarity activists and Responsibility to Protect-advocates seek to protect, who(m) are their objects of compassion and empathy? The chapter uncovers the main characteristics and assumptions behind notions of 'people' and 'populations' that both groups of activists seek to protect. The life of the group that the East Timor solidarity activists aimed to protect was that of a 'people', defined in essentially political terms. R2P-advocates on the other hand strive to protect the more depoliticized life of 'populations' - of groups void of any political or identifiable characteristics. Secondly, the chapter examines the nature of the compassionate relation between the anti-genocide activists and their objects of compassion. Whereas East Timor activists explained their empathy as an expression of international solidarity with the suffering other, R2P-advocates explained their empathy referring to the reciprocal obligation or 'responsibility' to protect each other from mass atrocities.

Chapter four seeks to trace the ideological assumptions that make anti-genocide activists respond with horror to what they regard as the most brutal violations of (sacred) 'human life'. When is 'the human' or 'humanity' felt to be violated or under threat in the eyes of anti-genocide activists? I observe that mass atrocities constitute the greatest threat to 'human life' in the view of anti-genocide activists, precisely because they aim for the extinction of a *whole* group and to ways of life specific to that group. For East Timor solidarity activists, the fear was for the loss of a distinct way of life as belonging to a people with their own social-cultural and 'national' identity. This is counter to their conception of the human as something essentially defined by self-determination and free political agency. R2P-advocates fear the erasure of human ways of life as belonging to the whole of human civilization or 'Humanity'. The idea that the obligation to protect each other from mass atrocities can be broken and replaced by a 'norm' of bestial slaughtering can evoke deep feelings of horror or 'anomic terror' among R2P-advocates.

Chapter five studies how both groups of anti-genocide activists produce, present and sanction evidence to gain public and political support for their moral truth claim. It asks: how do East Timor solidarity activists and R2P-advocates convince society of what they hold to be true? What evidence and proof do they produce to support their truth claim? I study two cases: the first of these concerns the occupation of the office of the then governing Dutch political party Democrats '66 (D66) by Dutch East Timor activists in December 1995. In this activity the activists 'speak truth to power' by clearly and firmly placing themselves outside the governmental power that they criticize. The second activity concerns a four-day conference on the responsibility to protect and international law in June 2010. Unlike the East Timor activists, R2P-advocates do not so much place themselves outside (governmental) power but speak the voice of expertise and professionalism. I also observe a difference in the kind of evidence that each of the groups use to build their case. Testimonial evidence is

highly valued by the solidarity activists as representing the voice and will of the East Timorese people. R2P-advocates instead used factual and forensic evidence as provided by independent experts to build their case.

Chapter six studies the views of both groups of anti-genocide activists on the principle of sovereignty, and on the related duties of the sovereign state or ruler. In what situations does the state or ruler fail in his duty to protect the population and what should be the course of action to halt or change that according to the activists? Two cases are presented to address this question. The first discusses the responsibility of the Portuguese government for the plight of East Timorese under Indonesian occupation. The second concerns the international military intervention in Libya (2011) that was sanctioned by the UN under explicit reference to the responsibility to protect. East Timor activists ground sovereignty in the people. If the sovereign fails in its protection duties, it is the people who have the right to resist and revolt against the sovereign state or ruler, and who have the first and last say about the political destiny of their people and nation. R2P-advocates opt for a model that confers the sovereignty to decide on mass atrocity interventions to the 'international community' of humanity as represented by the United Nations. Transferring the decision-making power from the people affected by mass atrocities to the international community of the UN, implies a shift in the locus of sovereignty, so I contend. The power to decide on one's own destiny is removed from the very bodies at stake in mass atrocities to the external body politic of the international community.

Based on the findings emerging from the separate chapters, I conclude the following. In the secular worldview of humanitarianism and human rights it is human life that is sacred. For the first two generations of human rights and humanitarian activists, the life of the individual constituted the locus of the sacred. In the struggle to halt and prevent genocide the life of the group became the locus of the sacred. The sacred community can be identified in both movements that I studied, but is attached to different entities - 'people' in the case of East Timor activists and 'humanity' in the case of R2P-advocates.

The shift in moral sensibilities that I sensed appears to be closely related to this shift of the sacred. A shift that, other than I assumed at the onset of my research, appears to be twofold: there is a shift of the sacred from individual to collective life, and also from a sacred community constituted by a sovereign people to a sacred community enveloping all human beings in the global community of humanity. This 'humanity' is postulated outside the political realm of 'peoples power', and legitimated by a universal notion of an 'indivisible we'. It thereby becomes transcendent; Humanity is sacralized. In this light, the sacralization of humanity paradoxically could be seen as an attempt to find a new moral anchor for a human rights and humanitarian community that struggles with its belief in humanity and in human rights as an effective guardian of that humanity.